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Stabilizing Authoritarian Rule: The Role of International Organizations

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Abstract

Research has demonstrated how membership in democratic regional organizations can strengthen prospects for democracy. However, a significant number of regional organizations are dominated by autocratic members who have very different preferences: to limit democratic contagion and consolidate authoritarian rule against democratic challengers. We outline a menu of mechanisms through which regional organizations with authoritarian members might have pernicious effects on the prospects for democratic rule. We use cross-national quantitative analyses to demonstrate that membership in deeply authoritarian international organizations is associated with autocratization. We supplement the quantitative results with an analysis of 29 of the most authoritarian regional organizations and illustrative case studies. The multi-method approach strengthens inference by showing that authoritarian international organizations do in fact engage in behaviors inimical to democratic rule.

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Introduction

In a recently published report, Freedom House sheds light on transnational repression, a phenomenon in which "governments reach across national borders to silence dissent among their diaspora and exile communities" (Linzer and Schenkkan, 2021). The report draws on 608 episodes on the part of 31 authoritarian origin states operating in 79 hosts. Yet the report also shows that not all of these efforts are undertaken by authoritarian regimes acting on their own. Rather, "regional organizations built around authoritarian norms of regime protection, especially the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), have expanded their collective efforts against exiles...Regional cooperation against exiles creates a sprawling web of control, forcing people either to flee further afield or to silence themselves" (Linzer and Schenkkan, 2021).

The growth and influence of regional intergovernmental organizations (ROs) dominated by authoritarian regimes is generally under-appreciated in the international organization (IO) literature. An earlier generation of work demonstrated that RO membership can have positive effects on democracy and human rights at the domestic level (Hafner-Burton, 2005; Lankina and Getachew, 2006; Mansfield and Pevehouse, 2006, 2008; Pevehouse, 2002, 2005; Poast and Urpelainen, 2015, 2018). However, if the contracting parties to regional organizations—the principals—are authoritarian regimes and their leaders, we would not expect them to advance the cause of democracy; to the contrary, they may collude to protect autocratic incumbents. An emerging body of research—much of it focused on particular regions—presents evidence to this effect (Ambrosio, 2008; Aris, 2009; Bader, Grävingholt and Kästner, 2010; Kneuer et al., 2019; Lemon and Antonov, 2020; Libman and Obydenkova, 2018; Obydenkova and Libman, 2019; Söderbaum, 2010; von Soest, 2015). But with a handful of important exceptions (Debre, 2020, 2021; Obydenkova and Libman, 2019), this work has not taken a cross-national approach to measuring the effect of membership in authoritarian-led ROs at the domestic level. Nor has it detailed the scope of such cooperation across ROs with authoritarian memberships.

We start with the presumption that authoritarian regimes have an interest in consolidating their power and limiting democratic challengers. We argue that ROs dominated by autocratic members can act like protective cartels, providing external support to meet this objective. We define authoritarian regional organizations not in terms of their decision-making structures—which tend to be strongly intergovernmental—but in terms of their memberships: the extent to which a given regional organization is made up of authoritarian members.

Drawing on the earlier literature on the effects of membership in democratic ROs, we classify the activities they undertake to support member state regimes in three areas: pooling resources to support members facing challenges, up to and including through military intervention; solving coordination problems to limit transnational support for political oppositions, as suggested by the Freedom House report; and legitimating authoritarian rule through propagation of norms and performative acts such as "zombie" election monitoring, or what we call "election validation."

Empirically, we adopt a multi-method approach that measures the effect of membership in more authoritarian organizations on the prospects for democracy and shows how ROs cooperate in this regard. Our quantitative analysis considers a panel of authoritarian regimes (1951 to 2010) and draws on a new dataset of authoritarian ROs that extends and modifies the widely used Correlates of War IGO Data Set (Pevehouse, McManus, and Nordstrom, 2019). We focus on an indicator we call the "IO autocracy score" (IAS). The IAS captures how autocratic a state's co-members are on average across the organizations of which the state is a member. This variable allows us to evaluate the political consequences of being embedded in more or less autocratic ROs. Using a two-stage Heckman-style model to account for states' propensities to select into more or less authoritarian ROs, we find that membership in more authoritarian ROs is associated not just with an absence of liberalization, but moves in a more authoritarian direction. These findings are robust to a variety of potential confounds, including indicators of linkages among autocratic regimes which do not pass through the authoritarian ROs.

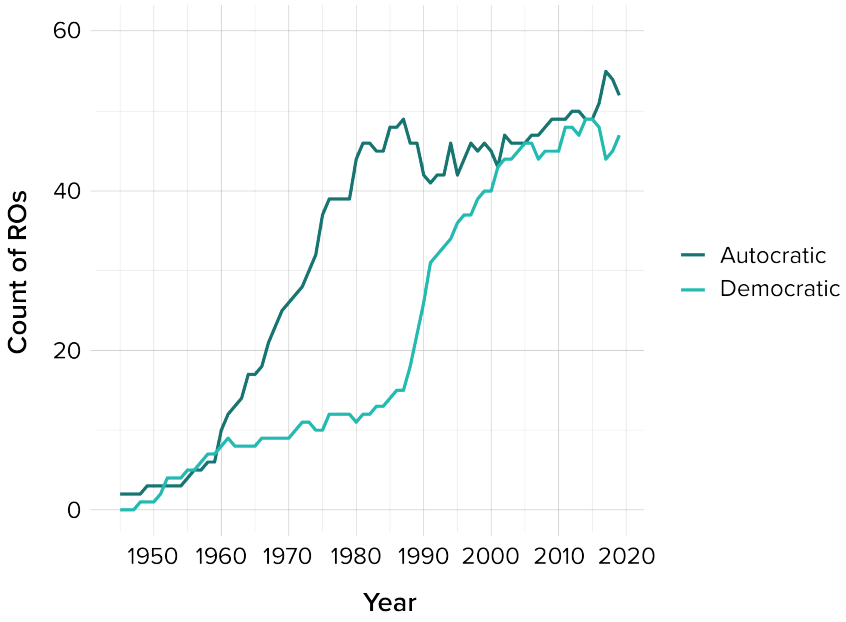
That membership in more authoritarian ROs is associated with movement toward more autocratic rule is suggestive but does not directly demonstrate that particular forms of cooperation are present or play a causal role. To address this question, we supplement the quantitative findings with a "large-N qualitative analysis" and illustrative case studies that demonstrate effects at the country level. We adopt an "extreme X" approach (Seawright 2016, 89-92) that focuses on a subsample of 29 "hard" authoritarian ROS: those whose average V-Dem scores never cross a democratic threshold. If the relationship between a country's IAS score and the prospects for democracy in our quantitative models is causal, we would expect these organizations to be engaged in the supportive activities postulated in our theory. Drawing on an original dataset of the activities of authoritarian ROs and illustrative cases, we demonstrate the prevalence of forms of cooperation postulated in the theory. Just as democratic ROs attempt to advance and protect the cause of democracy, so ROs with autocratic

memberships engage in “illiberal solidarism” (Costa Buranelli, 2020). Authoritarian ROs provide support—both material and ideational—that contributes to the consolidation of autocratic rule.[1]

Consolidating Autocratic Rule: Theory and Causal Mechanisms

Conceptually, we think of authoritarian ROs as those dominated by authoritarian member states. A sense of the scope of authoritarian ROs is captured in Figure 1, which is based on all ROs focused on political, economic, or security issues from 1945 until 2019. The figure reports counts of ROs whose members are, on average, electoral democracies using the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project’s Polyarchy variable and a standard (0.5) threshold.[2] This V-Dem variable, which we also use in our quantitative analysis, rests on a minimalist electoral definition of democracy but includes the ability of political and civil society organizations to act freely (Coppedge et al., 2020; Teorell et al., 2016).

Figure 1.



[1] Costa Buranelli (2020) defines illiberal solidarism as a logic of international cooperation and convergence promoted by elites to enhance shared authoritarian values and resist efforts to institutionalize democracy worldwide.

[2] ROs composed of small Caribbean island states are excluded because their member countries (e.g.Grenada, St. Lucia) are not included in V-Dem data.

In the post-World War II period, regional organizations were initially formed by advanced industrial democracies, particularly in Europe. Following waves of decolonization, new ROs formed in the 1960s-1970s and the share of authoritarian ROs grew. The onset of the Third Wave of democratization subsequently increased the share of ROs with democratic members. The growth rate of ROs also fluctuated slightly as countries founded and dissolved organizations; approximately 23 percent of ROs are dissolved or replaced prior to 2019. However, the number of ROs with primarily authoritarian members generally grew from the 1990s onward.[3]

We conceive of national governments as the principals of regional organizations, who collectively make decisions to write rules, coordinate policies, and delegate powers to ROs in pursuit of common interests. The interests of these principals are affected by regime type. While democracies are responsive to the median voter, a representative agent, or a duly elected ruling coalition, authoritarian regimes are responsive to the interests of autocrats and a narrower electorate. We adopt a standard assumption that autocrats desire foremost to remain in power, and this motivates their interests in limiting democratic contagion from abroad and political challenges at home.

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Building on an extant literature on the mechanisms through which IOs made up of democracies might sustain democratic rule, we consider how parallel mechanisms may contribute to consolidating authoritarian rule; in effect, reducing the probability that autocrats will be overthrown. Table 1 groups these forms of cooperation under three widely-recognized functions that IOs perform: pooling of resources; solving coordination and collective action problems; and legitimation. We operationalize the discrete functions listed under each broad type of cooperation and show their incidence for the entire sample of authoritarian ROs as well as a sub-sample of particularly “hard” authoritarian ones.

[3] Appendix Figure 1 illustrates that there are generally twice as many autocracies with membership in at least one authoritarian RO each year in comparison to democracies. Democracies are not wholly shut out of authoritarian ROs.

Table 1: How Authoritarian Regional Organizations Sustain Authoritarian Rule

Functions	Mechanisms: Corresponding Treaty Provisions and Actions
Pooling resources and providing material support	• Financial support through grants or loans Mutual defense arrangements • Joint military exercises • Intervention
Solving coordination problems	• Police cooperation and information-sharing Anti-terrorism policies and cooperation • Norms against coups or irregular transfers of power
Legitimation of authoritarian rule	• Promoting "stability" (political, security, or economic) as an organizational goal • Principles of non-interference and pluralism of regime type • Election monitoring and validation

First, ROs pool resources and provide material support to members. This can entail economic or military support. In some authoritarian ROs, the bulk of funding disbursed through the organization comes from wealthy member states. This is true of ROs anchored by China, Russia, and the Gulf monarchies; prior to its economic collapse, Venezuela also distributed significant material support through ROs. In authoritarian ROs with poorer memberships, such as those in Central Africa, organizations have increasingly procured funding from global institutions, donor states, and regional banks as much if not more than they do from member states' contributions. In either case, support from ROs serves a number of political and economic functions: providing short-term countercyclical finance that members can draw in times of crisis; funding longer-run developmental objectives that garner wider public support; or providing resources that can be distributed to narrow constituencies through corruption.

ROs can also provide military support in ways we typically associate with alliances. Some create mutual defense commitments and cooperate militarily to augment domestic capabilities and deter challengers. Cooperative activities in support of members include training exercises and information sharing platforms across multiple domains. Regional organizations have also coordinated military interventions to defeat challengers in the context of civil wars, in the wake of coups d'état, and in the form of peacekeeping, counterterrorism, or peace enforcement operations. Authoritarian ROs also can intervene in the face of anti-regime mass mobilizations of civilians and opposition activists.

These forms of direct support to autocrats partially overlap with actions taken to control "contagion" and the channels through which democracy might diffuse geographically within a region (e.g. Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova 2016). Lemon and Antonov (2020) show how such coordination was accomplished in the post-Soviet space through legal harmonization, and we focus primarily on police cooperation and joint-anti-terrorism activities. Police cooperation includes commitments not to provide safe haven for co-members' opponents, including those promoting democratic objectives (Christensen and Weinstein, 2013; Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash, 2016). Promises to instead extradite wanted individuals can not only weaken domestic oppositions but violate international norms such as that of non-refoulement.

Particularly since the onset of the "War on Terror," authoritarian cooperation supports cross-border police and military coordination against internationally-recognized extremist organizations. But research demonstrates that the tactic of reframing oppositions as terrorists has moved from the domestic level up to regional organizations in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (for example, see Whitaker 2010). Some of these ROs coordinate against "irregular" transfers of power occurring through mass mobilization of democratic oppositions by portraying members of those oppositions as terrorists or criminals. A smaller number of ROs formally reject coups and irregular transfers of power in their treaty documents.

Finally, authoritarian ROs may have socializing and legitimizing effects (Ambrosio, 2008; Cooley, 2015; Diamond, Plattner and Walker, 2016; Thomas, 2017; Vanderhill, 2013; von Soest, 2015; Weyland, 2017). Scholars have debated whether authoritarian ROs are ideologically committed to promoting authoritarianism or simply act defensively to limit democratic contagion (Tansey, 2016; Yakouchyk, 2019). Even if not seeking to spread authoritarian- ism, such organizations tacitly endorse authoritarian incumbents by prioritizing political "stability" above participatory institutions and indicating it is acceptable to limit political freedoms. Although democratic as well as authoritarian ROs may enshrine norms of non-interference, authoritarian ROs are more likely to restrict cross-border activities that democracies would tolerate, such as the operation of human rights NGOs. A particular form of legitimation that we identify in a number of authoritarian ROs is the dispatch of election monitors to endorse the results of rigged elections (Merloe, 2015; Walker, 2016), a practice we call "election validation."
Is there evidence that ROs engage in such activities? And is there evidence that ROs dominated by more authoritarian regimes—as indicated by higher IAS scores—are more likely to engage in such self-protective activities? Tables 2 and 3 suggest that the answer to both of these questions is "yes." These tables show the percent of the full sample of 64 general, political and security authoritarian ROs which formed prior to 2010 and existed for at least five years that engage in each of the activities identified in Table 1, as

well as a subsample of 29 “hard” authoritarian ROs whose average IAS scores are always below the V-dem threshold for electoral democracies (.5).[4] As can be seen, not only do significant shares of all authoritarian ROs engage in these activities, the more authoritarian subsample engages in virtually all of them to a greater extent.

Table 2. Incidence of Authoritarian IO Support for Autocracy

	Pooling resources and providing material support			
	Financial Support	**Military exercises**	**Ever intervene**	**Mutual defense**
Full sample (67 GPS ROs)	56.7%	29.9%	22.4%	22.4%
Hard authoritarian ROs (29 GPS ROs)	65.5%	51.7%	41.4%	37.9%

Table 3. Incidence of Authoritarian IO Support for Autocracy

	Solving coordination problems			**Legitimation of authoritarian rule**			
	Police coopera-tion	**Anti-terroris m**	**Anti-coup, irreg.**	**Political non-interfer-ence**	**Ever-monitor**	**Stability principle**	**Avg Total Activities**
Full sample (67 GPS ROs)	53.7%	58.2%	13.4%	46.3%	47.8%	80.6%	4.8
Hard authoritarian ROs (29 GPS ROs)	82.8%	79.3%	13.8%	62.1%	69.0%	93.1%	6.0

In sum, we propose three main ways in which authoritarian ROs cooperate to consolidate authoritarian rule and limit prospects for democracy, and identify corresponding forms of collective action. We advance the following overarching proposition

[4] The sample of 64 organizations whose activities were coded excludes regional banks, lending, and insurance institutions.

H1: Membership in more authoritarian ROs reduces the extent of political liberalization in autocracies.

Subsequent sections explore this proposition in two ways. First, in the next section we present estimates of the effect of membership in more or less authoritarian ROs (the average RO autocracy score) on changes in authoritarian regimes' electoral democracy scores. Our results indicate that members of more deeply authoritarian ROs are not only less likely to liberalize their politics. They are actually more likely to move in the opposite direction by further restricting civil and political liberties. We complement the quantitative design by examining the activities of the "hard authoritarian" RO subsample, cataloging the extent and types of cooperation on an organization-by-organization basis. Exemplary cases illustrate how these activities affect political outcomes at the country level.

Authoritarian Sample

Since we are focused on estimating how IO membership affects authoritarian consolidation (or liberalization), we limit our sample to authoritarian regimes. We use the Geddes, Wright and Frantz (2014) dataset on regime type to identify countries under authoritarian rule each year. The full sample includes 280 authoritarian governments in 118 countries, though our analysis is restricted to the 205 authoritarian governments in 103 countries where data is available on all co-variates.

Regional organizations are drawn from the Correlates of War IGO Dataset Version 3.0 (Pevehouse et al, 2020) and a new set of organizations we identified that were missing from the original dataset. The intergovernmental organizations in the dataset are extremely heterogeneous; they span complex political and economic institutions such as the European Union and highly-focused functional organizations, such as the Union of Banana Exporting Countries. Although functional and industry organizations may affect national politics, many of the causal mechanisms we have outlined above, such as military cooperation, police cooperation, and socialization to authoritarian rule are only likely to operate through organizations engaged with "high politics." We therefore recoded the dataset to exclude functional organizations that typically represent or regulate particular professions

or industries, leaving us with a sample of regional organizations. Codings of the full list of regional organizations in our sample can be found in Appendix 1. The sample of regional organizations is also heterogeneous with respect to the composition of memberships—some are composed mostly of democracies and others have exclusively authoritarian members.

Quantitative Research Design

We test our hypothesis using time-series, cross-sectional data spanning 1951 to 2010, where the unit of analysis is the country-year. We estimate linear models where our dependent variable, changes in democracy scores, is calculated as the difference between a country's Polyarchy score in year t and its score in subsequent periods: one year ([t+1] - t), three years ([t+3] - t), and five years ([t+5] - t). The Polyarchy variable, produced by the Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem), is an index which captures the extent to which a country adopts components of electoral democracy, including freedom of association and free and fair elections. Increases in this score reflect political liberalization; decreases capture autocratization through reduction in political freedoms.

Our approach adopts one of the two complementary but distinct approaches for modeling democratization (or autocratization). One approach central to the "transitions" literature and used by Debre (2021) in her work on authoritarian ROs, follows the convention of identifying regime change as a discrete event. Models of this sort estimate the likelihood of regime change in any given country-year, where democracy and autocracy are categorical. However, considering continuous measures of democracy—the approach we adopt here—has the advantage of capturing more incremental changes (see e.g. Teorell 2010 and Coppedge et al. 2020 for a discussion).

The main independent variable—the average IO autocracy score (IAS)—is constructed using co-member scores on the V-Dem Polyarchy index, which we rescale to span 0-10 rather than 0-1 (Teorell et al., 2016). For every country-year, we first calculate the average electoral democracy score of co-members for each RO in our sample of which the country is a current member, excluding the country under observation from the calculation. The average IO autocracy score (IAS) is then calculated as the average of those co-member democracy scores multiplied by -1. We multiply the scores by -1 so that higher IAS scores—the main explanatory variable of interest—are associated with membership in more authoritarian ROs. In our full sample, the IAS ranges from -10 (least autocratic) to 0 (most autocratic) with a mean of -2.47. For example, in 2000, Liberia was a member of three ROs from our sample. Liberia's IAS score for that year is the simple average of its co-members' democracy scores for those three organizations, excluding the democracy score of Liberia, multiplied by -1: -3.569.

Considering the possibility of non-random assignment to more deeply authoritarian ROs, we control for the inverse Mill's ratio generated in a first-stage probit model (presented in Appendix section 2). This procedure attempts to deal with the possibility that regimes with the least interest in liberalizing would be more motivated to create and join authoritarian IOs. If this was the case, it would be more challenging to estimate independent effects of authoritarian ROs, as opposed to the effect of committed

autocrats. After controlling for the inverse Mill's ratio to address this omitted selection variable, we bootstrap standard errors to account for additional uncertainty introduced through estimation.

Because our rescaled Polyarchy scores are bounded between 0 and 10, there are ceiling and floor effects with respect to how much any country can either deteriorate or improve. We therefore control for a country's current Polyarchy score to account for differential possibilities related to a country's starting point. To address possible alternative drivers of political change, we control for structural features of the country's political economy and longer- or shorter-run economic performance. These are operationalized as GDP per capita (log), GDP growth (Bolt et al., 2018), and the logged value of a country's oil production (Ross and Mahdavi, 2015). We consider natural gas production as another resource which might generate "resource curses" in the Appendix. With respect to relevant authoritarian institutions, we include a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if a country is led by the military (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, 2014). Military-led autocracies are more likely to be short-lived regimes of emergency or have the latitude to return to the barracks (Geddes, 1999); they are thus more likely to democratize than other autocratic regime types (Magaloni and Kricheli, 2010). Our vector of controls also includes a Cold War dummy to reflect the fact that the strategic environment became less favorable to autocrats following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This dummy variable equals 1 prior to 1989 and 0 afterward. A question of interest is whether our estimates could merely reflect exposure to authoritarian great powers, China and Russia. To address this possibility, we include controls for the number of co-memberships a country shares with these two countries each year.

Due to the panel nature of our data, we also account for serial correlation in the error terms of our models and heterogeneity at the country level. To address the latter concern, we include country fixed effects in each specification and for the former, we cluster our standard errors at the country level. Because our independent variables are measured on very different scales, we standardize them for ease of interpretation.

Quantitative Results

As can be seen in Table 2, the negative relationship between IO autocracy scores and liberalization is present over each time frame; membership in more authoritarian IOs leads to more authoritarian political outcomes across one, three, and five-year windows. Because we present standardized coefficients, we can say that a one standard deviation (1.87 point) increase in the IAS would lead to a .070 (in t +1), .181 (in t +3), and .308 (in t +5) decrease in the rescaled Polyarchy score (0-10) over the respective

time frames, controlling for each state's propensity to select into authoritarian ROs.[5] It is also interesting to note that the influence of the IAS is consistent over time while controlling for the count of co-memberships with Russia and China.

Table 4. Determinants of Liberalization, 1951-2010

	Dependent Variable		
	Polyarchy Δt+1 (1)	Polyarchy Δt+3 (2)	Polyarchy Δt+5 (3)
IO Autocracy score	−0.070∗	−0.181∗∗	−0.308∗∗∗
	(0.036)	(0.082)	(0.106)
GDP per capita (log)	−0.039	−0.125	−0.177
	(0.035)	(0.087)	(0.128)
Growth GDP per cap	−0.008	0.003	0.001
	(0.014)	(0.018)	(0.025)
$ Value oil production (log)	0.062∗	0.084	0.093
	(0.031)	(0.081)	0.136)
Country Polyarchy score	−0.224∗∗∗	−0.647∗∗∗	−0.884∗∗∗
	(0.042)	(0.080)	(0.097)
Cold War	−0.074∗∗∗	−0.174∗∗	−0.136
	(0.026)	(0.068)	(0.083)
Military regime	0.027	0.035	0.051
	(0.019)	(0.043)	(0.061)
Co-memberships- China	0.037∗	0.141∗∗	0.255∗∗∗
	(0.022)	(0.054)	(0.068)
Co-memberships- Russia	−0.068	−0.206∗∗	−0.319∗∗
Inverse Mill's ratio	0.000	0.001	0.001
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country clustered SEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,091	2,881	2,671
Adj. R^2	0.049	0.194	0.289

Note: ∗p<0.1; ∗∗p<0.05; ∗∗∗p<0.01

[5] Table 9 in the appendix provides the coefficients from the same model with non-standardized independent variables.

In Appendix 3, we assess robustness of our results to several variants of our IAS measure, including using the value of the most authoritarian RO of which a country is a member, the inverse-standard deviation weighted IAS, and the GDP-weighted IAS instead of the average score. The relationship between the IAS and adverse political outcomes remains consistent across these measures aside from the GDP-weighted measure. This likely reflects the outsized concentration of wealth among democracies and more democratic ROs in the sample. When we measure authoritarian IO influence as the proportion of a country's RO co-members which are autocratic, we obtain similar results to those in Table 4.

Appendix 3 also includes placebo tests. First, we substitute in the IAS of the least authoritarian RO of which a country is a member each year. Given that there are ROs with predominantly democratic members in the sample, we would not expect membership in these ROs to be associated with autocratization. Results are consistent with this expectation. We also would not expect a higher IAS to be associated with slowed liberalization in democracies. Leaders of democracies operate in institutional contexts where they are more likely to be held accountable for leveraging RO resources to attack political freedoms or opponents. Results presented in Appendix 3 indicate that when we replace our sample of authoritarian regimes with democracies, again controlling for propensity to join authoritarian ROs and the same independent variables, there is no relationship between the IAS and future polyarchy scores in democracies.

We consider the possibility that economic liberalization matters more for the path of political change by controlling for a country's trade openness (Levitsky and Way, 2010). Again, the effect of the IAS remains consistent. Finally, the appendix includes an additional assessment of a confounding resource curse explanation, controlling for the value of natural gas produced in a country in addition to oil. This additional control does not significantly alter the observed relationship between the IAS and authoritarian consolidation.

Qualitative Research Design

The foregoing section demonstrated that for non-democracies, increases in the IO Autocracy Score were associated with the depression of future democracy scores. Yet, these regressions are reduced form in nature; they do not show that the bundle of postulated causal mechanisms is present. One recent multi-method approach for complementing regression analysis is so-called "large-N qualitative analysis" or LNQA. This method is particularly appropriate for small populations or phenomena that are relatively rare such as authoritarian ROs (Goertz, 2017; Haggard and Kaufman, 2018; Goertz and Haggard, 2020). In multi-method LNQA designs, regressions generate average treatment effects of the stipulated causal variable at the population level: in this case, the effect of membership in more or less authoritarian regional organizations on the prospects for democratic rule. The large-N qualitative analysis complements these findings by asking whether the postulated causal mechanisms are present and operate as predicted. In this case, we analyzed whether authoritarian organizations engaged in the activities we hypothesized, permitting simple generalizations.

The standard method in qualitative case selection, including LNQA, often focuses on so-called (1, 1) cases: those in which both the independent and dependent variables are in evidence or take high values. By contrast, our approach is to select the independent variable—the authoritarian RO—and provide evidence that the mechanisms we outline in Table 1 are present.

Although some large-N qualitative analyses select the entire population of the stipulated causal factor for analysis, we follow what Seawright has labeled an "extreme-X" approach by sampling on the most authoritarian ROs (Seawright 2016, 89-92; Goertz 2017, 63-66). As Seawright (2016) explains the logic, "when the average effect of X on the pathway variable is large, the average case where X takes on an unusual value will obviously have an unusual value for the pathway variable W." In our case, the "pathway variables" are the RO activities that we hypothesize are providing protective effects for autocrats.

As previewed in Tables 2 and 3, we selected those ROs formed prior to 2010 (the cutoff in our quantitative analysis) whose average V-Dem Polyarchy scores over their entire life span never rose to 0.5, a cutoff that has been used for separating electoral democracies from autocracies.[6] We remove two ROs from the sample: one which was extremely short-lived and one which never functioned whatsoever. Our sample therefore includes 29 authoritarian ROs.

[6] Note that the IAS in our statistical analyses reverses the original V-Dem scores to span -10 to 0, rather than the original 0-1. Using the IAS, the hard authoritarian organizations never fall below an average score.

Table 5. Coding of Authoritarian ROs

Causal Mechanisim	Variables and coding rule
Pooling resources and providing material support	• **financial_support:** Does the organization provide grants or loans to members? • **mutual_defense:** Do the organization's charter or subsequent treaties establish the organization as a mutual defense pact, where aggression against one state is viewed as aggression against the collective? • **military_exerc:** Has the organization ever conducted military exercises? • **ever_intervene:** Has the organization ever staged a military intervention in a member state?
Solving coordination problems	• **police_cooperation_agmt:** Do the organization's charter or subsequent treaties commit members to police cooperation? • **antiterrorism_policy:** Do the organization's charter or subsequent treaties refer to combatting terrorism as a goal of the organization? • **anticoup_irreg:** Do the organization's charter or subsequent treaties condemn irregular changes of regime (not through normal procedures) or coups?
Legitimation of authoritarian rule	• **stability:** Do the organization's charter or subsequent treaties mention promoting stability (political, security or economic) as a goal of the organization? • **political_noninterference:** Do the organization's charter or subsequent treaties mention adherence to the principle of noninterference in the affairs of member states? • **ever_monitor:** Has the organization ever sent election observers to a member state during elections?

The coding scheme is presented in Table 5, and mirrors the activities outlined in the theory section and in Table 1. Tables 6 and 7 provide organization-by-organization information for the 29 most authoritarian ROs on each of these dimensions, breaking out the cases summarized in Tables 2 and 3. The last row of each table presents the number of countries cooperating on each dimension. The last column of Table 7 presents the number of dimensions on which each organization cooperates. In combination, this exercise identifies the scope of cooperation within and across "hard" authoritarian ROs.

Because the regressions report average treatment effects, they mask the uneven distribution of cooperation. We find that there are some "robust cooperators" engaged in more activities and other authoritarian ROs which do little with respect to dimensions of interest. If we take as a cutoff cooperation in more than five of the ten critical areas, however, we find that eighteen of the 29 organizations fall in this "robust cooperator" category.

Pooling Resources and Providing Material Support

We hypothesized that the most direct way in which authoritarian ROs might support autocratic incumbents was through the pooling and transfer of material resources. This can take either economic form or involve security assistance: mutual defense agreements, joint exercises, and even intervention. Direct financial support is contingent in part on the resources members provide to ROs and on ROs' capacity to borrow or solicit aid. Nonetheless, 19 of the 29 organizations provide financial support to members. ROs with memberships that include higher-income countries can rely on richer members, and often set up parallel regional banks or funds to channel support. For example, the Arab Monetary Fund was launched by the Arab League during oil price booms of the 1970s to provide liquidity to member states with balance-of-payments difficulties (Fritz and Mühlich, 2019). In contrast, organizations made up largely of lower-income countries have been able to use their organizations as a means of accessing extra-regional resources. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), for example, is made up of eight low- and lower-middle income countries in the Horn of Africa. With 80 percent of its 40 million USD annual budget provided by donors, including the World Bank, European Union, and United States, IGAD has become a fundraising and donor coordination platform for projects in the region (Berhe, 2019).

Table 6. Incidence of Authoritarian IO Support for Autocracy

	Pooling resources and providing material support			
	Financial Support	**Military exercises**	**Ever intervene**	**Mutual defense**
African Union	1	1	1	1
Afro-Malagasy Union	0	0	0	1
Arab Maghreb Union	1	0	0	1
Association of Southeast Asian Nations	1	1	0	0
Central Asian Cooperation Organization	1	1	0	0
Collective Security Treaty Organization	0	1	1	1
Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa	1	0	0	0
Commonwealth of Independent	0	1	1	1
Community of Sahel-Saharan	1	1	1	0
Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia	0	1	0	0
East African Community	1	1	0	0
Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa	1	1	1	1
Economic Community of Central African States	1	1	1	1
Economic Community of Great Lakes Countries	1	0	0	0
Economic Cooperation Organization	1	0	0	0
Eurasian Economic Community	0	0	0	0
Gulf Cooperation Council	1	1	1	1
Gulf of Guinea Commission	0	1	0	0
Intergovernmental Authority on Development	1	0	1	0
International Conference of the Great Lakes Region	1	0	0	1
Lake Chad Basin Commission	1	1	1	0

League of Arab States	1	0	1	1
Mano River Union	1	0	0	0
Organization for African Unity	1	0	1	0
Organization of Turkic States	0	0	0	0
Regional Centre on Small Arms and Light Weapons	0	0	0	0
Shanghai Cooperation Organization	0	1	0	0
Southern African Development Coordination Conference	1	0	0	0
Warsaw Treaty Organization	0	1	1	1
Total	**19**	**15**	**12**	**11**

Table 7. Incidence of Authoritarian IO Support for Autocracy

	Solving Coordination Problems			**Legitimization of Authoritarian rule**			
	Police cooper-ation	**Anti-terroris m**	**Anti-coup, irreg.**	**Political non-interfere**	**Ever-monitor**	**Stability princi-ple**	**Total***
African Union	1	1	1	0	1	1	9
Afro-Malagasy Union	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Arab Maghreb Union	0	0	0	1	1	1	5
Association of Southeast Asian Nations	1	1	0	1	1	1	7
Central Asian Cooperation Organization	1	1	0	0	0	1	5
Collective Security Treaty Organization	1	1	0	1	1	1	8
Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa	1	1	0	0	1	1	5

Commonwealth of Independent States	1	1	0	1	1	1	8
Community of Sahel-Saharan States	1	1	0	1	1	1	8
Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia	1	1	0	1	1	1	6
East African Community	1	1	0	1	1	1	7
Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa	1	1	0	0	1	1	8
Economic Community of Central African States	1	1	0	1	1	1	9
Economic Community of Great Lakes Countries	1	0	0	0	1	1	4
Economic Cooperation Organization	1	1	1	0	1	1	7
Eurasian Economic Community	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Gulf Cooperation Council	1	1	0	1	0	1	8
Gulf of Guinea Commission	1	1	0	1	0	1	5
Intergovernmental Authority on Development	1	1	0	1	1	1	7
International Conference of the Great Lakes Region	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
Lake Chad Basin Commission	1	1	0	0	0	1	6

League of Arab States	1	1	0	1	1	1	8
Mano River Union	1	0	0	0	1	1	4
Organization for African Unity	0	1	1	1	1	1	7
Organization of Turkic States	1	1	0	0	1	1	4
Regional Centre on Small Arms and	1	1	0	1	0	1	4
Shanghai Cooperation	1	1	0	1	1	1	6
Southern African Development	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Warsaw Treaty Organization	1	0	0	1	0	1	6
Total	**24**	**23**	**4**	**18**	**20**	**27**	

* Note: Totals carried over from Table 6.

To the extent that such transfers fund popular projects or provide rents that incumbents can distribute to core constituents, they should mitigate political risk and reduce pressures for reform. One of the better-known examples is the Gulf Cooperation Council's intervention in Bahrain in 2011, which had financial and military components. The Gulf Cooperation Council is made up entirely of monarchical members, and was established in 1981 in response to the Iranian revolution. Although the organization divided in its response to the Arab Spring, its members had common interests in supporting the stability of monarchical rule (Yom, 2014). Members intensified cooperation over time, and the organization has coordinated on eight of the ten dimensions we identify.

From its inception, the GCC considered external security threats from Iran to be intimately interwoven with potential internal political challenges from Shia minorities. In statements issued regarding its intervention in Bahrain, the GCC was quick to portray it as a response to meddling by Iran (AlArabiya, 2011; Salem, 2011). The GCC's Muslim Scholars League also accused Bahraini anti-regime protesters of inciting "sectarian fitna" or civil strife at the expense of Bahrain's Sunni Muslims (Heydemann and Leenders, 2011). Yet the Arab Spring naturally raised the potential not just for leadership replacement but for regime change toward a constitutional monarchy (Zunes, 2013; Louër, 2011; Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011).

The military intervention in Bahrain, led by Saudi troops under the banner of a GCC joint force called Peninsula Shield Force (established in 1982) represents an example of direct military support and a number of analysts conclude this intervention directly forestalled further political liberalization in Bahrain (See for example Zunes 2013; Akkaya 2019); an analysis of V-Dem polyarchy scores before and after the intervention shows a marked de- cline in the wake of the intervention. It is also worth noting that a key component of the GCC's overall strategy was the infusion of significant financial resources into both Bahrain and Oman. Both countries were more vulnerable to declining oil reserves than other GCC members and continued to face the most pressing challenges of economic diversification. Announced on March 10 following a GCC Foreign Ministers meeting in Riyadh, the GCC promised no less than $10 billion to each country to upgrade housing and infrastructure over 10 years, directly addressing risks associated with unemployment (Laessing and Johnston, 2011). Moreover, the strategy of sustained economic support continued over the remainder of the decade. A second financial package for Bahrain was timed to coincide with the run-up to parliamentary elections in November 2018, in which the monarchy again faced political challenge (Mogielnicki, 2018).

Provision of military support is not uncommon among authoritarian ROs. Eleven of the 29 regional organizations have language in their charters that constitute the organization as a mutual defense arrangement. An even larger number—15 of the 29—have conducted joint military exercises, including seven of the eleven that committed to collective defense agreements. Authoritarian ROs' military exercises provide a venue for members to share best practices, demonstrate their willingness to reveal capabilities to co-members, and increase interoperability of members' militaries to conduct joint operations.

Military exercises organized by ROs without formal defense agreements, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, can also be wide-ranging in their scope. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, formally inaugurated as such in 2001, grew out of two earlier five-party agreements aimed at reducing border tensions, with China playing an initiating role and Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan as founding members. The majority of SCO exercises center on counterterrorism, including a 2007 exercise which "simulated the response to another state's request for intervention to prevent an international terrorist group from taking control of the state" (Southerland, Green, and Janik, 2020). A recent inventory by the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2020) catalogs 17 exercises organized by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization between 2002 and 2019 in which Chinese forces participated.

Authoritarian ROs have also acted on their security commitments. Twelve of the hard authoritarian ROs we identified have engaged in military interventions, including the Gulf Cooperation Council and six other organizations with collective defense arrangements. Perhaps the archetypical authoritarian international institution of the early postwar period—the Warsaw Pact—provides two particularly well-known examples: Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.[7] Early analysis tended to view the Warsaw Pact as little more than a Soviet instrument—and with some justification. For example, Soviet military policy "simply forced Eastern Europe's communist military establishments to evolve as parts of the Soviet army and not as independent entities" (MacGregor 1986, 228; Mastny 2005, 5). New research shows that the organization became less hierarchical over time and provided an organizational forum through which Eastern European countries could air their interests (for example, Crump and Goddard 2018).

The common interest in limiting the diffusion of opposition became clear in the political crises that jolted the region from the early-1950s. The first of these occurred in Germany in June 1953, and was suppressed by Soviet forces prior to the formation of the Warsaw Pact. In 1956, tensions arose between Moscow and the Polish and Hungarian parties over reforms and the emergence of protests. Although Soviet decision-making was pivotal, the two separate interventions in Hungary in October and November were invited, one by the government, the second by hardline factions under János Kádár that had been communicating with Moscow over the course of the Hungarian uprising. Among their concerns were Imre Nagy's increasing sympathy to more democratic rule and his inclination to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact altogether. The path of Hungary's V-Dem polyarchy score conforms with expectations; the brief phase of liberalization in 1955 swiftly reverses in 1956. The intervention provided a reminder of the ground rules of the Soviet bloc (Kemp-Welch 2010): that no member could leave and the states of Eastern Europe would maintain a communist monopoly at all times. However, it is noteworthy that in the aftermath of the intervention, a meeting of key Warsaw Pact countries formally articulated a common interest in limiting further political reform in Hungary. The Polish and Romanian leaderships had confronted the effects of political contagion from the Hungarian revolution, and wanted to avoid repeating those experiences. The concerns of the East German party leadership over defections to the West were a pivotal factor in the escalation of the second Berlin crisis in 1958-61, which ultimately ended with the construction of the wall.

[7] In addition to intervening on behalf of its members, the Warsaw Pact is coded as engaging in six of the ten functions we outline, including a mutual defense commitment, military exercises, police cooperation, and norms of stability and non-intervention, with the latter interpreted as non-intervention by "hostile" forces.

In 1968, the Polish and East German leaderships feared that the pro-democracy Prague Spring would spread and supported military exercises and a tougher Warsaw Pact response (Kemp-Welch 2010, 223; Mastny 2008, 36). Although the intervention was dominated by the Soviets, the "Warsaw Five" of the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria issued a statement in July pressing the Dubcek government to return Czechoslovakia to the authoritarian fold. The Soviet intervention and the subsequent articulation of the Brezhnev doctrine recapitulated norms made clear in 1956: that domestic political reforms could not threaten the stability of authoritarian rule among the members of the "socialist commonwealth." Again, the path of V-Dem polyarchy scores comports with expectations: a process of partial liberalization that began in the 1950s was swiftly reversed in the aftermath of intervention. During the crisis around the emergence of Solidarity in Poland in 1980, Moscow relied even more heavily on Warsaw Pact maneuvers to send a political signal to Warsaw. Ultimately, intervention was unnecessary only because the Polish military held steady in the face of the Solidarity challenge and navigated out of the crisis by imposing martial law. As in the other cases, a brief moment of modest liberalization, as measured by Poland's polyarchy scores, was reversed.

Solving Coordination Problems

A strand of the literature on political liberalization has suggested that democracy may spread geographically through social networks and communication associated with proximity. Pro-democracy groups learn, mimic, and draw strength from fellow activists in neighboring countries. To protect themselves from this democratic "diffusion," autocrats strengthen their diplomatic, economic, and military collaboration with other authoritarian regimes (Kneuer et al., 2019; Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova, 2016; Schmotz and Tansey, 2018; von Soest, 2015). As the Freedom House report cited in the introduction suggests, co-members limit the ability of activists and opponents to find safe haven or exercise influence from abroad by sharing information on their whereabouts.

Of particular importance in this regard are two forms of cooperation that are prevalent across the cases. Twenty-four of the 29 hard authoritarian ROs have police cooperation arrangements, which often include extradition clauses, and 23 have anti-terrorism arrangements. After 9/11, the UN Security Council affirmed the importance of cooperation to counter terrorism, passing a number of resolutions and decisions including most notably UNSC Resolution 1373. The United States and its allies increasingly used terrorism as a justification to crack down against non-state actors. Many autocrats exploited the opportunity to follow suit. Human rights organizations increasingly focus attention on the way anti-terrorism laws are turned against groups

that constitute legitimate political, regional, or ethnic-religious opposition to the authoritarian status quo (Amnesty International, 2014; Edel and Josua, 2018). Prominent among the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's original objectives are "combating terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations, fighting against illicit narcotics and arms trafficking, and other types of transnational criminal activity..." (Art. 1). The significance of these "three evils" can be seen in several legal and organizational features of the SCO. These include the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, which articulates a norm of deterring irregular regime change (Art. 1, 1) and establishes detailed cooperation on the issue; the 2004 Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) established in Tashkent, Uzbekistan as a separate legal entity; and a 2009 Convention against Terrorism (Xiaodong 2010). The organization's 5th anniversary statement spoke of an "independent role in safeguarding stability and security in the region" and made a commitment in the case of emergencies to "immediate consultation on effectively responding to the emergency to fully protect the interests of both the SCO and its members" (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2006).

These documents appear to hew closely to extant international conventions, and carefully define terrorism, separatism, and extremism in terms of violence and the use of force; for example, extremism is identified as "the use of violence or changing violently the constitutional regime of a State." However, the debate about the organization has focused on the extent to which these norms are designed not only to deter terrorists so defined (for example Aris 2009; Xiaodong 2010) but to strengthen authoritarian incumbents and deter, prosecute, and delegitimate oppositions (Ambrosio, 2009; Libman and Obydenkova, 2019, Ch. 11). It is not surprising that legal analyses of SCO commitments note their "potential to impact individual rights that are protected by international law, including security of the person, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of association, privacy, and fair treatment under the law" (Human Rights in China 2011, 76).

The treaty is specific with respect to harmonizing legislation, exporting China's "three evils" concept, and assuring that persons found in violation should not be acquitted "based upon exclusively political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other similar considerations." The parties also commit to establish a formal request-for-information process (Arts. 8 and 9) and to cooperate with respect to curtailing the financing of groups engaged in illicit activities (Art. 7). Although far from transparent, the RATS allegedly maintains "blacklists" and a database of suspected terrorists, separatists, and extremists, as well as their networks and funding sources (Human Rights in China, 2011, 81-96). In 2010, when a representative of the World Uyghur Congress (a human rights organization designated as terrorists by China) attempted to travel to SCO members Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, he learned that he was on a list of

people banned from entering Kyrgyzstan. When he traveled onward to Kazakhstan, he was detained and informed that he would not be allowed to enter any SCO member country (Jardine, Lemon, and Hall, 2021).

Moreover, early in the treaty (Art. 2,2), SCO parties agree that designated suspects will be subject to extradition, removing the possibility of regional safe havens and denying asylum claims. The means for achieving these objectives violate the international legal norm of non-refoulment for refugees. A task force report on early SCO activities noted that as of 2010, "extraction, via administrative expulsion, deportation, or even kidnapping by security forces operating outside of state borders" had already emerged as one of the controversial means SCO member states deploy in assisting one another (Portland State University Task Force on U.S. Democracy Promotion and Assistance Policies, 2010, 11).

It should be underscored that these forms of collaboration did not entirely prevent episodes of political liberalization, most notably in Kyrgyzstan and more recently—and modestly—in Uzbekistan. Moreover, the SCO chose not to intervene directly as the Warsaw Pact and GCC did. Nonetheless, since the founding of the SCO, the four original Central Asian members of the organization have never seen their average V-Dem polyarchy scores exceed .5.

Legitimating Authoritarian Rule

As we noted in the introduction, much of the work on authoritarian IOs has made reference to the role that they play in legitimating authoritarian rule. Particularly in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the international environment placed strong ideational pressures on authoritarian incumbents. The advanced industrial states—and particularly the United States—sought to promote democracy and punish autocrats deemed illegitimate, including through military intervention. A dense network of transnational NGOs also sought to advance democratic norms on the ground. When autocrats rejected liberal norms regarding human rights and pluralism, ensuing crises of legitimacy sparked anti-government protests, as was most dramatically visible during the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring. As a result, autocrats developed a new ideational playbook: seeking to reframe discourse around stigmatized behaviors, de-linking liberal norms from conceptions of legitimacy or acceptability, and holding stage-managed elections (Debre and Morgenbesser, 2017; Hyde, 2011; Morgenbesser, 2020). These efforts include three practices that we identified in our coding scheme and LNQA exercise: the prioritization of societal "stability"; the codification of norms of "non-interference," at least from outside democratic forces; and the development of what we call "election validation" infrastructure.

The effort of authoritarian ROs to support the status quo is reflected in the large majority of organizations which have statements prioritizing "stability" (27/29). These ROs implicitly endorse the proposition that repressive tactics—particularly crackdowns on oppositions—are justifiable in the name of maintaining domestic and regional order. Even tacit support from ROs bolsters autocrats' claims that anti-democratic practices such as attacking protesters and intimidating opposition figures serve this higher purpose. More generally, authoritarian ROs have an interest in supporting illiberal norms such as the idea that societal coherence supersedes individuals' or groups' civil and political rights (Ambrosio, 2008; Cooley, 2015). Some authoritarian ROs go beyond endorsing illiberal norms and participate in the production of pro-regime propaganda. In April 2021, amidst widespread international criticism of China's persecution of ethnic minorities in its Xinjiang province, SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov toured Xinjiang with other diplomats from the region. In a televised interview with China's state-owned broadcaster CGTN, Norov agreed that accusations of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Chinese government against Uyghurs in Xinjiang were false and spoke at length about how impressed he was with the province's agricultural development and standards of living (CGTN 2021b). In a segment on CGTN's YouTube channel, Norov appeared to read directly off a teleprompter, listing economic growth figures for Xinjiang (CGTN 2021a).

A second norm that a number of authoritarian ROs endorse is the long-standing principle of non-interference. Eighteen of the 29 authoritarian ROs emphasize the principle of non- interference in members' internal affairs, with most including this principle in their founding charters. As discussed in Section Two, however, this principle is applied in a selective way. Authoritarian ROs are likely to endorse intervention in support of authoritarian incumbents while claiming that transnational NGOs monitoring human rights are interfering with member state sovereignty. Authoritarian RO counter norms are clearly aimed at limiting the penetration of democratic political forces and thus countering "liberal interventionism."

Finally, we found that 20 of the 29 organizations engage in monitoring—and in effect validating—members' elections. Even highly authoritarian regimes use elections for the purpose of signaling support and intimidating oppositions (Magaloni, 2008). Autocratic incumbents invite so-called "zombie" monitors from authoritarian ROs to cast a positive light on elections that are neither free nor fair. These monitors mimic the practices of monitors from more credible organizations, attempting to appease international actors and persuade voters regarding the quality of elections. They do so in part by releasing election monitoring reports and statements to media organizations that downplay incumbents' abuses. A growing body of survey research and case studies suggest that such efforts convince at least some voters that polling was conducted fairly (Bush and Prather, 2018; Debre and Morgenbesser, 2017).

Election validation has become ubiquitous in Sub-Saharan Africa's competitive authoritarian states. Over three-quarters of the African ROs in our sample which remained at least partially active in the 2000s have adopted election monitoring practices (10/13). The African Union (AU) is the least authoritarian-dominated of these 13 ROs and it does sometimes criticize the elections it observes. Yet, the African Union and other ROs in the region have validated dozens of elections rife with fraud and anti-competitive behavior. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) is one of several authoritarian ROs in our sample that has released joint election observation statements with the African Union. In- dependently and alongside the AU, ECCAS sent monitors to at least 25 national elections in ten of its eleven member states between 2005 and 2020 (Bush, Cottiero and Prather, 2022),[8] validating elections for some of Africa's most repressive regimes.

Positive election monitoring reports from Africa's authoritarian ROs— particularly when issued jointly with the AU—communicate solidarity among incumbents against their critics from domestic civil society groups and Western human rights organizations. Nganje and Nganje (2019) show that RO solidarity can have significant domestic repercussions, citing the Democratic Republic of Congo as an example. The DRC experienced some political liberalization in the first half of the 2000s before slowing after Joseph Kabila's first election as president in 2006. When Kabila claimed to win re-election in 2011 through polls that civil society observers denounced as fraudulent, the United States and European Union quickly questioned the validity of Kabila's win. However, after five African ROs issued a joint statement expressing satisfaction with the election, the United States and European Union lost leverage over Kabila and backpedaled on earlier criticisms and statements about re-running the polls (Nganje and Nganje, 2019).

The Republic of Congo's President Denis Sassou-Nguesso has also sought legitimation through RO monitoring, including monitoring of legislative elections. Following a transitional term as president after the country's 1997 civil war, Sassou-Nguesso won presidential elections in 2002, 2009, 2016, and 2021. In July of 2012, despite the harassment of opposition candidates, including the arrest and disqualification of former opposition alliance spokesman Paul-Marie Mpouele, the African Union and ECCAS' joint observation mission declared legislative polls in Congo "free, transparent and credible."[9] AU-ECCAS observers also declared the election "generally peaceful," despite Congolese police firing live rounds on supporters of opposition candidate Mathias Dzon in response

[8] The one member state which has not received ECCAS monitors is Burundi.

[9] African Union and the Economic Community of Central African States (2012). See the United States Department of State (2013) report regarding harassment of opposition figures.

to demands for transparency with respect to election results. Not coincidentally, Dzon lost to Hugues Ngouelondele, the ruling party candidate and son-in-law of Sassou-Nguesso (Associated Press, 2012).

ECCAS continued to serve as a tool for election legitimation after Sassou-Nguesso amended Congo's constitution to remove term limits, setting the stage for his 2016 re-election. In 2021, Sassou-Nguesso secured a fifth term in office amidst opposition boycotts and an internet, text message, and social media shutdown.[10] While the government refused to accredit domestic election monitors from Congo's influential Catholic Church, ECCAS was again invited to provide a positive review of Congo's polls. Dr. Sergio Esono, the head of ECCAS's electoral observation mission, told reporters that "The election on March 21, 2021, was conducted peacefully and serenely... The enthusiasm of Congolese voters for the election was clearly significant" (Asala, 2021). Since 2003, the quality of the country's elections and its polyarchy scores have remained virtually unchanged.

Conclusion

The debate about the role of IOs in supporting democracy has shifted in recent years as authoritarian regimes forged or reinvigorated regional organizations. Have powerful or ambitious regional powers—China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and, prior to its collapse, Venezuela—promoted autocracy through the ROs that they helped to create and sustain? Are cartels of authoritarian leaders in Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia colluding to protect themselves?

We approached the question through a multi-method design. Following earlier econometric work on democratic IOs, and accounting for selection into authoritarian ROs, we showed how membership in more authoritarian ROs dampened the prospects for political liberalization in non-democracies. To strengthen our confidence in the statistical results, we coded a sample of "hard" authoritarian organizations that should be most likely to exhibit the postulated cooperative behavior in support of autocrats. Across a majority of these organizations and a significant number of issues, ROs did cooperate in the way suggested by our theory. We found particularly robust cooperation in articulating norms of stability and in the areas we identified as addressing coordination problems, including anti-terrorism and police cooperation.

[10] "Congo-Brazzaville's president is re-elected after his rival dies of covid-19," March 24, 2021. *The Economist.* https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2021/03/24/congo-brazzavilles-president-is- re-elected-after-his-rival-dies-of-covid-19.

Over a third of the organizations we examined went so far as to directly intervene with military force in support of autocratic incumbents. In countries as diverse as Hungary under communist rule, Bahrain, and the DRC, autocrats used ROs to prevent political liberalization.

We see several directions for future research. First, regional hegemons have a variety of instruments at their disposal and any effects on political development at the country level are by no means coming only through an international institutional channel. We showed that our results are robust to models that account for multiple alternative measures of authoritarian linkage. And we argued that apparently hierarchical organizations—with the Warsaw Treaty Organization as a prime example—may nonetheless reflect common interests in limiting the diffusion of democratic ideas. But more research can be done on both separating out and relating the lines of influence emanating from larger powers within these organizations. For example, authoritarian great powers may indeed support allies bilaterally. But support through one channel does not necessarily negate the significance of support through the regional organizational channel if viewed as acting in concert.

A second topic that warrants further research is the relationship between these organizations and powerful democratic states. A number of African regional organizations dominated by authoritarian leaders receive significant funding from the United States, European Union, and European Union member states. Channeling funding through these organizations could redound to the benefit of authoritarian elites, suggesting that leaders of democracies should be more cautious in their approaches to cooperation with ROs.

Finally, there is ample room for further research at the country level. We have established a statistical relationship between membership in authoritarian ROs and political outcomes at the domestic level in autocracies, have shown that the organizations cooperate as expected, and provided illustrative examples of how the activities of ROs were connected to adverse political outcomes at the country level. Yet more work is needed on how these external lines of support interact with domestic developments to consolidate authoritarian rule. The military intervention against anti-regime protests in Kazakhstan under the banner of the CSTO in 2022 underscores the relevancy of authoritarian RO membership at critical junctures.

We also currently lack a theory of how authoritarian ROs affect their democratic members. In the Appendix we report tests that suggest that membership in more authoritarian ROs does not appear to lead to political regress in extant democracies. But have leaders of democracies in "bad neighborhoods" joined their authoritarian RO co-members in illiberal policing or counter-terrorism programs? Have democracies in more authoritarian ROs become more willing to overlook anti-democratic behavior domestically or internationally?

With respect to autocratic regimes, the link between authoritarian RO memberships and political outcomes at the domestic level appears to pertain. A broad literature has focused on the extent to which the international environment is hospitable or hostile to political liberalization and democracy, with new work focusing on channels through which democracy- promotion may generate headwinds. Yet this work must still grapple with authoritarian international cooperation. Just as autocrats individually engage in complex strategies at home to deflect democratic challengers, so have they cooperated with one another to contain oppositions. Not only are the policy implications troubling, but the theoretical implications for the study of IOs are as well. Cooperation can prove a double-edged sword, both strengthening the prospects for democracy where regional institutions have firm democratic roots but consolidating authoritarianism where cooperation takes place among autocracies.

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