The Strategic Origins of Electoral Authoritarianism

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Abstract

Why do autocrats adopt multiparty elections? This paper argues that transitions to electoral authoritarianism (EA) follow a strategic calculus in which autocrats balance international incentives to hold elections against the costs and risks of controlling them. I test this with a multinomial logit model that simultaneously predicts transitions to EA and democracy, using a sample of non-electoral autocracies from 1946–2010. I find that pro-democratic international leverage—captured by dependence on democracies through trade ties, military alliances, IGOs, and aid—predicts EA adoption. Socioeconomic 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's mainly predicted by regime weakness and not international engagement or socioeconomic factors. The results demonstrate that different forms of liberalization follow distinct logics, providing new insights into autocratic regime dynamics and democracy promotion’s unintended effects.

1 Introduction

Why do autocracies choose to adopt multiparty elections? Why would dictators legalize their challengers and risk electoral loss without the legitimacy gain of democratization?
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 may 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 paper sources transitions to EA to a combination of international pressure, socioeconomic 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, autocrats strategically adopt flawed elections and reap the rewards. Second, 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. These expectations can be based on a range of political and socioeconomic factors. In particular, winning under EA is less risky when there exists a large mass of poor voters who can be coopted through clientelism and state assistance. Thus, autocratic elites adopt elections to gain international benefits, but only if socioeconomic 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. 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

¹ Magaloni 2006; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Blaydes 2011.
³ Przeworski et al. 2000; Miller 2012.
and 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 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, IGO memberships, 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. Contrary to an extensive literature, socioeconomic factors are generally unrelated to democratization, but strongly predict EA transition. However, the effects are opposite in 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 paper presents instructive contrasts with democratization theory. Whereas theories on democratization have long been divided between structural and actor-based accounts, this paper 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 democratic politics. For Boix and Acemoglu and Robinson, the key is expected redistribution, which is in turn a product of economic inequality. Other theories focus on the expected supply of public goods or general policy radicalism. This paper 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. Besides comprising the majority of current autocracies, there is growing evidence that autocratic elections matter for policy, democratic develop-

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4 Boix 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006.
6 Przeworski 1991; McKoy and Miller 2012.
7 Magaloni 2006; Miller 2015b.
Second, most major political transitions are from one autocratic regime to another, yet we know little about what underlies these changes. In particular, the results shed light on how international dynamics unintentionally promote liberalized autocracy, with implications for democracy promotion and foreign policy.

Lastly, the results present a methodological challenge to the numerous studies that aim to investigate democratic change, but fail to distinguish between democratization and shifts within autocracy. This problem is particularly acute for studies using shifts on the Polity democracy score. A positive Polity shift from a closed autocracy is nearly three times as likely to end up at EA than democracy, yet this paper shows that these transition types are predicted by entirely different factors. The implication is that 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 paper demonstrates the need to clearly distinguish the types of transitions being tested.

2 Background on Electoral Authoritarianism

Although not entirely new to history, electoral authoritarianism has become the dominant form of dictatorship in the world, with 113 countries holding a multiparty election under autocracy since 1946. Figure 1 shows the global prevalence of closed autocracy, EA, and democracy from 1946–2010. Again, EA regimes are defined as autocracies with legal multi-party competition for the legislature (e.g., Russia, Malaysia, and Singapore). Closed autocracies either lack electoral institutions (Saudi Arabia, UAE) or hold single- or no-party elections (North Korea, Swaziland), which are generally ceremonial in nature. This diffusion of auto-

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8 Lindberg 2009; Miller 2015a.
9 Kinne and Marinov 2013.
10 Carothers 1999; Goldsmith 2008.
12 Schedler 2006; Miller 2015a.
13 As discussed in Section 4, I use Boix et al. 2013 to define democracy and Cheibub et al. 2010 to code for EA.
ocratic elections, parties, and legislatures has stimulated a growing literature on the causes and consequences of autocratic institutions.\textsuperscript{14}

Why do autocrats allow contested elections? Although numerous theories have been presented, most fall into two categories.\textsuperscript{15} First, elections may be motivated by international pressure and domestic legitimacy.\textsuperscript{16} 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.

Second, elections may promote regime survival through domestic political advantages, either by coopting elites into the party hierarchy\textsuperscript{17} or extending control over citizens.\textsuperscript{18} Elections can communicate regime dominance through overwhelming victories, cultivating a “public image of invincibility...[to] discourage potential divisions within the ruling party.”\textsuperscript{19} Autocratic elections can also reveal information\textsuperscript{20} and help to monitor local leaders.\textsuperscript{21} Thus, autocratic elections can be seen as a technique for bolstering power.

Although elections may present some advantages for autocrats, they also come with costs. Contested elections can invigorate the opposition and threaten survival if regimes fail to adequately control the electoral sphere.\textsuperscript{22} About 1 in 5 national elections under EA lead to the incumbent executive leaving office.\textsuperscript{23} Many ruling parties eventually lose to rivals and accede to democratization, as in Malawi in 1994 and Mexico in 2000.\textsuperscript{24} An implication of this threat is that the net advantage of elections for autocrats is contingent on regime-specific factors, such as the likelihood of maintaining electoral control.

\textsuperscript{14} Geddes 1999; Schedler 2006, 2013; Levitsky and Way 2010; Svolik 2012.
\textsuperscript{15} Hermet 1978; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009.
\textsuperscript{16} Hermet 1978; Carothers 1999, 2002; Schedler 2006.
\textsuperscript{17} Geddes 1999; Magaloni 2006; Blaydes 2011; Svolik 2012.
\textsuperscript{18} Lust-Okar 2006; Magaloni 2006.
\textsuperscript{19} Magaloni 2006, 9.
\textsuperscript{20} Magaloni 2006.
\textsuperscript{21} Zaslavsky and Brym 1978; Blaydes 2011.
\textsuperscript{22} Magaloni 2006; Miller 2015b.
\textsuperscript{23} Using Hyde and Marinov 2012.
\textsuperscript{24} Suggested predictors of democratization from EA include international pressure (Levitsky and Way 2010; Donno 2013), reduced resource revenues (Greene 2007), and opposition coalitions (Howard and Roessler 2006; Donno 2013).
Despite the abundance of theories on autocratic motivations for elections, there have been few attempts to translate them into clear predictions for when elections will be adopted. To my knowledge, no prior quantitative work has specifically predicted transition to EA. A few studies predict shifts to multipartyism, but only in limited samples and without distinguishing transitions to EA and democracy.\textsuperscript{25} For instance, Goemans and Marinov 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.\textsuperscript{26} As I show, this research design is problematic given that EA and democratic transitions have highly distinct predictors. The same concern applies to studies predicting movements on Polity, which conflate shifts to democracy with shifts between autocratic regime types.\textsuperscript{27}

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.\textsuperscript{28}

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 \textit{Maisanta}, a list of more than 12 million petition signers. Voters who favored Hugo Chavez’s recall faced an average 5% drop in income, with many state workers and doctors dismissed.\textsuperscript{29} Voters favoring the recall of opposition figures were more than twice as likely to enter into a government cash trans-

\textsuperscript{25} Hannan and Carroll 1981; Goemans and Marinov 2014; Dietrich and Wright 2015.
\textsuperscript{26} Goemans and Marinov 2014.
\textsuperscript{27} Other empirical studies on autocratic institutions have clear distinctions with this paper. Epstein et al. (2006) distinguish democracies, “partial democracies,” and autocracies, but don’t model transitions from autocracy to partial democracy. Further, partial democracies are defined by middle values of Polity, which produces a heterogeneous mix of regime types. Only 36% of these partial democracies are EA regimes; conversely, only 23% of EA regimes are partial democracies. Gandhi (2008) argues that autocratic legislatures are adopted to enable policy concessions to elites. However, she does not look at regime transitions and only 54% of autocracies with legislatures are EA.
\textsuperscript{28} Schedler 2006, 2013; Levitsky and Way 2010.
\textsuperscript{29} Dobson 2012, 99-100.
fer program as Chavez opponents.\textsuperscript{30} Similarly, across EA regimes, the local areas voting for
the ruling party are rewarded with spending, whereas opposition strongholds are starved of
government funds.\textsuperscript{31} Many authors see this clientelism as the central dynamic underlying
autocratic elections.\textsuperscript{32} As I argue below, however, this strategy’s effectiveness depends on the
country’s socioeconomic structure.

3 Predictors of Electoral Authoritarianism and Democracy

This paper examines transitions from closed autocracy to EA and democracy. Table 1 dis-
plays the number of transitions between the three regime types. As seen, transitions from
closed to electoral autocracy are the most common transition type, with 139 cases, or 5.2% of
country-years under closed autocracy.\textsuperscript{33} Transitions directly to democracy are one-third as
common. What are the domestic and international factors that predict these transitions?

3.1 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 45 democratic
transitions in this paper’s sample, the final autocratic executive lost power within five years
(and all but three instantaneously).\textsuperscript{34} In contrast, the majority of executives and more than
three in four ruling parties remained in power five years after an EA transition.\textsuperscript{35} Further,
in an average five-year period, 75% of democratic executives lose power, compared to 37% of
EA leaders and 40% of closed authoritarian rulers.\textsuperscript{36} Whereas democratization is a virtual
\textsuperscript{30} Stokes et al. 2013, 44-50.
\textsuperscript{31} Magaloni 2006; Blaydes 2011; Hicken 2011.
\textsuperscript{32} Lust-Okar 2006; Blaydes 2011.
\textsuperscript{33} Five years after transition to EA, about 66% remain EA, 11% are democracies, and the
remainder transition back to closed autocracy.
\textsuperscript{34} There are cases in which autocratic ruling parties remain electorally competitive post-
democratization (Wright and Escribà-Folch 2012). However, these are almost exclusively trans-
sitions that occur from EA, not closed autocracy.
\textsuperscript{35} Controlling for average income, year, region, and past turnovers, an executive is not signif-
ically more likely to lose power after shifting to EA compared to retaining closed autocracy.
\textsuperscript{36} Goemans et al. 2009.
guarantee of losing power, EA transition may actually 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.\textsuperscript{37} It follows that the anticipated size of international rewards and the leverage held by external democratic actors should encourage EA transition.\textsuperscript{38}

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 51 elections since 1946, often resulting in democratization.\textsuperscript{39} 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.\textsuperscript{40} Absent such signals, regimes must 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 socioeconomic status, particularly whether there exists a large mass of poor voters that the regime can coopt through clientelism and targeted public goods.

\textsuperscript{37} Goldsmith 2008; Levitsky and Way 2010.
\textsuperscript{38} Domestic benefits for regime power may also exist, but tracking variation in the size and need for these benefits is difficult.
\textsuperscript{39} Hyde and Marinov 2012.
\textsuperscript{40} 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 first round was won by the Islamic Salvation Front.
Democratization works very differently, as closed autocratic leaders rarely retain power under democracy. Assuming power is the primary concern, any rewards stemming from democratization will carry little weight. Not only will the rewards fail to match the sacrifice of power, but autocratic leaders will no longer be in a position to gain from international 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 within closed autocracy. 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.\(^{41}\)

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 socioeconomic structure.

### 3.2 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.\(^{42}\) Numerous political benefits, including foreign aid and trade, are designed to be contingent on democracy.\(^{43}\) The U.S.’s 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 E.U.’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, stud-

\(^{41}\) Levitsky and Way 2010; Albertus and Menaldo 2012; Miller 2012.

\(^{42}\) Whitehead 1996; Gleditsch and Ward 2006; Torfason and Ingram 2010. Most obviously, foreign powers can impose democracy after war, as in Germany and Japan. Democracy can also be encouraged by normative diffusion (Whitehead 1996), regional organizations (Pevehouse 2002), and democracy assistance (Carothers 1999).

ies show that democracies prefer to trade and ally with similar regimes, presenting an implicit reward for recognition as a democracy.\textsuperscript{44}

Studies conflict, however, as to whether foreign aid and pressure effectively spread democracy.\textsuperscript{45} A potential reason for this, I suggest, is the failure to distinguish different types of liberalization. As many scholars have observed, the bulk of rewards cast as encouraging “democracy” are in practice given for even critically flawed elections.\textsuperscript{46} Diamond argues that “democracy promotion policies have been dominated by a highly minimalist, electoral conception of democracy.”\textsuperscript{47} Young notes that in African countries “semi-democracy is probably sufficient to deflect international system pressures for more complete political opening.”\textsuperscript{48} As a consequence, the end result of democratic pressure is often transition to electoral autocracy, since many autocrats will happily adopt partial reforms if they can gain the benefits \textit{without} sacrificing power.\textsuperscript{49}

For 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 U.S., Japan, and the E.U., increased development aid, and the first-ever visit by an American president in November 2012.

In general, the rewards given for adopting democratic versus merely contested elections are remarkably similar. Figure 2 shows country averages of U.S. economic and military aid (top) and IGO memberships (bottom),\textsuperscript{50} based on proximity to either EA or democratic transition. Transition years for each are normalized to 1. In the four years before democratization, the average closed autocracy receives $10.01 per capita in U.S. 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 tran-

\textsuperscript{44} Mansfield et al. 2000.
\textsuperscript{45} Ethier 2003; Knack 2004; Finkel et al. 2007; Dietrich and Wright 2015.
\textsuperscript{46} Diamond 1999; Joseph 1999; Young 1999; Goldsmith 2008; Brown 2011.
\textsuperscript{47} Diamond 1999, 56.
\textsuperscript{48} Young 1999, 35.
\textsuperscript{49} Carothers 1999, 2002; Goldsmith 2008.
\textsuperscript{50} Respectively, from Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2007; Pevehouse et al. 2004.
sitions is from 44.7 to 51.2; for EA transitions, from 42.4 to 46.0. Thus, EA transition and democratization result in nearly identical benefits.

Another illustrative example comes from the Africa Growth Opportunity Act, a 2000 U.S. program that gives duty-free access for 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 (Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Niger, Mali, and Madagascar). 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.51

Besides encouraging EA, international actors’ approval of flawed elections has often worked (sometimes intentionally) to prevent a full democratic opening. In Kenya in 1991, a threatened suspension of aid led Daniel arap Moi to concede to multiparty elections. However, fears of instability led the U.S. and U.K. to endorse highly flawed elections in 1992 and 1997, even restricting fraud reports by their own observation teams.52 As Brown writes, “This electoral legitimation allowed Moi to... indefinitely postpone reforms that would have allowed a full transition to democracy.”53 Similarly, U.S. 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.54

51 Freedom House 2013.
52 Geisler 1993.
54 Carothers 1999; Goldsmith 2008; Brown 2011; Bush 2015.
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 [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.” 55

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. Second, 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. To address this, I show 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 autocracy is more economically and politically dependent on democracies, economic sanctions and political marginalization become much more costly. 56 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 U.S. alliance. Egypt scholars generally agree that Sadat was guided by a desire for foreign investment and military cooperation with the West. 57

Previous findings have demonstrated the significance of trade partners’ political characteristics. Hadenius shows that U.S. trade promotes democracy and Cao et al. find that trade

56 Goodliffe and Hawkins forthcoming.
57 Waterbury 1983; Blaydes 2011, 33-38.
with rights-respecting countries promotes human rights diffusion.\textsuperscript{58} Conversely, other studies show that greater trade with China influences foreign policy and autocratic survival.\textsuperscript{59} Trade dependence on democracies can vary enormously, with major political consequences. In the 1980s, 95\% of South Africa’s bilateral trade was with democracies, compared with 60\% of Burma’s trade (which subsequently fell as low as 25\%). 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.\textsuperscript{60}

Related work examines the influence of democratic military alliances,\textsuperscript{61} co-members of IGOs,\textsuperscript{62} and other network interactions.\textsuperscript{63} However, this work has generally failed to distinguish effects on autocratic liberalization versus genuine democratization.

I compute the fraction of each autocracies’ trade, military alliances, IGO co-memberships, and aid represented by democracies, 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 predict 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, IGO co-memberships, or foreign aid.

**Hypothesis 1B:** Transition to democracy is unrelated to dependence on external democracies through trade ties, military alliances, IGO co-memberships, or foreign aid.

\textsuperscript{58} Hadenius 1992, 96; Cao et al. 2013.
\textsuperscript{59} Respectively, Flores-Macías and Kreps 2013; Bader 2015.
\textsuperscript{60} 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.
\textsuperscript{61} Goodliffe and Hawkins forthcoming.
\textsuperscript{62} Pevehouse 2002; Goodliffe and Hawkins forthcoming. 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.
\textsuperscript{63} Levitsky and Way 2010; Torfason and Ingram 2010.
Regime Contagion

A related international effect is regional contagion. Countries are more likely to democratize and sustain democracy if higher fractions of their regions and neighborhoods are democratic.\(^{64}\) 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.\(^{65}\) In their study, this linkage predicts democratic transitions from EA, but it should also explain EA adoption.

In addition, there are at least four reasons that EA neighbors (and to a lesser extent, democratic neighbors) should directly influence EA adoption. First, this follows from a policy diffusion logic, according to which political choices spread through learning and emulation.\(^{66}\) If elections and parties function well in nearby countries, autocrats are likely to copy these strategies. Second, popular pressure for elections increases when citizens witness them in neighboring countries.\(^{67}\) This effect was particularly pronounced during the wave of liberalizations in sub-Saharan Africa from 1990–94.\(^{68}\) Third, autocrats want to avoid looking like illiberal outliers in their region.\(^{69}\) Fourth, powerful closed autocracies often provide support for similar neighboring regimes to secure alliances and block future regime diffusion.\(^{70}\) For instance, China has been a crucial stabilizing force for North Korea, Laos, and (until recently) Burma.\(^{71}\) An absence of these hegemonic “black knights” should make regional liberalization more likely.

Hypothesis 2: Transition to EA is more likely with a higher proportion of regional EA regimes.

\(^{64}\) Starr 1991; Gleditsch and Ward 2006.
\(^{65}\) Levitsky and Way 2010.
\(^{66}\) Simmons et al. 2006; Ambrosio 2010.
\(^{67}\) Sadiki 2000; Levitsky and Way 2010.
\(^{68}\) Bratton and van de Walle 1997. For instance, Tanzania’s early-90s 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.
\(^{69}\) Whitehead 1996.
\(^{70}\) Ambrosio 2010; Levitsky and Way 2010.
\(^{71}\) Reilly 2013.
3.3 Socioeconomic 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, in 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. These expectations may have many sources, including the presence and strength of a ruling party, past electoral experiences, and opposition activity. I focus instead on how socioeconomic characteristics of the population influence the threat of contested elections. Specifically, I argue that wealthier citizens are especially difficult to coopt and thus act as a deterrent to 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 coopt 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. 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, Egypt, Jordan, Singapore, Taiwan, and many other countries. In Egypt under the NDP, for instance, districts supportive of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood were less likely to subsequently receive connections to public sewer and water lines.

The feasibility of this electoral strategy greatly depends on the country’s socioeconomic structure. EA regimes tend to construct their electoral coalitions around poor voters, who are more easily and cheaply coopted. Reversing the democratic pattern, the poor are often the most likely to vote in autocratic elections and tend to support the ruling party. As a result, higher incomes reduce the grip and cost-effectiveness of clientelism. Survey evidence from

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72 Lust-Okar 2006; Blaydes 2011; Hicken 2011.
74 Blaydes 2011.
75 Magaloni 2006; Blaydes 2011.
Ghana shows that both personal wealth and local development reduce an individual’s willingness to sell his or her vote. 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. Lastly, higher levels of remittances increase local electoral competitiveness in Mexico by reducing voter dependence on state patronage.

Besides 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. Second, wealthier voters are typically better educated, and therefore more discerning and critically evaluative of regime propaganda. Third, they tend to value political rights over material needs, and will thus push for civil liberties and fairer electoral competition. 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. Thus, EA should be less threatening, and thus more likely to be adopted, when average income is low and inequality is high. Collier points to several cases of suffrage extension in 19th 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. Bermeo argues that Portugal’s Republican Party allowed contested elections in 1911 for the

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77 Weghorst and Lindberg 2013.
78 Stokes 2005.
79 Pfutze 2014.
81 However, this relationship may not be linear, as more educated (and therefore literate) citizens are more often exposed to government media (Geddes and Zaller 1989).
82 Inglehart and Welzel 2005.
83 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% proportional increase in turnover in EA and a 29% decrease in closed regimes. Turnover is from Goemans et al. 2009.
84 Collier 1999, 76.
85 Collier 1999, 144.
same reason: “The meager resources local bosses traded for votes had value precisely because the population was so poor.”

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 success, right-wing military governments in 1970s Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay imitated a developmental approach that O'Donnell termed “bureaucratic authoritarianism.” 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? A possible explanation is that Brazil was by far the poorest and most unequal of the four countries. At the point of democratic breakdown, Brazil's average income was about half the next poorest, with its Gini measure of inequality 43% higher than the other countries' average. The large mass of poor, rural voters allowed Brazil's military to dominate the electoral arena and engage in controlled liberalization. In contrast, greater development in the other countries made elections much more difficult to control. Despite widespread repression, the 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.

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. A related factor is the extent of funds available to the regime for electoral control. Greene argues that natural resource revenues are a critical source of capital for clien-

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86 Bermeo 2010, 1127.
telism, leading EA ruling parties to democratize when resource revenues decline relative to overall income.\textsuperscript{91} By extension, resource dependence may also predict EA transition, as rulers will anticipate having these funds for electoral control. However, resource revenues are also useful for consolidating power in closed autocracy and blunting international pressure for liberalization.\textsuperscript{92} Expectations are therefore unclear.

3.4 Leader Turnover

Finally, how can we test the effect of regime weakness on democratic transition? I use violent leader changes, particularly coups, to indicate significant instability and fragility within the regime coalition.\textsuperscript{93} Besides capturing weakness, leader changes may also predict transitions because new leaders have different political strategies and are often forced to seek out sources of legitimacy. Although autocratic leader changes are neglected in democratization theory, recent work has connected turnovers,\textsuperscript{94} violent turnovers,\textsuperscript{95} and assassinations\textsuperscript{96} to democratic transition. I test three types of leader turnover and find strong support for an effect of coups on democratization and weaker support for an effect of regular turnovers on EA transition.

4 Empirical Analysis and Data

Empirical Design

I estimate a multinomial logit model that simultaneously predicts transitions to EA and democracy from 1946–2010. I use a sample of closed autocracies, removing cases of state failure as defined by Marshall and Jaggers.\textsuperscript{97} These comprise 3.9\% of country-years in closed autocracy. Since these cases are generally incapable of adopting electoral politics, they are removed, although the results are unchanged when including them. The multinomial logit's

\textsuperscript{91} Greene 2007.
\textsuperscript{92} Sadiki 2000; Blaydes 2011.
\textsuperscript{93} This follows Miller 2012.
\textsuperscript{94} Treisman 2015.
\textsuperscript{95} Miller 2012; Goemans and Marinov 2014; Thyne and Powell forthcoming.
\textsuperscript{96} Jones and Olken 2009.
\textsuperscript{97} Marshall and Jaggers 2010.
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 setup is advantageous as it allows for a close comparison of the factors predicting each type of transition. Further, it provides a more accurate test of EA transition, as a binary logit model would lump together stable closed autocracies and democratizing countries in the reference category.

The multinomial logit model relies on an assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA), which states that excluding specific outcomes does not affect the relative odds of 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 paper’s main models (Table 2), the Hausman $\chi^2$ test fails to reject the IIA assumption for all three regime categories, validating the use of multinomial logit.\textsuperscript{98}

**Establishing Regime Choice**

This paper’s central claim is that EA is strategically adopted by autocrats. There are two alternative possibilities that require exploration. First, some transitions may be unintended by 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, a robustness check recodes the cases of democratization that may have been attempted, but failed, EA transitions. The main results are unchanged.

Second, perhaps EA transitions are not strategically chosen by autocrats but forced upon them by domestic or international actors. For instance, election adoption might occur in the face of overwhelming popular protests. To address this, 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 predict EA transition.

\textsuperscript{98} In addition, Wald tests confirm that the three outcome categories should not be collapsed.
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.\(^9\) 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.\(^1\) About 88% of these regimes featured full legislative elections within the previous five years.\(^2\) This definition has two main advantages. First, it’s highly concrete, as it’s based on a formal legal requirement and not a subjective evaluation of contestation. Second, transitions to EA clearly result from a conscious choice, as legalizing opposition parties is a significant political change.

For 12 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.\(^3\)

Independent Variables

I now overview data for 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 Table A1. Additional variables, including measures of international leverage, are described in the results section.

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\(^9\) Boix et al. 2013.
\(^1\) From Cheibub et al. 2010. Since this data ends in 2008, I updated it to 2010 using country reports in Freedom House 2013.
\(^2\) As shown below, the results are robust to recoding the remaining 12% as closed autocracies.
\(^3\) One additional case has a two-year discrepancy, but recoding it does not affect the results.
Regional EA and Regional Democracy are defined as the fraction of EA regimes and democracies in each country’s region (excluding the country itself). Similar measures are used to capture the regimes types of trade partners, allies, and IGO co-members.

Economic development is captured by logged GDP/capita (in real 2000 dollars). Economic Inequality is measured by the Gini index of income. I test five other socioeconomic indicators: Economic Growth (the percentage change in GDP/capita), Population (logged), Urbanization (the percentage living in cities of 100,000+), ELF (ethnolinguistic fractionalization), and Resource Dependence (revenues from fuel and metals as a percentage of GDP). Due to missing data concerns, I first run a model omitting Economic Inequality and Resource Dependence.

For each of three types of executive turnover, I test a dummy variable indicating whether such a turnover has occurred within the previous five years. Using Goemans et al., I first distinguish regular and irregular turnovers, where the former occur through legal procedures. I further distinguish irregular turnovers led by government insiders (coup) versus other actors (primarily rebels and popular protest movements). Because the Goemans et al. data ends in 2004, I updated each variable through 2010.

Because global regime types have fluctuated over time, I control for the year as a linear term. To capture regime history, I control for the country’s number of prior spells of EA and democracy. Finally, to account for regime longevity, I use the Polity dataset’s Durable

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103 The eight regions are Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East, post-communist, sub-Saharan Africa, Western Europe and the British settler colonies, East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia.
104 From Haber and Menaldo 2011; World Bank 2014.
106 Heston et al. 2011.
107 COW Project 2010b.
109 Haber and Menaldo 2011.
110 Following Miller 2012.
112 About 21% of closed autocracies are within five years of a coup, 6.4% within five years of an irregular turnover from below, and 21% within five years of a regular turnover.
113 In robustness checks, I further add a Cold War dummy.
variable.\textsuperscript{114} I add cubic splines of duration with three knots (at the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles of \textit{Durable}).\textsuperscript{115} This represents a highly flexible duration model that allows the transition propensity to vary with regime age.

5 Empirical Results

Table 2 displays the initial multinomial logit results. Due to missing data concerns, the displayed models do not control for every relevant variable at once. Rather, I first consider a base model (Model 1 in Table 2) that includes most of the key variables yet retains 92\% of all observations. Model 2 in Table 2 adds controls for \textit{Resource Dependence} and \textit{Economic Inequality}. Table 3 summarizes 13 additional models separated by dashed lines. For each, a set of variables is added to the base model, with results for these additional variables shown. I discuss in turn the findings for international factors, economic structure, leader turnover, and other predictors.

5.1 International Factors

The two models shown in Table 2 test for the regional diffusion of EA and democracy. The results are clear: Being surrounded by EA regimes predicts transition to EA, whereas being surrounded by democracies predicts democratization. This confirms previous findings on regional democratic contagion and extends this to a parallel effect for EA. \textit{Regional Democracy} is also positive for EA transition in Model 1, but narrowly misses significance.\textsuperscript{116}

Figure 3 shows predicted probabilities of transitions to EA and democracy from Model 1. In the top panel, \textit{Regional EA} is varied along the horizontal axis, holding other variables at their means. The large substantive effect on EA transition is clearly seen, with the estimated likelihood ranging from about 2\% to nearly 20\% each year. The bottom panel instead varies

\textsuperscript{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. Results are substantively identical using Geddes et al.’s 2014 regime duration measure.

\textsuperscript{115} This follows Beck et al. 1998.

\textsuperscript{116} Using neighboring regime types instead of regional averages returns broadly similar results, except that EA and democratic neighbors tend to predict both transitions.
Regional Democracy, showing a similarly strong effect on both transition types. In total, EA transition appears to be more sensitive to regime contagion than democratization.

Table 3 displays tests of how international leverage and engagement influence regime change. The first model calculates the influence of trade dependence. The two variables measure the fraction of trade represented by democracies and EA regimes (using total dyadic trade), thus testing whether economic reliance on democracies and EA regimes predicts political diffusion. The interesting finding is that economic engagement with democracies strongly encourages transition to EA, but not democratization. In fact, the effect on democratization is slightly negative. In contrast, trade with EA regimes is not a significant predictor of either transition.

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. The third model instead looks at regime types among co-members of IGOs. Lastly, the fourth model tests the fraction of foreign aid commitments represented by democracies.

In every case, the democratic fraction strongly and significantly influences EA adoption, but not democratization. In contrast, the EA fraction has no effect. This strongly supports Hypotheses 1A and 1B, as autocrats adapt their institutions to mollify the democracies on which they are economically or politically dependent. Thus, international leverage by democracies routinely 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 4 shows predicted probabilities of transitions to EA and democracy from the first two models, alternatively varying Democratic Trade Dependence and Democratic Allies. Other

117 Trade data from Barbieri and Keshk 2012.
118 The findings hold if tested as the fraction of GDP made up by trade with each regime type.
119 Alliance data from COW Project 2013.
120 IGO member data from COW Project 2010a.
121 Bilateral aid data from AidData 2012. Insufficient aid comes from EA regimes to test the EA fraction. IGO aid dominated by democracies (e.g., the World Bank, OSCE) is counted as democratic.
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 to 13%. For democratic military allies, the shift is from 4% to 16%.

The fifth model compares three types of international engagement: political, social, and economic. Following Pevehouse and Torfason and Ingram,\textsuperscript{122} political engagement is measured by the country’s \textit{IGO Memberships}.\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Social Globalization} is the KOF index of personal contacts, information flows, and cultural diffusion from other countries.\textsuperscript{124} Lastly, economic engagement is proxied by \textit{Trade Dependence} (imports and exports as a percentage of GDP).\textsuperscript{125} Only \textit{IGO Memberships} predicts transition to EA, whereas none of the variables predict democratization. Thus, greater international political engagement encourages autocracies to adopt at least the outward form of democracy.

Finally, the sixth model tests total \textit{Foreign Aid} (official development assistance as a percentage of GNI).\textsuperscript{126} Previous research is conflicted as to whether foreign aid (or even democracy assistance) encourages moves toward democracy.\textsuperscript{127} The results here are similarly mixed. \textit{Foreign Aid} is weakly positive for democratization, but significantly predicts EA transition. Results are similar if \textit{Foreign Aid} is lagged five years. Again, this supports the view that foreign aid incentivizes piecemeal reforms to satisfy international observers. The results also add nuance to studies connecting foreign aid to multiparty adoption without distinguishing EA and democracy.\textsuperscript{128}

\section*{5.2 Socioeconomic Structure}

I now turn to socioeconomic factors. Both models in Table 2 support a key finding: \textit{GDP/capita} is significantly negative for EA transition. Using Model 1 and holding other variables at their means, shifting average income from the 10th to 90th percentile of closed au-

\textsuperscript{122} Pevehouse 2002; Torfason and Ingram 2010.
\textsuperscript{123} From COW Project 2010a.
\textsuperscript{124} Dreher et al. 2008.
\textsuperscript{125} Heston et al. 2011.
\textsuperscript{126} World Bank 2014.
\textsuperscript{127} Knack 2004; Finkel et al. 2007; Goemans and Marinov 2014; Dietrich and Wright 2015. Unfortunately, data on democracy assistance is too sparse for the multinomial logit model.
\textsuperscript{128} Goemans and Marinov 2014; Dietrich and Wright 2015.
tocracies decreases the annual likelihood of EA transition from 8.5% to 2.3%. This reflects the difficulty of controlling autocratic elections in wealthier countries, encouraging regimes to retain closed autocracy. In comparison, the likelihood of democratizing shifts up from 1.2% to 2.6%, although the effect is not significant.

Similarly, in Model 2, Economic Inequality is positive for EA transition and non-predictive of democratization. A 10th to 90th percentile shift on inequality raises the chances of EA transition from 4.0% to 9.0%. Further, infant mortality and under-5 mortality,\textsuperscript{129} common measures of a population’s material deprivation and inequality, are each significantly predictive of EA transition when tested in place of GDP/capita. Unequal countries have larger numbers of poor citizens who can be cheaply coopted by state assistance, making electoral control easier. These socioeconomic effects are counterintuitive, but help to explain the concentration of EA in the most poverty-ridden parts of Africa and Southeast Asia.

Urbanization is also significantly positive for EA transition, which may reflect the greater ease of building patron-client networks in urban environments. Economic Growth, ELF, and Resource Dependence are generally insignificant for both transition types. Surprisingly, Resource Dependence is slightly negative for EA transition, which suggests that it helps to strengthen closed autocracy.\textsuperscript{130}

The seventh model in Table 3 tests HDI, an aggregate index of income, education, and health,\textsuperscript{131} which I expect to match the logic for average income. Indeed, even controlling for GDP/capita, HDI is significantly negative for EA transition. The next model in Table 3 tests two measures of education: Average Education (average schooling years among adults)\textsuperscript{132} and University (percentage enrolled at university).\textsuperscript{133} 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

\textsuperscript{129} World Bank 2014.
\textsuperscript{130} This remains true if Resource Dependence is replaced by resource income per capita or oil income specifically (from Haber and Menaldo 2011).
\textsuperscript{131} Calculated using UNDP’s formula and World Bank 2014 data.
\textsuperscript{132} Barro and Lee 2001.
\textsuperscript{133} Banks 1976; Norris 2008.
the democratizing influence of norms spread through advanced education and exposure to modern ideas.134

5.3 Leader Turnover

Models 1 and 2 in Table 2 compare three types of leader turnover, using dummy variables for an occurrence within the previous five years. As expected, recent coups strongly predict democratization, as they indicate key periods of instability and regime weakness. Using Model 1, a closed autocracy has a 1.1% annual chance of democratizing without a recent coup, compared to a 2.9% chance with one. Other irregular turnovers are insignificant for both transition types. Regular turnovers are predictive of EA transition, but only in Model 1. This suggests that new, peacefully installed leaders seek out sources of legitimacy and may be more confident than coup leaders of controlling the country’s electoral politics.

5.4 Other Predictors

Table 3 covers five further models. First, I control for whether the closed autocracy features a regime party founded by the current ruler, a party existing prior to the ruler, and a legislature.135 Wright and Escribà-Folch argue that parties should be positive for democratization and legislatures negative.136 Their logic is that parties help regimes retain a share of power post-democratization, whereas legislatures merely bolster regime control. That pattern in fact fits the results for EA transitions, which are predicted by both party types but are negatively related to legislatures. 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, with a combination of personalist dictatorships and monarchies as the reference category.137 As Geddes observes, military regimes are highly prone to democratization.138

134 Sanborn and Thyne 2014.  
135 Cheibub et al. 2010; Svolik 2012.  
136 Wright and Escribà-Folch 2012.  
137 Geddes et al. 2014.  
However, this effect does not extend to EA transitions. Surprisingly, party-based regimes are slightly less likely to transition from closed autocracy.\textsuperscript{139}

The next two models test whether coercive capacity and state strength predict transition. \textit{Military Spending} (as percentage of GDP)\textsuperscript{140} is negative for each transition, but not significantly so. \textit{State Capacity} (a combination of 24 variables capturing administrative and coercive capacity)\textsuperscript{141} is also unpredictive.

In the final model, I test the effects of recent violent activity and peaceful protest. \textit{Political Violence} is a 10-point rating of domestic civil and ethnic violence,\textsuperscript{142} which may encourage transition by destabilizing the country’s politics. \textit{Protest Activity} is the number of protests and strikes.\textsuperscript{143} The latter is significantly positive for democratization, but neither predicts EA transition.\textsuperscript{144}

The final three models are instructive as they 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 transition. Rather, international leverage and favorable socioeconomic conditions are the strongest predictors, supporting this paper’s theory on the strategic origins of EA.

### 5.5 Robustness Checks

Table 4 displays four robustness checks of this paper’s main results. All controls in Model 1 of Table 2 are included, but only selected variables are shown. The same checks for the models in Table 3 are summarized in Table 5. Two further robustness checks for all models are shown in Table A2. As before, the sample is closed autocracies from 1946–2010.

\textsuperscript{139} 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.

\textsuperscript{140} COW Project 2010b.

\textsuperscript{141} Hanson and Sigman 2013.

\textsuperscript{142} Marshall 2010.

\textsuperscript{143} Banks 1976; Norris 2008.

\textsuperscript{144} Results are insignificant for both variables using two-year or five-year averages instead.
Starting with Table 4, Model 1 recodes as EA transitions eight cases of democratization that may have been failed attempts to establish EA. In five cases, the ruling party ran in founding multiparty elections, but lost and accepted defeat. In three cases, the ruling party instead won, but the election was deemed democratic.\(^{145}\) This check confirms this paper’s theory for a fuller set of possibly intended EA transitions.

Model 2 recodes EA to additionally require a national legislative election within the past five years,\(^ {146}\) thus providing a higher bar for EA transition. This eliminates cases in which multiple parties can technically compete, but there is a long delay in holding elections (as in Angola 1993–2008). Further, it shifts the date of transition from the legalization of parties to the first multiparty election. About 10.7% of EA regime-years are recoded to closed autocracy, but the main results are unchanged.

Model 3 only counts transitions to EA and democracy that retain the new regime type for at least five years. This eliminates cases of ephemeral regime change for which this paper’s strategic logic may not apply. Although this removes 59 EA transitions and 13 democratic transitions, the results are remarkably robust.

Finally, Model 4 adds a control for Cold War, defined as 1946–90. Several authors claim that geopolitical changes following the Cold War shifted the dynamics of regime change.\(^ {147}\) In particular, Western democracies may now more freely push for liberalization. As Figure 1 shows, there was a large jump in EA after the Cold War, so the period may confound some variables. Model 4 disputes this, as the main results are unchanged. The Cold War period is strongly positive for democratization because 61% of Cold War democratic transitions occurred from closed autocracy, compared to only about 10% of post-Cold War transitions.

On the checks in Table A2, the first includes cases of state failure in the sample.\(^ {148}\) The second successively lags each variable of interest by five years to minimize endogeneity and reverse causation.

\(^{145}\) This could have been an intended EA transition since the party may have violated democratic norms if they were threatened with losing.

\(^{146}\) Hyde and Marinov 2012.

\(^{147}\) Goldsmith 2008; Levitsky and Way 2010; Goemans and Marinov 2014.

\(^{148}\) Marshall and Jaggers 2010.
The main results are highly robust across these checks. GDP/capita remains significant for EA transition at the .05 level in all models and at the .001 level in four of six models. Recent Coup significantly predicts democratization in every model. Regional contagion holds in all but the lagged model, for which both variables fall under conventional significance levels. Urbanization significantly predicts EA transition in all but the state failure model. The democratic leverage variables are also highly robust: For the 24 total coefficients (four variables, with six checks each), 22 remain significant. Despite data limitations, Economic Inequality is fairly robust, remaining significant at the .1 level across all checks. Foreign Aid (% of GDP) is less stable, but remains consistently signed and significant for EA transition at the .1 level in four of six checks. Lastly, results for the party variables are highly robust.

6 Conclusion

This paper presented a theory of autocratic regime change from the interaction of elite choice with socioeconomic and international factors. Autocratic leaders strategically adopt contested elections to gain international benefits, but only if socioeconomic conditions favor their ability to dominate the elections. Thus, EA transitions are predicted by external dependence on democracies (through trade, military alliances, IGO co-memberships, and aid) and by low average income and high inequality. I also find evidence of regional contagion of both EA and democracy. Despite limited findings for democratization, this study provides insight into the paths to democracy since 90% of modern democratic transitions occur from EA.

The results provide empirical backing to claims that international pressure and aid aimed at “democracy” promotion in fact encourage liberalized autocracy. Relative 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. However, the effect of democratic leverage should be acknowledged, as it may enable a process of adaptation that can lead to genuinely pro-democratic effects.

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149 The two exceptions are both for Democratic IGOs, but the coefficients remain large and borderline significant.
151 Miller 2015a, 2015b.
Future work should analyze specific cases of EA adoption to confirm this paper’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.\textsuperscript{152} Research should be careful to 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 \textit{and} substance.

\textsuperscript{152} Carothers 2002; Schedler 2006, 2013.
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Fig. 1: 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 et al. 2010). Democracy is measured from Boix et al. (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.
Fig. 2: The figures show the average provision of U.S. 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 U.S. aid and international engagement follow very similar patterns after each transition type.
Table 1: Transitions Between Three Regime Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Year</th>
<th>Closed Autocracy</th>
<th>Electoral Autocracy</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closed Autocracy</td>
<td>2,514</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Autocracy</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>2,015</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3,226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes:* 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.
Table 2: Multinomial Logits Predicting Transitions to EA and Democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EA</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
<th>EA</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional EA</td>
<td>2.447***</td>
<td>0.957</td>
<td>3.338***</td>
<td>1.252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.53)</td>
<td>(1.09)</td>
<td>(4.40)</td>
<td>(1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Democracy</td>
<td>1.221</td>
<td>2.444**</td>
<td>−0.760</td>
<td>2.381*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.78)</td>
<td>(3.07)</td>
<td>(−0.89)</td>
<td>(2.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP/capita (ln)</td>
<td>−0.458***</td>
<td>0.232</td>
<td>−0.685***</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(−3.48)</td>
<td>(1.26)</td>
<td>(−3.61)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Growth</td>
<td>−0.014</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>−0.002</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(−1.06)</td>
<td>(0.28)</td>
<td>(−0.12)</td>
<td>(0.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent Coup</td>
<td>0.400</td>
<td>1.186**</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>1.106*</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.44)</td>
<td>(2.76)</td>
<td>(0.47)</td>
<td>(2.30)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recent Irregular Turnover from Below</td>
<td>0.262</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>0.501</td>
<td>0.541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.69)</td>
<td>(1.63)</td>
<td>(1.11)</td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent Regular Turnover</td>
<td>0.494*</td>
<td>−0.219</td>
<td>0.354</td>
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<td>0.018*</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.040**</td>
<td>0.020</td>
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<td>(2.08)</td>
<td>(0.84)</td>
<td>(2.92)</td>
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<td>ELF</td>
<td>0.377</td>
<td>0.474</td>
<td>−1.238*</td>
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<td>Population (ln)</td>
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<td>0.219</td>
<td>0.315**</td>
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<td>Prior EA Spells</td>
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<td>Prior Democratic Spells</td>
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<td>(−0.81)</td>
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<td>Economic Inequality</td>
<td>0.047*</td>
<td>−0.013</td>
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<td>(2.32)</td>
<td>(−0.47)</td>
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</table>

Duration Cubic Splines? | Y | Y | Y | Y |
N                        | 2,367 | 1,339 |
Countries                | 106 | 86 |
Pseudo R²                | 0.168 | 0.226 |
Hausman IIA (p-value)    | 0.809 | 0.211 | 0.846 | 0.909 |

Notes: 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 < 0.001
Table 3: Additional Predictors of Transitions to EA and Democracy

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<th>Democracy</th>
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<td>(1.06)</td>
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<td>0.099**</td>
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<td><strong>Political Variables</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1.808</strong>*</td>
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<td>(4.63)</td>
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<td><strong>Party Prior to Ruler</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1.403</strong>*</td>
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<td>(4.09)</td>
<td>(1.53)</td>
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<td>(-2.25)</td>
<td>(-0.02)</td>
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<td><strong>0.218</strong></td>
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<td>(-1.22)</td>
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<td><strong>Political Violence</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Protest Activity</strong></td>
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<td>-0.019</td>
<td>0.145*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(-0.24)</td>
<td>(2.24)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 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 < 0.001
Fig. 3: The figures show estimated probabilities (with 95% 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.
Fig. 4: The figure shows estimated probabilities (with 95% 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.
Table 4: Robustness Checks Predicting Transitions to EA and Democracy

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<td>Democracy</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>Democracy</td>
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<td>Failed EA Transitions Included</td>
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<td>0.150</td>
<td>2.126**</td>
<td>1.867</td>
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<td>(3.73)</td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
<td>(2.63)</td>
<td>(1.92)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(2.20)</td>
<td>(2.14)</td>
<td>(1.52)</td>
<td>(4.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP/capita (ln)</td>
<td>−0.440***</td>
<td>0.420</td>
<td>−0.351**</td>
<td>0.124</td>
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<td>(−3.46)</td>
<td>(1.73)</td>
<td>(−2.94)</td>
<td>(0.68)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Recent Coup</td>
<td>0.448</td>
<td>1.121*</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>1.078**</td>
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<td>(1.65)</td>
<td>(2.50)</td>
<td>(1.35)</td>
<td>(2.94)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recent Regular Turnover</td>
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<td>−0.242</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>−0.193</td>
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<td>(1.95)</td>
<td>(−0.51)</td>
<td>(1.84)</td>
<td>(−0.46)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>0.017*</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.020**</td>
<td>0.007</td>
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<td>(2.02)</td>
<td>(0.78)</td>
<td>(2.84)</td>
<td>(0.73)</td>
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<td>Cold War</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional Controls?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2,367</td>
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<td>106</td>
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<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.172</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>0.177</td>
<td>0.180</td>
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</table>

Notes: The table displays robustness checks of this paper’s main results, predicting transitions to electoral authoritarianism (EA) and democracy from a sample of closed autocracies. Model 1 recodes democratic transitions as EA if the ruling party may have intended EA transition. Model 2 recodes EA to require a recent legislative election. Model 3 only counts transitions that retain the regime type for at least five years. Model 4 adds a control for the Cold War period. t statistics (based on robust standard errors clustered by country) are shown in parentheses.

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
Table 5: Robustness Checks Predicting Transitions to EA and Democracy

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) Failed EA Transitions Included</th>
<th>(2) EA Recoding (Recent Election)</th>
<th>(3) Durable Transitions</th>
<th>(4) Cold War Control</th>
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<td>EA Democracy</td>
<td>EA Democracy</td>
<td>EA Democracy</td>
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<td>−0.023†</td>
<td>−0.021</td>
<td>−0.035†</td>
<td>−0.019</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(−1.76) (−0.61)</td>
<td>(−1.43) (−1.11)</td>
<td>(−1.88) (−1.03)</td>
<td>(−1.52) (−0.58)</td>
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<td>Economic Inequality</td>
<td>0.037†</td>
<td>0.035†</td>
<td>0.055**</td>
<td>0.048*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.79) (−0.12)</td>
<td>(1.83) (−0.69)</td>
<td>(2.64) (−0.18)</td>
<td>(2.37) (−0.75)</td>
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<td>4.147***</td>
<td>3.831***</td>
<td>4.903***</td>
<td>4.435***</td>
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<td>(3.67) (−0.05)</td>
<td>(2.91) (−0.23)</td>
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<td>(1.79) (0.76)</td>
<td>(0.92) (1.66)</td>
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<td>1.947**</td>
<td>1.999*</td>
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<td>Democratic IGOs</td>
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<td>3.701</td>
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<td>Democratic Foreign Aid</td>
<td>2.755**</td>
<td>2.203**</td>
<td>1.990*</td>
<td>2.312**</td>
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<td>Foreign Aid (% of GDP)</td>
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<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.027*</td>
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<td>(0.94) (2.33)</td>
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<td>(4.67) (2.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Prior to Ruler</td>
<td>1.527***</td>
<td>1.609***</td>
<td>1.390**</td>
<td>1.446***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.47) (0.54)</td>
<td>(4.71) (1.95)</td>
<td>(2.91) (1.16)</td>
<td>(4.06) (1.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>−0.470</td>
<td>−0.521†</td>
<td>−0.850*</td>
<td>−0.623*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(−1.57) (−1.14)</td>
<td>(−1.86) (−0.17)</td>
<td>(−2.17) (0.45)</td>
<td>(−2.12) (0.25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The table displays robustness checks of additional predictors of transitions to electoral authoritarianism (EA) and democracy. Each set of variables between the horizontal dashed lines represents a separate multinomial logit, with the variables added to Model 1 of Table 2. Model 1 recodes democratic transitions as EA if the ruling party may have intended EA transition. Model 2 recodes EA to require a recent legislative election. Model 3 only counts transitions that retain the regime type for at least five years. Model 4 adds a control for the Cold War period. t statistics (based on robust standard errors clustered by country) are shown in parentheses. + p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001