

Threats and Promises: Why Democracy Promotion Sometimes Leads to Civil Conflict

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Prepared for 2016 Annual Meeting of the
American Political Science Association

Abstract

The experience of several Arab countries during the 2011 “Arab Spring” offers strikingly different lessons for democracy promotion. While Tunisia appears to have successfully liberalized, Syria remains mired in civil conflict. This paper argues that scholars have neglected the strategic incentives of autocrats in their evaluation of democracy promotion abroad. Successful democratization requires the mobilization of groups within a country – which can be facilitated by external actors – but autocrats can respond to this mobilization either with concessions, leading to democratization, or repression, leading to civil conflict. I analyze a theoretical model in which democratization can occur either as a unilateral concession by an autocrat or as the result of a stochastic conflict. Peaceful democratization is more likely when external states are able to both promise post-democratization support to nascent opposition groups and provide direct material support. Conversely, I show that non-institutionalized political competition is an equilibrium outcome of democracy promotion when external states can promise post-democratization support to opposition groups but are unable to directly aid these groups. I demonstrate support for the theory using a strategic statistical model. The findings shed light on the ability of great powers to promote democracy as a function of their existing ties to autocratic regimes. This paper also cautions that democracy promotion may exist uneasily with a commitment to peacekeeping, and provides conditions for an ex ante evaluation of democracy promotion’s likelihood of success.

*University of Pennsylvania. Working draft. Please do not cite. Comments welcomed.

In the wake of the 2011 revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, U.S. President Barack Obama stated that the United States would “support political and economic reform in the Middle East and North Africa that can meet the legitimate aspirations of ordinary people throughout the region.”¹ With the United States at least nominally supportive of the goals of successful Arab Spring democratizations, protesters in Syria had good reason to believe that a similar uprising would be supported by the West. But the implications for the Assad regime were less clear: the United States and its Western allies had already been implacably opposed to the current Syrian government, and Russia appeared no less willing to back its sole remaining friend in the region. In this situation, democracy promotion efforts changed the value that opposition groups placed on taking office, but not the value the regime placed on maintaining its hold on power. The consequence was the mobilization of opposition groups on a massive scale. But instead of democratizing, the Assad regime responded with repression which eventually evolved into a massively destructive, stalemated civil conflict.

Why is great power support for democratization only sometimes successful in bringing about democracy? And why does this support at times result in conflict rather than peaceful regime change? This paper argues that extant research on externally-guided democratization has committed two serious errors. The first of these errors is theoretical: this literature has neglected the effect that different types of external democracy support have on the strategy of autocratic governments. In this paper, I show that while some types of democracy support can induce autocrats to step down, others have no effect on these leaders’ willingness to leave office. Specifically, when external actors increase the value that democratic groups place on taking control of office – as Obama did for the Syrian rebels – these groups are more likely to challenge their

¹<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa>

governments. But unless external actors can also decrease the value that autocrats place on maintaining tenure – which the West was unable to do in Syria – the expectation of democracy support is more likely to cause conflict than democracy.

The second omission from the literature on externally-supported democratization is generated by an empirical oversight. A necessary precondition for democratization is the existence of a sufficiently-organized group that can make demands of the government and credibly threaten punishment if these demands are not met. Sometimes these demands are met with conciliation; but more often they are met with violence, if they are not explicitly violent themselves. According to Chenoweth (2008), from 1900-2006 58% of major non-state resistance campaigns utilized primarily violent methods, and 86% of these campaigns were met with violence from the government they sought to protest. A plurality of the cases (105 of 192) are coded as being unsuccessful but were met with violence from the government; only 17 succeeded in securing institutional reform with no violence, while an additional 61 succeeded but only after a violent interregnum.

The implication of the above statistics is simple. If one mechanism by which external democracy support can promote democracy is through mobilizing opposition groups, and governments sometimes respond to mobilization with violence, then civil conflict – a stochastic process that may or may not ultimately result in democracy – is an inevitable consequence of democracy promotion. Models of democracy assistance that elide this possibility are missing a large number of cases (perhaps the majority) in which democracy promotion succeeds on a key dimension but fails in its ultimate outcome. In other words, research on democracy promotion generally proceeds from an independent variable (support) and examines its effect on its intended dependent variable (democratization). But this is an unnecessarily narrow view of what

democracy support might accomplish. In this paper I allow for great power democracy support to lead to either democratization or political contestation, and examine how this support shapes the strategic incentives of autocratic governments.

Democratization and the Mobilization of Political Opposition

Most studies examining the influence of international forces on democratization narrow their lens to the effect that international actors have on regimes deciding whether or not to democratize. A focus on the targeted regime indicates that external actors can often have positive effects on the likelihood of democratization. For example, by imposing costs through economic sanctions (Marinov, 2005; Escribà-Folch and Wright, 2010) – states can destabilize leaders towards whom they are antagonistic. Pevehouse (2002) argues that regional international organizations (IOs) can effect democracy through “overt de-legitimization of the [autocratic] regime... diplomatic pressure to direct economic sanctions against the regime, or even expulsion from the organization” (p. 522). In other words, these authors argue that by creating costs for the current leadership, external forces reduce the value the former place on maintaining their current autocratic institutions.²

But regime decisions only paint half the picture of democratization. The development of a sufficiently organized and committed movement that has an opportunity to press its government for political concessions is equally critical. The comparative political literature on democratization makes this point clear. One of the earliest and most famous articulations of this point

²On the other hand, external actors can forestall democratization by providing resources or political succor to embattled allied regimes. While Gibler (2008) finds that the United States imposes opportunity costs to human rights abuser by refusing to provide them foreign aid, Nielsen (2013) argues that this result is contingent on the leader in question not being an ally of the United States.

was by Barrington Moore in his famous study “The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy.” Moore (1966) argued that the development of an autonomous urban bourgeoisie was necessary to check the power of the nobility and pave the way for representative institutions. The point can be made more generally: Weingast (1997) states that “maintaining democracy is in part a coordination dilemma among citizens. . . [S]elf-enforcing limits on the state result when members of a society resolve their coordination dilemmas about the appropriate limits on the state” (p. 246). Once these dilemmas are solved, participation in action against the state can become self-reinforcing, once anti-government groups reach a participatory “tipping point” (D’Anieri, 2006).

External actors can therefore also shape the likelihood of democratization by encouraging the formation of pro-democracy groups within other states or helping to overcome Weingast’s coordination dilemma. This encouragement can take several forms. First, external actors may directly support pro-democracy groups within other states. Finkel, Pérez-Liñán and Seligson (2007) find support for this point, noting that at least in the case of post-Cold War U.S. democracy assistance, “investment in democracy programs is explicitly directed toward the empowerment of particular. . . individuals, political organizations, and social movements” (p. 435). Aid donors commonly divert aid around the government within poorly-governed countries, delivering foreign aid directly to non-state actors (Dietrich, 2013). In a consolidation of this logic, Scott and Steele (2005) find suggestive evidence of a “dictatorship resistance” hypothesis, wherein U.S. democracy aid is allocated in an “effort to mobilize resistance against anti-democratic regimes” (p. 453).

Second, external actors can promise to support pro-democracy groups in the future if they are able to take power. Such promises were critical, for example, in several Eastern European

countries at the end of the Cold War. Access to West German markets played a significant role in facilitating democratization in Hungary. Aid from West Germany made Prime Minister Károly Grósz willing to accept the costs of leading the country through liberalizing economic reforms. Even while negotiations to remove Hungary's previous prime minister were underway, West German foreign policy adviser Horst Teltschik approached the coup plotters, including Grósz, telling them that were they to be successful "the West German government would support this programme [of economic reform]... with financial credits." Bonn kept its word to the tune of a billion Deutschmark credit which was used directly to pay for interest on outstanding foreign loans (Sebestyen, 2009, p. 214).

In a broader sense, wresting control of a government away from an autocrat provides opposition groups with numerous avenues through which to pursue their policy goals. Many of these opportunities are available only to the legally-recognized government of a state. Legal recognition allows states to secure external resources enhancing their ability to stay in power, contract with other states, secure foreign capital, and establish standing in international courts (Krasner, 1999, p. 17). Coggins (2011) writes that "external legitimacy is the fundamental distinguishing feature between states and nonstates," and that the expectation of international recognition is therefore a key determinant in understanding secessionist behavior (p. 461).

Strategies of encouraging the opposition do not necessarily have the same behavioral implications as do strategies of destabilizing or punishing the government. If external actors can sufficiently penalize the government for failing to democratize, the regime begins to place less value on the status quo and is relatively inclined to change it. Anti-regime strategies of externally-supported democratization imply that the government can either accept the costs of external pressure or democratize. Bolstering the opposition does not necessarily have the same

effect. The regime is content to stay in office, but its pro-democratic opponents are not content to let it stay there. In this context, the government has a wider array of options. It could democratize peacefully, but it may also seek to repress the opposition. Here, successful external democratization efforts may increase the likelihood of either improvements in democracy or political violence.

Shifting the level of analysis to incorporate opposition incentives – as well as those of the regime – complicates the analysis of externally-encouraged democratization. Put sharply, it reveals that previous studies of externally-driven democratization have confused process with outcome: democratization is only one possible outcome resulting from the process of external influence. This influence can also incite a stochastic process of competition that may or may not ultimately result in democratization. Scholars have paid scant attention to the possible relationship between external assistance, democratization, and conflict. In one notable contribution, Savun and Tirone (2011) find that external democracy aid can reduce the chances of civil conflict in states that have already begun to democratize. But this argument is problematic for several reasons. First, the independent effect of the *level* of democracy in a country tends to explain more variation in the onset of political conflict than do *changes* in the level of democracy (Hegre, 2001). Because Savun and Tirone (2011) do not estimate the effect of democracy aid as conditional on the level of democracy within a country, it is unclear whether changes in institutionalization or the institutions themselves are moderating the effect of democracy aid. More troubling, however, is that there is no explanation for why a dictator would engage in partial democratization only to renege later and plunge his country into civil war. A more comprehensive account of the effect of external assistance on democratization and civil conflict should explain why dictators make the choice between a political contest and democratization.

Theory

The discussion in the previous section points to several mechanisms through which an external state might exercise some influence over the process of democratization in another. First, an external state might impose costs on an autocrat for remaining in office. These costs are likely to come in the form of foregone aid, reduced trade, or exclusion from capital markets. The primary effect of these levers of influence is to reduce the value that an autocrat places on the status quo. Second, an external state might directly aid or otherwise embolden a nascent opposition group within another state. This support can have two effects. Aid that is distributed while a group is in the opposition can shape the likelihood that the supported group is able to oust the current government. This type of aid might be composed of weapons or money. The primary effect of this type of support is to increase the chances that a challenge to the current government succeeds. The second type of support that a state might provide to an opposition group within another is a promise: a promise to ally or aid the group should it come to office. This type of support is likely to come in the form of expected diplomatic recognition, defense alliances, trade agreements, favorable loans, or other arrangements that would ease the group's burden of governing. Crucially, the effect of this type of support is *not* to increase a group's chances of seizing control of government, but rather to shift the value it places on doing so. In the remainder of this section, I analyze a simple game theoretic model that incorporates these three potential external influences on domestic bargaining and outline their implications for the study of democratization.

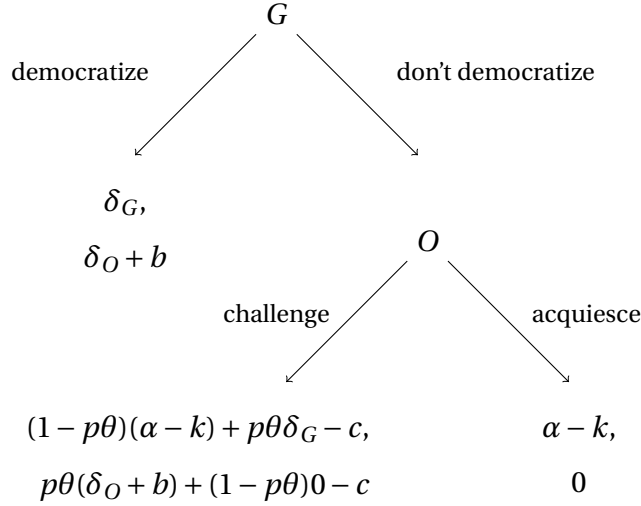
Consider a model capturing an interaction between a government, G , and an opposition, O . At the beginning of the game, G must decide whether to undertake a program of democrati-

zation or not. If the government chooses not to democratize, the opposition must then decide whether or not to challenge the government. If the opposition does challenge, the two actors engage in a probabilistic and costly competition over control of the state institutions. If the opposition prevails in this conflict, it imposes democracy; if the government wins, it retains control of the state and the opposition remains in opposition. If the opposition chooses not to challenge the government, the status quo prevails.

The two actors place different values on each potential outcome. First, if the status quo prevails – either because the opposition does not challenge the government or because the government prevails in a competition for office – both players receive their payoffs for living in an autocracy. I assume that G receives $\alpha > 0$ for retaining control of an autocratic state, and that O receives 0 for remaining out of office in an autocracy. If the terminal outcome is democracy – either as a concession by the government or as the result of a competition for office won by the opposition – O receives $\delta_O > 0$, its payoff for democracy. Similarly, G receives δ_G , which I assume is less than α , the government’s payoff for retaining control of an autocracy. In other words, I assume that G does not prefer democracy for its own sake. Finally, if a competition over office occurs between G and O , O wins control over the government and imposes democracy with probability p , and returns to the opposition with probability $1 - p$. Both players pay a cost $c > 0$ if a competition occurs.

External assistance enters into the model in three ways. First, external pressure can result in a cost to the government for staying on in office. This external pressure is modeled as a cost $k > 0$ that G pays for remaining in office. For example, other states might impose sanctions on individuals who support the regime. Second, external assistance might shape the prospects for democratization by increasing the value that O places on holding office. I assume that O re-

Figure 1: A Model of Externally-Assisted Democratization



ceives an additional benefit $b > 0$ only if she successfully takes office and undertakes a program of democratization. Finally, external aid can directly shape the probability that O is successful in a potential challenge to O . I assume that with external aid, O successfully deposes G with probability θp , where $\theta \in (1, \frac{1}{p}]$ is a coefficient denoting the effectiveness of external aid.³ A graphical representation of the model is presented in Figure 1.

The model does not explicitly incorporate the strategy of the external democracy promoter. I choose to abstract away from this third potential actor for a number of reasons. The goal of this paper is to explore the effect that democracy assistance has on the relative likelihood of democratization and political conflict within a country. Incorporating the strategy of a democracy promoter would be enormously useful for a number of different questions: under what conditions democracy promoters are willing to provide assistance (Azpuru et al., 2008; Hyde and Marinov, 2014), what types of assistance they provide (Bush, 2015), or how domestic politics within donor states shapes where democracy assistance is sent (Heinrich, 2013). However, as long as we are willing to assume that potential recipients of this assistance and their domes-

³The upper boundary on θ simply ensures that the probability of O winning office does not exceed one.

tic adversaries are able to (on average) accurately forecast the assistance they will receive, the exclusion of donor states is not problematic for the question at hand. Therefore, this model enables us to explore the effect of some exogenous level of democracy assistance on the probability of democratization and civil conflict.

The model has a unique sub-game perfect equilibrium with three potential behavioral outcomes.

Proposition 1. *When direct support to the opposition is ineffective ($\theta < \bar{\theta}$) and the costs to the government of the status quo are small ($k < \alpha - \delta_G$), the status quo prevails and G does not democratize.*

Intuitively, unless O can meet a threshold for which competing for office is “worth it,” G will never unilaterally democratize. Consider O ’s decision of whether or not to compete for office. Unless the chances of taking office are high enough, she will not be willing to pay the costs of competition. Formally, if

$$0 \geq \theta p(\delta_O + b) + (1 - \theta p)0 - c, \quad (1)$$

O is never willing to compete for office. This constraint holds so long as

$$\theta < \bar{\theta} \equiv \frac{c}{p(b + \delta_O)}. \quad (2)$$

Anticipating O ’s decision, then, G is highly unlikely to democratize if he foresees that he will not be challenged. The only condition under which G will unilaterally grant democracy is when the externally-imposed costs of remaining in office are prohibitively high: that is, when $k > \alpha - \delta_G$. Because governments likely place a much greater value on remaining in control of an

autocracy than in living in a democracy (the quantity $\alpha - \delta_G$ is likely quite large), external actors are unlikely to be able to unilaterally compel democratization.

Proposition 2. *When direct support to the opposition is moderately effective ($\hat{\theta} < \theta < \bar{\theta}$), G does not democratize and O competes for office.*

A trickier case appears when external aid is sufficient to convince O to challenge for office but not so extensive as to render G willing to concede democracy. The decision on the part of O is the same as above: as long as $\theta > \bar{\theta}$, O will challenge the government given the opportunity. G 's decision therefore rests on a balance between the likelihood of losing office, the costs of remaining in office should he win, and the value he places on living in a democracy. Therefore given that O will challenge him, G democratizes only if

$$\delta_G \geq \theta p \delta_G + (1 - \theta p)(\alpha - k) - c, \quad (3)$$

and otherwise engages in a competition with O for office. This constraint can be written in terms of θ , the effectiveness of democracy aid on O 's chances of unseating G . Put in these terms, G withholds democracy and engages in political competition if

$$\theta < \hat{\theta} \equiv \frac{1 - \frac{c}{\alpha - \delta_G - k}}{p}. \quad (4)$$

Proposition 3. *When direct support to the opposition is highly effective ($\theta > \max\{\hat{\theta}, \bar{\theta}\}$), G unilaterally concedes democratization.*

The final potential outcome of the model is relatively straightforward. If G knows that external support for O will be highly effective in bringing the latter to power – that is, when θ is very

high – G is better off conceding democracy at the outset. This outcome, of course, is the result touted by democracy promotion advocates. By bolstering the power of pro-democracy groups within other countries, patrons are said to present autocrats with a *fait accompli*: democratize or be ousted by your disenfranchised subjects.

Result 1. *An increase in the value that opposition groups place on holding office (b) strictly increases the chances of conflict.*

In the model, the expected external benefits of holding office are captured in the parameter b . Recall that O can only access these benefits should she successfully unseat G and take control of the government. Mathematically, the effect of b is to shift the constraint $\bar{\theta}$ downwards, making O more willing to compete for office. But while the expectation of rewards upon coming to office can incentivize rebellion on the part of the opposition, it has no bearing on G 's willingness to step down.

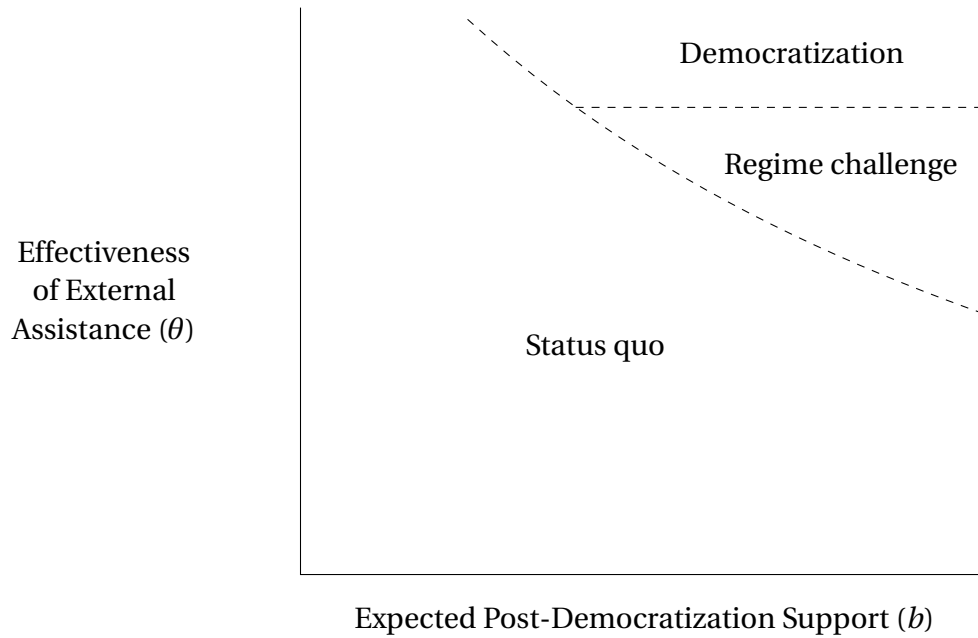
In fact, one could imagine that these resources could make an incumbent autocrat less willing to leave office. If the resources that opposition groups expect to access upon overthrowing their current leader are implements of coercion, an autocrat may see the distribution of these resources as an acute threat to his post-tenure fate.

Result 2. *Costs imposed on autocrats (k) strictly increase the likelihood of democratization and decrease the likelihood of conflict.*

Straightforwardly, any action that decreases the value an autocrat places on holding office increases the chances he willingly leaves without a fight.

Result 3. *When both the expected post-democratization support (b) and direct support (θ) are high, the government concedes democratization at the outset.*

Figure 2: Equilibrium Space: The Effect of External Assistance on Democratization and Conflict



In the first result, O placed a high value on seizing control of office, but this did not directly shape the value that G placed on either abdicating or attempting to hold on to power. In that scenario, increasing the willingness of one actor to compete for office without decreasing the willingness of another to do so meant that conflict was the result. This final result provides some nuance to this relationship.

Consider the interaction if O both places a high value on competing for office – ensuring that it does so – and is bolstered in its ability to win through direct external support. Now G has an incentive to alter its own behavior. Not only will its domestic opponent challenge for office, it has a better chance to win office because of the external support it receives. Under these conditions, so long as democratization is not too painful, G is willing to concede at the outset rather than gamble on conflict. To illustrate the point graphically, I present the equilibrium space of the model in Figure 2. Note that democratization only occurs under relatively restrictive conditions: when O is galvanized by an expectation of support after democratization (b) and when it

receives high levels of external support (θ).

Empirical Analysis

The previous section analyzed a model of democracy support, democratization, and political competition. Unsurprisingly, I found that these processes are interrelated. For example, the expectation of democracy support can increase the chances of both conflict and democratization: if autocrats believe their domestic opponents are likely to revolt in the absence of concessions, they are more likely to make them. Because the theory indicates that governments' decisions are likely to be influenced by their expectations of what their opponents will do, an empirical analysis of their behavior should account for this. In view of these strategic relationships, in this section I utilize a statistical procedure called statistical backwards induction.

Statistical backwards induction supposes that both players experience stochastic shocks to their utilities. Formally, for actors $a \in \{G, O\}$, choices $c \in \{G : D, \neg D; O : C, \neg C\}$, and observations $i \in \{1, \dots, I\}$, suppose that each player receives to their utilities a stochastic shock $\mu_{a,c,i}$, and that $\mu_{a,c,i} \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$. This means that, in terms of the model analyzed above, the government cannot know *for certain* whether the opposition will challenge it should it forgo democratization. Instead, I model the government's decision-making process as taking into account a strategic but stochastically "incorrect" opponent. Here, the government anticipates how the operationalized parameters from the model shape the probability that the opposition takes a given action if it has the opportunity to do so. For example, the government might anticipate that opposition groups receiving external support will be more likely to challenge if democratization is not granted. In turn, the government can take this increased chance of a domestic challenge into

account when it decides whether or not to democratize.

The structure of the model above is such that if the opposition has a chance to act, it determines the terminal outcome of the game for certain. Suppose then that for an observation i the ex ante probability that the opposition challenges the government is $p_{C,i}$, modeled as a function of some set of covariates. By complementarity, the government likewise knows that the probability the opposition will choose not to challenge is $1 - p_{C,i}$. At the initial node of the game, then, the government faces a choice between democratization for sure or a lottery over either the status quo or domestic conflict. Formally, the government democratizes when

$$U_G(D) + \mu_{G,D,i} \geq (1 - p_{C,i})[U_G(\neg C) + \mu_{G,\neg C,i}] + p_{C,i}[U_G(C) + \mu_{G,C,i}]. \quad (5)$$

In other words, the government should choose to democratize only when its utility for doing so (as a function of the regressors described below) exceeds the weighted utility it places on the “status quo ”and “civil unrest” outcomes. Each of the latter outcomes (or terminal nodes) is weighted by the probability that the government will reach it, given the opposition’s choice.

The dataset utilized in this analysis covers the years 1972-2006 and includes all countries that are not currently democracies, as per the coding in Boix, Miller and Rosato (2012). The unit of observation is the country-year, and after list-wise deletion of observations with missingness on the variables described below, there are 2,159 potential observations. Recall that the outcome variable in question must record (1) whether a country democratizes in a given year; (2) and if not, whether or not it experiences a challenge to the regime. For the first, I code a country-year as experiencing democratization using the binary data from Boix, Miller and

Rosato (2012).⁴ If a country-year does not experience an episode of democratization, it is coded as experiencing a challenge to the regime if Chenoweth and Lewis (2013) code the country as experiencing an anti-government campaign in that year. If a country-year experiences neither democratization nor a campaign, the autocratic status quo prevails. The outcome variable is therefore coded as:

$$\text{outcome} = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if democratization } (n = 112) \\ 1 & \text{if no democratization and no campaign } (n = 4,346) \\ 2 & \text{if no democratization and campaign } (n = 839) \end{cases} \quad (6)$$

There are therefore three potential observed outcomes in the model. For the first outcome – democratization – we only need to concern ourselves with modeling the government’s utility, since the opposition cannot directly choose whether or not this node is reached. The second and third outcomes have two utilities each – one for the government and one for the opposition. Unfortunately it is impossible to estimate the actors’ utilities for every possible outcome: at least one of the actor’s terminal utilities must be fixed at zero in order to identify the model. We can use the quantities of interest from the theoretical model to identify the omitted equation. In particular, we are concerned here with the effect of external support on the opposition’s decision to challenge the government, as well as the government’s decision to democratize or not. In contrast, we are relatively less concerned with the value that the government places on a domestic challenge. Therefore I fix the government’s value for a domestic challenge to

⁴The following analysis is robust to operationalizing democracy and democratization using the Polity IV cutoff of 6, as is common in the quantitative international relations literature. Because the data collected in Boix, Miller and Rosato (2012) are specifically generated as a dichotomous variable, I use this coding to analyze episodes of democratization instead.

zero. Since the opposition must choose either the status quo or a challenge, there is no need to include an equation for its status quo utility. This leaves us with three utilities to model: the government's utility for democratization, the government's utility for the status quo, and the opposition's utility for a challenge.

Regressors

In order for the government's decision to provide any analytical traction, the model must include variables that affect the opposition's decision to challenge the regime or not. Several of these are provided by the theoretical model.

First, the theory indicates that costs levied on the autocratic government for staying in power should make democratization more likely. To capture these costs, I include a variable that indicates whether or not the regime is currently being sanctioned by a great power, a condition which is satisfied for approximately 8% of the country-year observations, according to the Threat and Imposition of Sanctions data (Morgan, Bapat and Krustev, 2009). The variable *SANCTIONS* equals 1 if great power sanctions are in effect against country *i* in year *t*, and 0 if they are not. As described earlier, scholars have found that sanctions are a moderately useful tool of statecraft in forcing leaders from office.

Second, direct support to the opposition should make a challenge to the government more likely. To capture information on whether or not a group has support from external parties, I utilize data from Högladh, Pettersson and Themnér (2011). These authors systematically coded instances in which political groups within a state received external support. From this, I keep those observations that were not government-to-government support, thereby focusing

on external support directed towards opposition groups. The variable `SUPPORT` equals 1 if a group received external support, and 0 otherwise. Approximately half of all campaigns received external support.

There are two potential sources of collinearity among the variables discussed so far that are worth addressing. First, one potential concern is that only non-state actors currently engaged in a campaign against their governments receive material support from external states. If this were the case, this independent variable would be collinear with the outcome variable, and any retrieved estimates of the former's effect would be highly uncertain. However, this turns out to not be the case: of the state-years coded as receiving external support, the majority are not currently experiencing an anti-regime movement (536/960). And, of ongoing anti-regime movements, only a bare majority receive external support (473/897). Second, another possibility is that democratization never occurs in states not currently experiencing an anti-regime movement. Again, the data do not bear out this concern: 75 out of 112 cases of democratization occur when Chenoweth and Lewis (2013) code no ongoing anti-regime movement.⁵

The final parameter from the model presents a more complicated measurement issue. The theory above suggests that challenges to the government may be driven by the opposition's expectation of receiving support should they win control of office. But because this support is only realized if the opposition actually takes office, there is no clear observational analogue. To provide a rough measure of this expectation, I construct a novel measure of potential democratic support that is a distance-weighted function of great power democracy in the international system. Let the great powers be denoted as the set $GP = \{\text{U.S., Britain, France, Russia, China}\}$ for

⁵To be sure that this was not due to democratization occurring in response to a just-ended campaign that exits the dataset in the year of democratization, I also checked to see if democratization occurred only in years with campaigns at $t - 1$: again, democratization appears slightly more likely to occur in years following no campaign (68/112) as opposed to years following a campaign (44/112).

the years 1975-2009. Then

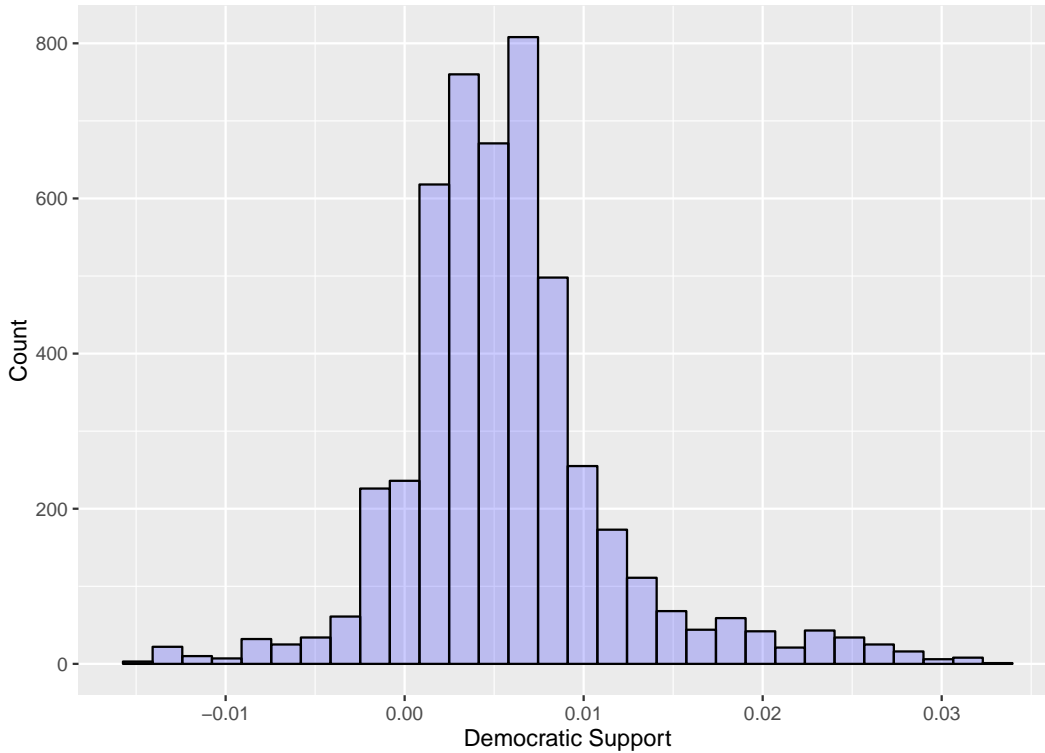
$$\text{DEMOCRACY SUPPORT}_{i,t} = \sum_{g \in \text{GP}} \frac{\text{Polity}_{g,t}}{\text{Distance}_{g,t}}. \quad (7)$$

In words, the variable DEMOCRACY SUPPORT captures how democratic the great powers are in a given year, and weights them according to how close each is to the country in question. This variable is distributed approximately normally (see Figure 3), and ranges from -0.0153 to .0327. The measure also displays reasonable face validity. One would expect a country close to several autocratic great powers – like, say, Mongolia during the Cold War – to receive relatively little democratic support should a democratic regime come to power there (in 1980 Mongolia rates a -0.0064 on the measure). Conversely, states near several democratic great powers and one partially-democratizing one – like much of Eastern Europe after the Cold War – are coded as having relatively high levels of expected democratic support (Croatia in 1994 receives a 0.287). Unsurprisingly, since the majority of great powers were democratic for the time period in question, the average state feels a slightly positive democratic pull (the mean value is 0.0057).⁶

These three variables measure the parameters that produces the core predictions from the theoretical model. Before examining the remaining control variables, I briefly reiterate the hypotheses from above and provide some preliminary evidence for them using the measures described above. First, sanctions should have a positive effect on the likelihood that the government unilaterally undertakes democratization in lieu of either the status quo or a potential challenge from the opposition. If governments are forced to bear the costs of sanctions, they should

⁶To account for the possibility that this measure is simply picking up the end of the Cold War and subsequent Russian quasi-democratization, I re-calculated the democratic support variable so that each country-year observation is expressed as a percentage of the global yearly mean and re-ran all following analyses. The results remain unchanged.

Figure 3: Distribution of DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT Variable



be relatively unwilling to leave the political situation unchanged. Second, democratic support and material support should both be positively associated with challenges on the part of the opposition, unless *both* are present. When opposition groups receive both direct material support and expect to be supported by great powers if their democratization efforts are successful, governments should be more willing to democratize rather than let a challenge emerge.

In Table 1, I present the mean level of expected democratic support and the proportion of states receiving material support for both non-status quo outcome variables. If the hypotheses from the theoretical model are correct, both expected democratic support and the proportion of states receiving material support should be greater in country-years experiencing both new campaign onsets and democratization. These simple descriptive statistics appear to bear out the predictions from above, although the difference in democratization rates for groups receiv-

Table 1: External Support and Domestic Political Competition

	Mean Democratic Support	Proportion of states with material support
No new campaign	0.0057019 (0.0000856)	0.12 (0.005)
New campaign	0.0064216 (0.0005532)	0.30 (0.040)
	$t = -1.44$	$t = -6.84$
No democratization	0.0056956 (0.0000852)	0.116 (0.004)
Democratization	0.0070422 (0.0006753)	0.125 (0.031)
	$t = -2.47$	$t = -0.29$

ing material support is much too small to differentiate with any certainty. What these statistics cannot tell us, however, is how robust these relationships are, or precisely how expected and material support affect the likelihood of democratization or new campaign onset. Do both types of support combine to decrease the likelihood of new campaign onset, as predicted?

In order to control for potential confounding explanations, I include several other control variables that may be plausibly related to the value the actors place on the three potential outcomes of the model. First, scholars have linked both a country's GDP and GDP growth to the potential for democratization. I include a measure of both from Gleditsch (2002). To account for the possibility of local democratic diffusion, I also include a variable for each state that measures its neighbors' yearly Polity scores. In each year, this variable is equal to the mean Polity score of each state's directly contiguous neighbors. Finally, I also include the democratic support variable in the government's utility for democratization, to account for the possibility that even autocrats feel the pull of great power influence. Therefore, the government's utility for democratization is modeled as a function of sanctions, GDP, GDP growth, neighborhood democ-

Table 2: Mapping Theory to Empirics

Construct	Parameter (Theoretical Model)	Measure (Empirical Model)
Expected Democratic Support	b	Great Power Democracy
Autocrat Status Quo Cost	k	Sanctions
Direct Support	θ	Material Support
		GDP per capita
Autocrat Status Quo Value	α	Winning Coalition
		Civil Liberties

racy, and great power democracy.

The government's value for the status quo is derived entirely independently of the theoretical model. Instead, I rely heavily on existing research to inform the choice of covariates. One important reason an autocrat might place a high value on retaining office is if (s)he is able to derive a large private rent from doing so. Because Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) argue that countries with small winning coalitions provide few private goods, I include a measure of winning coalition size in the model predicting the government's valuation of the status quo. I also include Freedom House's measure of a state's civil liberties, on the logic that regimes with more civil liberty repression might be less likely to face a challenge due to the high costs of mobilizing opposition. Finally, I include as a regressor Ross's (2013) measure of the state's oil production value.

In the equation modeling the opposition's decision to challenge the government, the most important variables are democratic support, material support, and their interaction, as described above. As in the other two equations, I include a measure of GDP per capita, and as in the first equation I also include the state's year-over-year GDP growth, to account for the possibility that opposition groups in states experiencing robust economic growth will be less likely

to revolt. I also include two variables that capture whether or not the state is currently experiencing a civil conflict or interstate conflict. Conflict-prone states might be more or less likely to experience the onset of a new campaign. Accordingly, I include two variables from Themnér and Wallensteen (2014) that measure the current levels of internal and external armed conflict experienced by a country.⁷

The results from the set of statistical models are presented in Table 3. Each utility equation is presented in a separate column. The coefficients therefore represent a given regressor's effect on the actor's utility for a given outcome. We can begin the analysis of the results by working "up" the game tree, beginning with the opposition's decision to challenge the government or not. The key prediction from the theoretical model was that both material and expected support should increase the chances of a challenge to the government, except in combination. This is indeed what the data suggest. The estimated coefficients for both democratic support and material support are both positive. The data indicate that both actual support and expected support increase the likelihood that a group will challenge its government. However, the estimated coefficient of the interaction of these two variables is negative, suggesting that the two variables in fact have a different effect in combination than alone.

The theoretical model suggested that when both material and expected support are high, the likelihood of conflict should be relatively low. The likelihood of conflict should be highest when an opposition group receives only one type of support – either material or expected. Conversely, when a group has access to both types of support, a challenge should be relatively low. In these cases, governments are likely to concede democratization at the outset – I explore this possibility in more detail below.

⁷For both types of conflict, the lower-bound on battle deaths for inclusion is 25.

Table 3: External Support, Democratization, and Regime Challenges

	$u_G(D)$	$u_G(SQ)$	$u_O(C)$
(Intercept)	-2.5357** (0.6963)	-0.4168 (1.8127)	-1.3291** (0.2961)
Democratic Support	92.2050** (28.3677)		28.9380** (10.5719)
Material Support			2.9622** (0.1774)
Democratic Support × Material Support			-99.5607** (21.2644)
GDP per capita (\$1,000s)	-0.0879 (0.2738)	0.0744 (0.3352)	-0.0439** (0.0104)
GDP growth per capita	-0.4738 (0.7374)		-0.8267† (0.4761)
Great Power Sanctions	1.0233* (0.5163)		
Neighborhood Democracy	-0.0465 (0.0412)		
Winning Coalition Size		-8.0941** (1.7018)	
Civil Liberty Suppression		1.4857** (0.2449)	-0.0852† (0.0486)
Oil		-0.0380 (0.0242)	
Interstate Conflict			0.1616 (0.3311)
Civil Conflict			0.3209† (0.1695)
Log-likelihood	-896.6088		
<i>N</i>	2159		

† $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. Bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses.

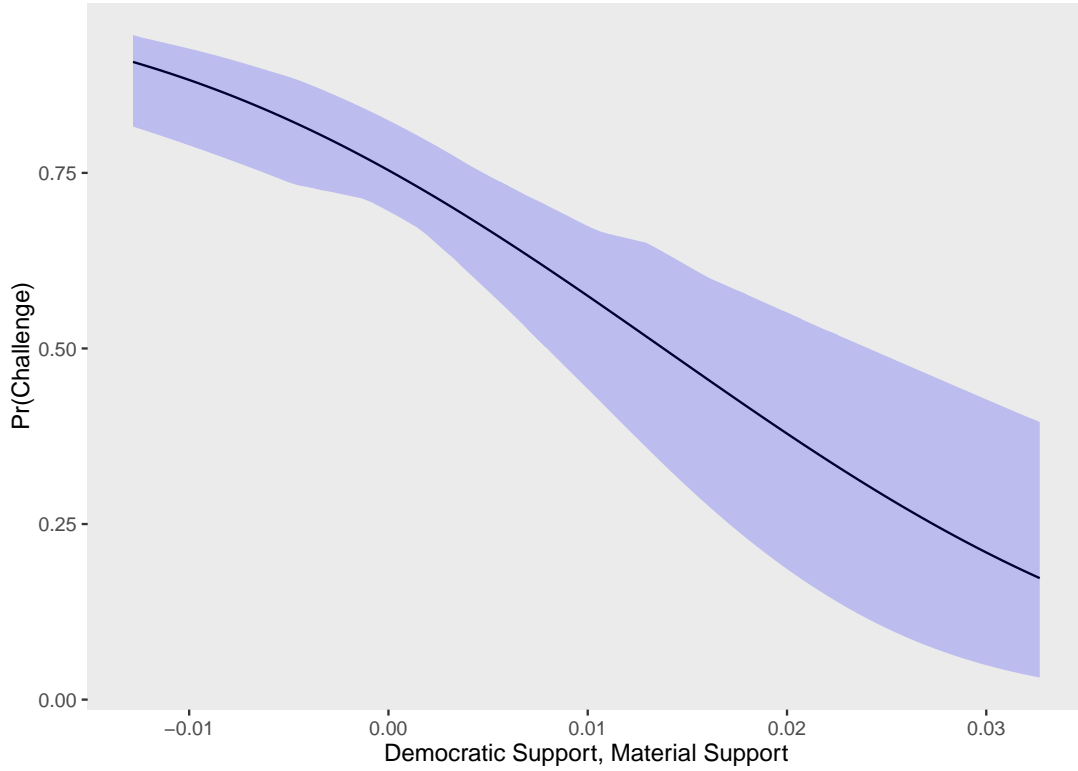
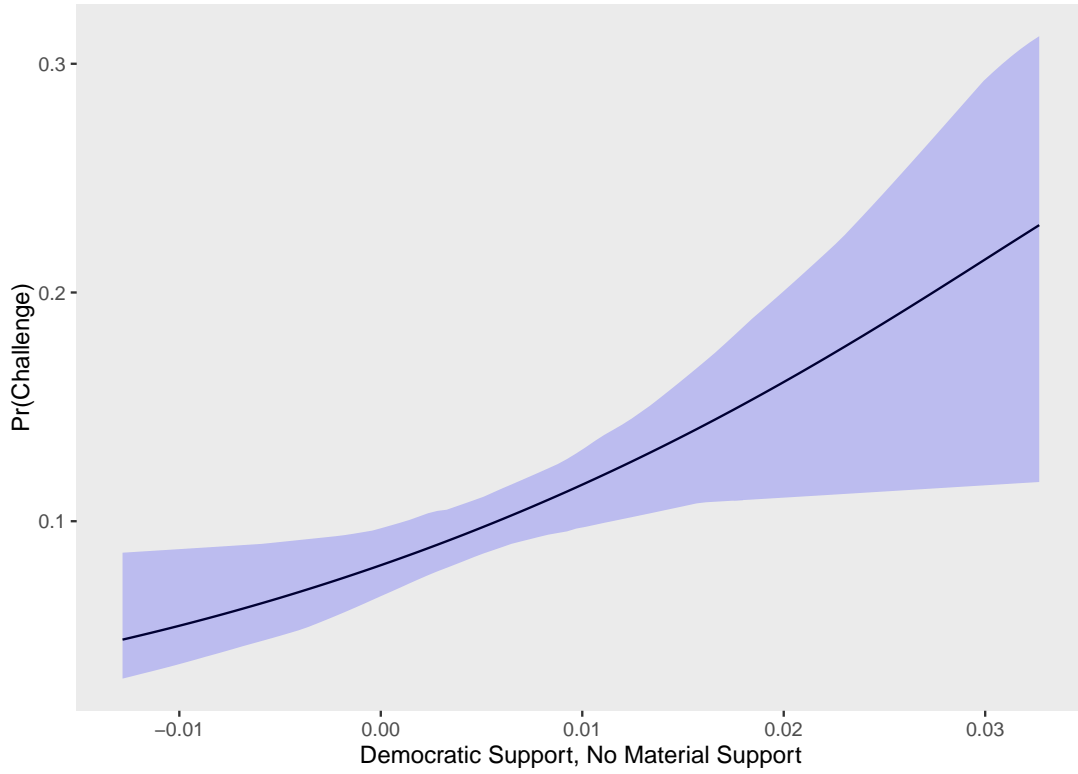
In Figure 4 I plot the predicted probability of a new campaign onset across the range of expected democratic support. In the top panel I hold the material support variable at zero: this graph therefore illustrates how the predicted probability of campaign onset changes as expected support increases *and* there is no material support. The graph on the bottom illustrates

the opposite case, in which opposition groups do receive material support. As expected, the likelihood of a new campaign onset are lowest when both expected and material support are low (left end of top panel), *and* when both are high (right end of bottom panel). A visual inspection of the two curves is supportive of the hypothesis that the effect of expected support is conditional on the reception of material support.

When it decides whether to democratize or not, the government is not directly choosing whether to accept the status quo or not. The status quo outcome is reached only if the government chooses not to democratize and the opposition chooses not to challenge the government. However, as described above, the government can place a probability estimate on the likelihood of reaching the status quo based on the value of the other variables. In this sense, the decision to forego democratization weights the government's utility for the status quo against the likelihood that it is ultimately reached. It is this probabilistic decision-making process that allows us to analyze the government's utility for the status quo. The theoretical model suggested that if external powers were able to impose costs on autocrats – measured in the empirical model by the imposition of sanctions – while they remain in office, they would be less likely to do so. The estimated coefficient on the sanctions variable indicates that this expectation was correct. Autocrats currently bearing the cost of sanctions are significantly less likely to end up at the status quo outcome.

The theoretical model and empirical results also highlight the interdependencies between the different potential outcomes. Return briefly to the discussion of the Syrian civil war that opened the paper. Using the statistical results, we can generate predicted effects of different strategies of democracy promotion. As I highlighted at the beginning of the paper, the United States took a clear stand that democracy in Syria would be welcomed by the West, and that

Figure 4: Democratic Support, Democratization, and Regime Challenges



democrats would be embraced by the international community if they took power. Indeed, Syria's 2010 score on the democracy support variable was 0.0116, which places it in the 90th percentile of all states in the sample during the time period.⁸ Its scores on other variables of interest are less promising: Syrian GDP per capita was a little over \$2,000 per year, its growth rate was negative (-2%), and repression was rampant (civil liberties abuse is coded as a 6 out of a possible maximum score of 7). By plugging these values into the model, I generated predicted probabilities for different potential outcomes as a function of changes in material support. First, even if support is absent, the model suggests that Syria was quite likely to experience a campaign of anti-government resistance ($Pr = 0.497$). It was very unlikely to experience democratization unilaterally, however ($Pr = 0.027$); the remainder of the probability density goes to the status quo outcome ($Pr = 0.476$).

How would material support in the year prior to the Arab Spring have changed these probabilities? First, if material support were sent to non-state groups within a state with Syria's profile, the probability of democratization jumps tremendously, from 0.027 to 0.297. Why is this? The probability of democratization increases because the government should become relatively more certain that the opposition will rally against it: and indeed, the probability of some type of anti-government campaign increases from 0.497 to 0.636.⁹ Is this good? Perhaps! The model dynamically highlights the relationship between anti-government campaigns and democratization. An increase in the probability of an anti-government campaign by 27% led to an increase in the probability of democratization by a factor of 10. But as we have seen in Syria, anti-government campaigns do not always end peacefully or with democratization. These tradeoffs

⁸Recall that only non-democracies are kept in the sample.

⁹The implication, of course, is that the probability of the status quo drops dramatically, to 0.066.

should be carefully evaluated. In particular, future research might incorporate another decision by the government in which it decides whether or not to repress an anti-government campaign. Such an extension might help further pin down the conditions under which support to anti-regime groups increases the chances of violence.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper I have made a simple argument. The threat of an anti-government campaign should be strategically linked to the willingness of a government to democratize. The effect of material support on the relative likelihoods of conflict and democratization depends critically on the ability of great powers to credibly promise to support democratic regimes after they come to power. When material support goes to anti-government groups within states far away from the center of great power democracy, it is much more likely to foment regime opposition than democratization. When compared to the status quo, this may well be a desirable effect, but it is worth considering the possibility of increased political violence as a competing outcome when considering the support of opposition groups within other states.

The theoretical and empirical evidence marshaled here therefore provides conditions for evaluating the ex ante effect on democratization of different types of external state behavior. Sanctions appear to be at least a “safe” mechanism of influence: even if their ability to lead directly to democratization is small, they seem unlikely to engender conflict. Material support at the very least decreases the probability of the status quo persisting. When this support goes to states near democratic great powers, democratization is more likely relative to when this support goes to states likely to face significant external pressures against democratization, but

even in these “favorable” cases the likelihood of democratization remains low.

The argument also provides a way to contextualize the effect of material support over time. The end of the Cold War may have increased the rapidity of democratization by increasing the value that democratic groups placed on seizing control of office, and by extension how credible their threats to challenge their governments were. If great powers are primarily democratic, as they are in the contemporary period, material support is in general likely to be more effective at bringing about democratization than it was during the Cold War. An increasingly autocratic Russia, however, may reverse this trend yet again: if pro-democracy groups believe post-democratization support is not forthcoming, material support becomes more likely to increase the chances of contestation rather than democratization.

More generally, the argument made in this paper provides caution to would-be democracy promoters. In many cases, a necessary condition for democratization is the development of an opposition group within autocracies willing and able to press its government for political change. External support can certainly facilitate the development of such a group, but there is no straight line leading from political mobilization to democratization. In many cases the same measures that increase the probability of democratization also increase the probability of an unsuccessful campaign and political violence. Because these campaigns can be long and deadly, policymakers should think hard about these trade-offs before engaging in democracy promotion. The model does provide a few insights into how to potentially alleviate this dilemma. First, policymakers should be careful in engaging in rhetorical democracy promotion if they are not willing to back this up with material support. Increasing the willingness of groups to fight for democracy without increasing their ability to directly coerce their own governments presents the worst of both worlds. Second, measures that decrease the willingness of auto-

crats to stay in power, e.g. through sanctions, seem low-risk, if also low-reward. They may only marginally increase the probability of democratization, but they appear to have a scant effect on the likelihood of political contestation, as well. On the academic front, future scholarship could profitably extend this line of argumentation by examining how the same measures that might incite a democratization campaign might also extend or curtail the violence that these campaigns sometimes engender.

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