For decades, the subfield of comparative politics has primarily been organized around regions of the world. The job market is still structured primarily around regions, although less so today than was the case in the 1970s or 1980s. About 70 percent of the articles published in the top three comparative journals over the last fifteen years have dealt exclusively with one geographic region (Munck and Snyder 2005: 8–9). Some respected political science journals are organized around regions. Curiously in light of the traditional organization of comparative politics along regional lines, however, there has been almost no explicit defense of why regions are important. Criticism of organizing comparative politics along regional lines has drawn more attention than defenses of why regions are important. For example, Robert Bates’s (1996, 1997) criticisms of area studies could be taken as a critique of organizing comparative politics along regional lines.

In this chapter, we build an explicit defense of the importance of regions in comparative politics and world politics. We do not claim that regions should be the primary unit of analysis in comparative politics or that analysis of regions is superior to other research designs. We do assert that regions are substantively important and that the reasons for this importance have been under-articulated in political science. For some research objectives, it is substantively useful to examine regions.

We present two reasons to take regions of the world seriously in comparative politics. First, regions have particular dynamics and political processes that are specific to those regions. Social science generalizations that are based on large N, cross-regional, or worldwide units of analysis must be attentive to these regional specificities. Otherwise, social scientists will
generalize where they should not. Of course, there are some exceptions (or outliers) to most
generalizations. Our argument is not that generalizations should be avoided because of
occasional exceptions, but rather that different regions may present distinctive and *systematic*
causal patterns that an assumption of worldwide causal homogeneity would obscure. The effect
is more substantial, and hence the need for caution greater when entire regions of the world,
rather than simply a few countries, are exceptions to a generalization.

Second, as many scholars have argued in recent years, political developments in one
country can have a strong impact on policies and political regimes in other countries in the same
region (Brinks and Coppedge forthcoming; Brown 2000; Gleditsch 2002; Gleditsch and Ward
forthcoming; Huntington 1991: 100–106; Kopstein and Reilly 2000; Levitsky and Way
forthcoming; Lowenthal 1991; O’Laughlin et al. 1998; Pevehouse 2002a, 2002b, 2005; Pridham
1991; Pridham, Herring, and Sanford 1994; Starr 1991; Starr and Lindborg 2003; Whitehead
1986, 1991, 1996). These international influences are especially important within regions. If we
always treat countries as the unit of analysis and fail to pay attention to regional effects and
dynamics, we will miss these regional effects and as a result will fail to understand causal
processes.

Both of these facts mean that regions should be important units of analysis in
comparative politics. Yet little work in political science has examined regional specialties and
regional diffusion effects.

Empirically, we demonstrate the importance of regions through the literature on
democratization. We argue that there are important regional specificities in the causal impact of
the level of development on democracy. Causal inferences based on a worldwide sample would
lead to a misleading understanding of what factors promote democratization in some regions. We
also show that it is impossible to understand democratic transitions and breakdowns without
emphasizing region-wide factors. Analyses that failed to consider the regional influences would overstate the importance of domestic factors, conclude that regime changes and stability are highly idiosyncratic processes, or perhaps commit both mistakes.

Before we get into details, we should briefly clarify what we mean by “region of the world.” We use this concept as it is understood in common parlance, to refer to geographically bounded parts of the world that are commonly viewed as occupying the same large part of the world. In this understanding, Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia are regions of the world. This is not an exhaustive list nor a historically permanent one. Like “nations” (Brubaker 1996), regions of the world are symbolic constructions, and there is some change over time in what is viewed as a region. However, more than is the case with nations, the symbolic construction of “regions” is not subject to constant changes; once created, a sense of “region” can endure for centuries. The idea that Latin America or Europe are regions, for example, has existed for centuries, even if the boundaries of what is considered Europe are contested and are undergoing change in the post-1989 period.

REGIONS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Almost no work in comparative politics has explicitly articulated reasons for undertaking region-based work. In contrast, several authors have advocated other research strategies in comparative politics and have articulated reasons for following them—for example, case studies, intermediate N, and large N quantitative work. There have been sophisticated justifications of case studies (Eckstein 1975; George 1979; George and Bennett 2005), large N analysis (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994), intra-country comparisons (Linz and de Miguel 1966; Putnam 1993; Snyder 2001a, 2001b), and cross-regional comparisons (Huber 2003). There is no comparably sophisticated argument for studying a region of the world. Thus there is a strange disjuncture
between the traditional organization of comparative politics along regional lines and a near vacuum in theorizing about why regions are important (for an exception, see Gleditsch 2002).

Of the 30 books that were most widely used in PhD field seminars and reading lists for comprehensive exams in comparative politics according to one recent survey (España-Najera, Márquez, and Vasquez 2003), only one, Cardoso and Faletto (1979), looked at a region—Latin America—in a sustained manner that took into account regional specificities. Although it is common to include controls for colonial heritage or peripheral world status in statistical models, a concern with regional specificities is rare even in the simple form of regional dummy variables. vi

In recent years, the most prominent advocate of paying attention to regional specificities in comparative politics has been Bunce (1995, 1998, 2000), who argued that there are regional differences in democratization, comparing the post-communist and Latin American cases. vii Another exception—not in vogue in recent years—is work that focuses on regional specificities stemming from political culture—for example, Wiarda’s work (2001) on Iberian Catholic political culture. Wiarda’s work and most work in this genre suffers from flaws, including the inability to explain important cross-national differences within a given region. viii If Iberian Catholic political culture were the prime explanatory factor in politics, there would be no obvious reason why the Iberian countries, Spain and Portugal, should be less affected than Latin American countries. Yet in terms of political regimes, social outcomes, and level of economic development, Spain today is very different from Bolivia, Honduras, or Nicaragua, to take three poor Latin American countries.

Some work in comparative politics has examined many countries within the same region of the world—for example, Collier and Collier (1991) on Latin America or Kitschelt (1994) on Western Europe. Yet these works do not reach any of our three standards of taking regions
seriously. First, they do not examine regional specificities. For example, although Kitschelt included only Western European countries in his analysis of Social Democratic parties, he made no claim to regional specificities for Western Europe. Second, they did not analyze regional effects such as dissemination or diffusion. Third, they did not articulate any explicit reason for choosing a region of the world to demarcate the counties in their analysis.

These observations are not criticisms of these prominent works, but rather a means of clarifying the claim that regions have not been adequately theorized in comparative politics. If the reason for case selection is similarity in dependent or independent variables, then cases from outside a region could be added with no difficulty except that of learning about additional countries. The practical demands of turning a region-based study into a cross-regional study might be considerable, but there is no theoretical reason not to add such cases. Under these circumstances, there are justifications for delimiting the case selection to countries within a particular region, but these reasons (efficiency, prior knowledge, familiarity with languages, etc.) are not theoretical.

DEMOCRACY, REGIONAL HETEROGENEITY, AND DIFFUSION: AN EMPIRICAL MODEL

We hypothesize that regions are substantively important for two reasons as relates to processes of democratization. First, the causal processes driving democratization differs across regions. Second, region-wide trends affect the propensity of neighboring countries for democratic outcomes. In this section we analyze world-wide trends in democratization based on the first hypothesis.

Our examination of causal heterogeneity looks at the relationship between the level of development and democracy, a classic issue in political science and political sociology. Almost every large-N study on this issue has shown that the level of economic development, usually
operationalized by per capita income, is a powerful predictor of democracy (Boix 2003; Boix and Stokes 2003; Bollen 1980; Bollen and Jackman 1985; Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Coppedge 1997; Dahl 1971: 62–80; Diamond 1992; Hadenius 1992; Huntington 1984; Jackman 1973; Lipset, Seong, and Torres 1993; Londegran and Poole 1996; Przeworski and Limongi 1997; Przeworski et al. 2000; Ross 2001). Most of this literature has assumed a regionally uniform impact of the level of development on democracy. In statistical terms, it has assumed causal homogeneity at the global level; the impact of the level of development on democracy is presumed to be roughly similar across regions (differences across regions should not be statistically significant).

A few scholars, however, have argued that the global finding may not apply to Latin America, which might have region-specific effects (Collier 1975; Landman 1999; O’Donnell 1973). Elsewhere we argued that the relation between development and democracy in Latin America is not linear, but rather N-shaped. At a very low level of development and at a high level of income (within Latin America), greater per capita income is associated with higher democracy scores. In contrast, at an intermediate level of income and for a quite expansive range in the level of development, a higher level of development was associated with lower democracy scores (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2003).

Whether there are region-specific effects in this relationship has important implications in comparative politics. Yet scholars have infrequently tested for region-specific effects in the relationship between the level of development and democracy and have only rarely made much of findings about regional specificity. If the level of development has a uniform impact on democracy across the globe, some claims for the virtues of focusing on regions would suffer.

In order to answer these questions, we collected information for 156 countries between 1950 and 2003. Due to the entry of countries in the sample at different points in time, as well as
the presence of missing data, the total number of observations was 5,745. The Appendix lists the countries and the number of years (observations) analyzed for each case. We measured the dependent variable (level of democracy) using the Polity IV score, which ranges from -10 (extremely authoritarian) to +10 (highly democratic). To minimize the number of missing values, we employed the revised version of Polity IV, which treats years of transition as a linear progression between the starting point and the end point of the transition (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2005).\textsuperscript{x1}

**Independent Variables**

We include five independent variables that change over time and nine time-invariant independent variables. The first group of predictors varies across countries and over time (yearly). It includes a measure of modernization (per capita GDP) and two related control variables (economic performance and population size), plus a measure of regional diffusion (the percentage of countries that are democratic in the region in any given year) and a related control variable (the percentage of countries that are democratic world-wide). Time-invariant predictors vary across countries but not over time within countries. We discuss them in greater detail below. They include measures of ethnic and religious heterogeneity, British colonial legacies, and regional location.

**Modernization** Our per capita GDP data came from the World Development Indicators for 1960-2003. For years between 1950 and 1959, not covered by the World Development Indicators but covered by the Penn World Tables (PWT), we estimated GDP per capita using the rate of growth reported by PWT according to the formula $GDP_{it-1} = \frac{GDP_{it}}{1 + G_{it}}$, where GDP\textsubscript{it} corresponds to GDP per capita as reported by the World Bank for country \textit{i} at time \textit{t} (generally 1960), and \textit{G} is the rate of growth as reported by PWT. We applied the formula retrospectively back to 1950 in order to impute the missing values for 1950-59. Data for two countries excluded
from the World Development Indicators come from the Penn World Tables (Cuba for 10 available years and Taiwan for 46 years). For those cases, figures were measured as per capita GDP (Laspeyres estimates) in constant 1996 dollars.

Because per capita income is not expected to have a linear impact on democracy, we modeled its effect as a quadratic function of per capita GDP. For this reason, we include two terms in the equation: per capita GDP and per capita GDP squared. Conventional modernization theory would expect the coefficient for the first term to be positive and significant, (the level of democracy should increase as per capita GDP increases up to a certain point) and the coefficient for the second term to be negative but small, indicating diminishing returns on per capita income (Jackman 1973).xii

**Economic Growth.** Several studies have argued that economic performance affects democratic durability (Diamond 1999: 77–93; Diamond and Linz 1989: 44–46; Gasiorowski 1995; Geddes 1999; Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Lipset et al. 1993; Przeworski et al. 2000). Growth rates were estimated as the average of the per capita GDP growth rates reported by the World Bank (in constant 1995 dollars) and by the Penn World Tables (Laspeyres and Chain estimates). To reduce potential problems of endogeneity (e.g., if democracies promote greater growth) we used the lagged value of growth, $G_{it-1}$, in all models.

**Population.** Population serves as a control variable to reflect the argument that democracy is more viable in smaller, homogeneous societies. Because the causal impact of population is usually not linear (an increase in population from one million to eleven million is presumably more relevant than an increase from one-hundred million to one-hundred and ten million), we used the natural logarithm of population measured in thousands. Data comes from the World Development Indicators, Penn World Tables, and the Banks Cross-National Times Series Dataset (Banks 2005; Heston, Summers, and Aten 2002; World Bank 2005).
Unfortunately, the Polity dataset excludes micro-states with less than half-million inhabitants, so the coefficients for this variable may be artificially depressed.

**World-Wide Democratic Trends.** In order to estimate the influence of world-wide democratization trends ("waves" and "counter-waves" of democracy), we calculated the percentage of countries that are democratic (excluding the country in question) in any given year at the global level. Countries were counted as democratic when they had a Polity score greater than 5.

**Regional Democratic Diffusion.** Similarly, to estimate the effects of regional democratic diffusion we computed the percentage of countries that were democratic (excluding the country in question) in any given year at the regional level. We classified countries into seven world regions described below. An alternative classification based on a larger number of regional clusters (16) did not alter the conclusions about regional diffusion.

In addition, we included some independent variables that vary across countries but not over time within countries. Every year a given country received the same score on these variables. Two factors explain this lack of variance for these independent variables: 1) some properties do not change over time (e.g., the country’s geographic location, whether a country was once a British colony); and 2) in some instances, information is available on general properties of a country, but not on the marginal year-to-year fluctuations for that variable (e.g., ethnic fractionalization).

**Former British Colonies.** This dichotomous variable indicates whether the country was a British colony prior to the mid-twentieth century. We coded the information based on several sources, but did not discriminate British “settler” colonies from the rest (Bernhard, Reenock, and Nordstrom 2004; Teorell and Hadenius 2004). The countries in this category in our sample were Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Botswana, Canada, Cyprus, Egypt, Eritrea, Fiji,
Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, India, Iraq, Israel, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lesotho, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritius, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

**Ethnic and Religious Fractionalization.** Two variables measure ethnic and religious fractionalization, respectively, by averaging the scores developed by Anthony Annett and James Fearon (Annett 2001; Fearon 2003; Fearon and Laitin 2003). These authors computed the same two scores using the same formula: \( 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{n} p_i^2 \), where \( p_i \) denotes the population share for each of the \( n \) social groups (ethno-linguistic groups or religious denominations) in the country. Values approaching 0 indicate ethnic or religious homogeneity, while values approaching 1 indicate extreme fractionalization. Although Annett tabulated figures by decade and Fearon presented yearly time series for 1945-99, in both cases they used static sources and their figures displayed no variance over time. Both authors used similar sources and their scores were practically identical.xiii

**Regions.** We created dummy variables for each world region with the exception of Western and Southern Europe, our baseline category. In order to limit the number of independent variables, we classified countries into seven regions: Sub-Saharan Africa (44 countries), the Middle East and North Africa (18 countries), Western and Southern Europe (17 countries), Russia and Eastern Europe (18 countries), Latin America (20 countries), the British Caribbean and North America (5 countries), and Asia (34 countries in South Asia, East Asia, and Oceania). Western and Southern Europe were used as the baseline category in all models. The appendix lists the regional classification for each country.

**Estimation**
Consider a simple model of modernization and regional diffusion in which properties of each country \((i)\) at a particular year in time \((t)\) are expected to shape the level of democracy \(Y_{it}\). Equation 1 presents the basic structure of the model, where:

\[
Y_{it} = b_{00} + b_1(GDP_{it}) + b_2(GDP^2_{it}) + b_3(G_{it-1}) + b_4(Population_{it}) + b_5(Diffusion\ World_{it}) + b_6(Diffusion\ Region_{it}) + U_i + e_{it}.
\]

In Equation 1, \(GDP\) accounts for per capita GDP and \(Diffusion\ Region\) for the percentage of democratic countries in the region. Modernization theory would anticipate a positive value for \(b_1\), reflecting the initial increase in the level of democracy as per capita GDP increases and a small negative value for \(b_2\) reflecting the later leveling off of Polity scores as per capita GDP increases beyond a certain point. Strong regional effects would create a positive and significant value for \(b_6\). Three control variables are also included in the model: \(G\) is the annual rate of economic growth, \(Population\) is the natural logarithm of the population (measured in thousands), and \(Diffusion\ World\) is the percentage of democratic countries in the world. Because countries enter the sample with different levels of democracy at \(t_0\), the model allows each country to deviate from the baseline intercept \((b_{00})\). If we assume that those deviations follow a normal distribution and they are uncorrelated with the predictors, unit effects can be treated as a component \((U_i)\) of the error term, creating a random effects model in which each country has a unique intercept, \(b_{0i} = b_{00} + U_i\). Thus, Equation 1 can be represented with new notation:

\[
Y_{it} = b_{0i} + b_1(GDP_{it}) + b_2(GDP^2_{it}) + b_3(G_{it-1}) + b_4(Population_{it}) + b_5(Diffusion\ World_{it}) + b_6(Diffusion\ Region_{it}) + e_{it}.
\]

It is very likely that the initial level of democracy for each country does not follow a random distribution but rather reflects underlying characteristics of each case. For instance, fractionalized societies may have been less able to build democratic institutions; British colonies may have had some advantage in creating democracy; or countries in different regions may have
confronted different historical conditions. If this is the case, we can model the country-specific intercept \( b_{0i} \) as the product of a country-level equation:

\[
[2b] \quad b_{0i} = b_{00} + b_{01}(\text{Africa}_i) + b_{02}(\text{North America}_i) + b_{03}(\text{Latin America}_i) + b_{04}(\text{Middle East}_i) + b_{05}(\text{Asia}_i) + b_{06}(\text{USSR-Eastern Europe}_i) + b_{07}(\text{Religious fractionalization}_i) + b_{08}(\text{Ethnic fractionalization}_i) + b_{09}(\text{Former British Colony}_i) + U_i,
\]

where \( U_i \) represents the residual variation in the country intercepts.

By substituting Equation 2b into Equation 2a, we obtain a mixed model with a complex disturbance term:

\[
[2c] \quad Y_{it} = b_{00} + b_{1i}(\text{GDP}_{it}) + b_{2i}(\text{GDP}^2_{it}) + b_{3i}(\text{G}_{it-1}) + b_{4i}(\text{Population}_{it}) + b_{5i}(\text{Diffusion World}_{it}) + b_{6i}(\text{Diffusion Region}_{it}) + b_{01}(\text{Africa}_i) + b_{02}(\text{North America}_i) + b_{03}(\text{Latin America}_i) + b_{04}(\text{Middle East}_i) + b_{05}(\text{Asia}_i) + b_{06}(\text{USSR-Eastern Europe}_i) + b_{07}(\text{Religious fractionalization}_i) + b_{08}(\text{Ethnic fractionalization}_i) + b_{09}(\text{Former British Colony}_i) + U_i + e_{it}.
\]

In contrast to Equation 1, Equation 2c captures not only the short-term effects of time-varying covariates on democratization but also the long-term effects of country characteristics and regional location on the overall level of democracy for each country. However, Equation 2c fails to address the critical issue of causal heterogeneity.

If causal heterogeneity affects the relation between economic development and democracy, the size of coefficients \( b_1 \) and \( b_2 \) may vary from country to country. Moreover, if our argument about regional specificities is correct, the size of those coefficients may vary systematically across regions. Equation 3a allows country-level variation not only in the intercept \( (b_{0i}) \), but also in the coefficients for Per capita GDP \( (b_{1i} \text{ and } b_{2i}) \):

\[
[3a] \quad Y_{it} = b_{0i} + b_{1i}(\text{GDP}_{it}) + b_{2i}(\text{GDP}^2_{it}) + b_{3i}(\text{G}_{it-1}) + b_{4i}(\text{Population}_{it}) + b_{5i}(\text{Diffusion World}_{it}) + b_{6i}(\text{Diffusion Region}_{it}) + e_{it}.
\]

Variance in the intercepts may be modeled according to equation 2b above, while variance in the coefficients may be captured by two country-level equations in which \( b_{1i} \) and \( b_{2i} \) vary by region. For instance:
\[ b_{1i} = b_{10} + b_{11}(\text{Africa}_i) + b_{12}(\text{North America}_i) + b_{13}(\text{Latin America}_i) + b_{14}(\text{Middle East}_i) + b_{15}(\text{Asia}_i) + b_{16}(\text{USSR-Eastern Europe}_i). \]

An equivalent equation may be applied to model \( b_{2i} \). By substitution, the mixed model becomes:

\[ Y_{it} = b_{00} + b_{10}(\text{GDP}_{it}) + b_{20}(\text{GDP}^2_{it}) + b_{3}(G_{it-1}) + b_{4}(\text{Population}_{it}) + b_{5}(\text{Diffusion World}_{it}) + b_{6}(\text{Diffusion Region}_{it}) + b_{01}(\text{Africa}_i) + b_{02}(\text{North America}_i) + b_{03}(\text{Latin America}_i) + b_{04}(\text{Middle East}_i) + b_{05}(\text{Asia}_i) + b_{06}(\text{USSR-Eastern Europe}_i) + b_{07}(\text{Religious fractionalization}_{it}) + b_{08}(\text{Ethnic fractionalization}_{it}) + b_{09}(\text{Former British Colony}_i) + b_{11}(\text{Africa}_i*\text{GDP}_{it}) + b_{12}(\text{North America}_i*\text{GDP}_{it}) + b_{13}(\text{Latin America}_i*\text{GDP}_{it}) + b_{14}(\text{Middle East}_i*\text{GDP}_{it}) + b_{15}(\text{Asia}_i*\text{GDP}_{it}) + b_{16}(\text{USSR-Eastern Europe}_i*\text{GDP}_{it}) + b_{21}(\text{Africa}_i*\text{GDP}^2_{it}) + b_{22}(\text{North America}_i*\text{GDP}^2_{it}) + b_{23}(\text{Latin America}_i*\text{GDP}^2_{it}) + b_{24}(\text{Middle East}_i*\text{GDP}^2_{it}) + b_{25}(\text{Asia}_i*\text{GDP}^2_{it}) + b_{26}(\text{USSR-Eastern Europe}_i*\text{GDP}^2_{it}) + U_i + e_{it}. \]

Equation 3c is a hierarchical model in which time-varying covariates operate at the country-year level (level 1), while stable predictors shape the intercept and region mediates the effect of GDP at the country level (level 2). For simplicity, the effect of all other time-varying covariates (growth, population, and diffusion) is treated as “fixed” (i.e., as constant across countries).

Table 1 presents the result of the analysis based on Equations 1 (random intercepts model) and 3c (causal heterogeneity). Consistent with a large body of literature, the first model indicates that per capita GDP has a positive and significant (yet non-linear) impact on democracy. It shows that there are both regional and global effects, consistent with the burgeoning literature on diffusion. Finally, it shows that countries have significantly different intercepts, meaning that their own unique histories affect how democratic they are. This simple model provides preliminary support for the importance of regional and international influences on democratization.

Model 3c shows that regional characteristics explain part of the variance in the intercepts and the coefficient for GDP. The impact of economic development on democracy is very
different for Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East compared to Western Europe (the baseline category). For the Middle East, negative coefficient $b_{14}$ cancels the positive baseline effects of higher per capita income on democracy ($b_{10}$), indicating a rather flat (in fact, slightly negative) slope. Countries in this region are slightly less democratic as per capita income increases. For Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, the much stronger, negative interactive effects ($b_{11}$ and $b_{13}$) invert the direction of the baseline coefficient. The negative signs of $b_{11}$ and $b_{13}$, combined with the positive signs of $b_{21}$ and $b_{23}$, indicate a U-shaped pattern. In these two regions, countries are on average somewhat more democratic at low levels of development. They become less democratic at intermediate levels of per capita income, and finally democracy scores tend to improve as countries cross a certain income threshold. The impact of increases in per capita GDP on the level of democracy is different in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa compared to Eastern Europe and Asia, which show no significant difference with respect to the Western European pattern.

In both models, regional diffusion effects are positive and significant even after controlling for world-wide trends. In order to verify this finding, we developed a more stringent model presented in the last two columns. This test assumes an autoregressive causal structure in which the error term at time $t$ is correlated with the error term at in the previous year ($t-1$), so that

$$e_{it} = \rho e_{it-1} + \varepsilon_{it}.$$  

In this model, most other predictors lose their statistical significance. The only exceptions are the diffusion terms. Although the absolute size of the diffusion coefficients is depressed compared to Models 1 and 3, regional and global effects remain positive and significant. The fact that these variables are significant even with the lagged dependent variable as an explanatory variable shows that international factors significantly alter the odds for or against
democratization. This finding is consistent with Brinks and Coppedge (forthcoming) and Gleditsch (2002).

In order to illustrate the substantive implications of these findings, we ran simulations based on Model 3c. Figure 1 presents the predicted Polity scores for four hypothetical countries located in three regions (the Middle East, Western Europe, and Latin America) at different levels of income per capita. The simulation assumes that those countries were not British colonies and that they have a population size equivalent to the average country in each region. It also assumes that the coefficients for economic growth, ethnic, and religious fractionalization are indistinguishable from zero (this assumption is consistent with the results in Table 1), and that half of the countries in the world are democracies. For the sake of comparison, the proportion of democratic countries for Western Europe and the Middle East (i.e., the regional environment) is set at 30 percent. Given this setup, the predicted level of democracy for Western European countries starts relatively high (5.2 points in the Polity scale) and increases monotonically with per capita income, reaching a predicted score of 9.1 at 20,000 dollars. In contrast, the expected level of democracy for the Middle East starts out relatively low (-1.5) and actually decreases slightly with greater per capita income (at 20,000 dollars, the predicted value is -2.5). Coupled with the sharp differences in the baseline level of democracy and in the coefficients of the GDP and GDP² variables across regions, Figure 1 demonstrates a remarkably different casual impact of per capita GDP on predicted Polity scores. It is plausible that the regional differences would diminish if we added other independent variables, but it seems very unlikely that they would disappear.

Figure 1

In sum, there are important regional differences in of the level of development on democracy. Yet in the quantitative work on modernization and democracy, except for the oil-rich
countries, little attention has been given to distinctive regional effects. The fact that there are distinctive regional effects means that it is important to take seriously regional specificities.

Ragin (2000) claims that quantitative analyses are usually oblivious to causal heterogeneity, that is, to the idea that a causal factor could have one impact in one setting but a different impact elsewhere. He is right that many quantitative analyses are not sufficiently attentive to such differences, but quantitative methods can often test for causal heterogeneity more precisely and clearly than qualitative methods.\textsuperscript{xiv}

To assess the substantive relevance of regional diffusion effects, we compare two Latin American scenarios in Figure 1. In the first one, only ten percent of the countries in the region are democratic; in the second one, sixty percent of them are. In both scenarios, the Latin American cases display a distinctive “bureaucratic authoritarian” pattern (marked by a clear decline in the expected levels of democracy at intermediate levels of development). The markedly more favorable regional political environment produces a positive change of 5.6 points in the Polity scale. Consistent with other recent work, this finding shows powerful regional influences in democratization. In a later section, we take up this point in more detail. First, however, we analyze the implications of the cross-regional differences in the impact of the level of development on democracy.

\textbf{CAusal Heterogeneity and Regional Specificities}

Many political scientists believe that regional specificities and other contextual factors are not important. Paul Pierson (2004: 167) noted that context “has become, for many in the social sciences, a bad word—a synonym for thick description, and an obstacle for social-scientific analysis. Indeed, over the last few decades, much of the social sciences has undergone what could rightly be called a de-contextual revolution.”
In a provocative universalizing claim, King (1996: 160) argued that “the professional goal of all scientists should be to attempt to demonstrate that context makes no difference whatsoever.” We disagree with this assertion; our position is that context (such as region) is sometimes very important and that political scientists should try to understand in what ways it matters. Sensitivity to context allows researchers to detect specific sub-populations governed by distinctive causal processes. In the case of regional specificities, the point is not merely that one region of the world differs from others in terms of the values on some independent variables (for example, high income inequalities). Rather, and this is the point that is problematic for King’s argument, causal processes (i.e., the underlying structural model explaining the outcome of interest) are different in different regions.

We agree that it is desirable to understand what specific factors account for causal heterogeneity according to context. In this sense, we share with King the viewpoint that it would be desirable to statistically eliminate the significance of contextual variables such as region and replace them with variables with a clearer substantive content. However, explaining why context matters diverges from King’s claim that it does not matter.

King posits the example of two “conservative, poor white men who identify with the Republican Party, prefer more defense spending, and insist that the federal government balance the budget immediately. They are each afraid that someone will take their guns away, hope to end welfare as anyone knows it, and think Rush Limbaugh should be president.” In King’s example, given these attributes of two voters, it does not matter whether they live in a liberal bastion or a conservative stronghold; both will vote in the same way. But his assertion misses the point that the effects of race, class, and sex on voting behavior are mediated by the voters’ environment. The neighborhood where two voters with similar demographic characteristics (for example, poor white men) live affects their social and political values (in King’s example, the
likelihood that they would be conservative, identify with the Republican Party, prefer more defense spending, etc.), which in turn influence their vote. In this way, context has an impact on values, voting, and other political behavior. A poor white male who lives in the rural south is more likely to have conservative values and ultimately to vote Republican in a presidential election than a poor white male who lives in San Francisco or New York. The political opinions that are affected by context help explain why context is important; they should not be taken as an indication that context does not make a difference in politics.\textsuperscript{xvi}

As social scientists, we would like to know not only that there are regional specificities that challenge assumptions of universality and of causal homogeneity, but also what causes such regional specificities. In this sense, this paper opens up an important new research question that we cannot resolve here, namely, why some regions are distinctive. As King (1996) argues, if it were possible to quantify all explanatory variables in a valid and reliable manner, the ultimate goal should be to eliminate statistically significant differences across regions (see also Przeworski and Teune 1970).\textsuperscript{xvii} Then we could fully explain what produces regional specificities. In this paper, we do not explain what specific factors make some regions different;\textsuperscript{xviii} our contribution here is rather taking stock of this specificity and indicating the need for further research on why different regions have different dynamics. Even if we cannot fully explain regional specificities, identifying them has important implications for social science.

A great deal of attention in political science has been given to the impossibility of generalizing from very small samples (King et al. 1994: 208–230). Less attention has been given to the need for caution in moving from generalizations based on global samples to even fairly large samples (such as regions) drawn from the global population. Such caution is sometimes in order. This cautionary note is not a call for endlessly smaller units of analysis or for avoiding all generalizations. These positions are at odds with our understanding of the social scientific
enterprise. Yet contextual specificity (Adock and Collier 2001), causal heterogeneity (Ragin 1987, 2000), and “bounded generalizations” (Bunce 2000) and domain restrictions are important parts of the toolkit of social science methodology.

An emphasis on the importance of regions does not entail a position against large-N generalizations in social science research. We adopt an intermediate position: generalizations are important, but there are few truly universal findings in the social sciences. Most generalizations in social science are bounded by geographic or historical contexts. Regional specificities are not the only way to bound generalizations in social science, but because regions are large parts of the world with distinctive dynamics and intra-regional influences, delimiting some generalizations by regions is useful.

A claim that a region has specific dynamics inevitably entails comparison with other regions or with the rest of the world. It is neither a call for the kind of cross-regional work that is most common in comparative politics (comparing one or a few countries in one region with one or a few in another, e.g., Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Marx 1998), nor a call for intra-regional comparison. Without comparing across regions, it is impossible to establish regional distinctiveness (Karl and Schmitter 1995). Examining regional specificities therefore does not imply focusing exclusively on one area of the world. To the contrary, good work on regional specificities must compare across regions and take broader theoretical issues and literatures into account. The domain restriction becomes clear only by comparing countries in one region to broader sets of cases.

**Dissemination and Diffusion of Democracy**

Our second argument on behalf of the importance of regions of the world focuses on regional demonstration and diffusion effects, once again related to democracy. A favorable
regional environment can enhance chances for democracy, while an unpropitious regional political environment might work against it.

To further explore the impact of the regional political environment on democracy, we undertake an analysis of regime changes to and from democracy in 19 Latin American countries for 1946-99. The dependent variable for all authoritarian regimes is whether the regime changes to a democracy or semi-democracy in a given year. The dependent variable for all democratic and semi-democratic regimes is whether it breaks down into authoritarianism in a given year. We use the trichotomous scale of democracy developed by Mainwaring, Brinks, and Pérez-Liñán in their chapter in this volume. This measure classifies regimes as democratic, semi-democratic, or authoritarian. We combine the democratic and semi-democratic cases into one category of competitively elected regimes and analyze what factors help explain transitions from authoritarianism to competitively elected regimes and what factors help explain breakdowns of competitively elected regimes.

We use two independent variables to examine regional effects in regime changes. One variable ("region") assesses the impact of Latin America’s regional political context on the likelihood of regime durability and change. We measured the regional political environment through the number of strictly democratic countries in the region every year, excluding the country in question if it was democratic. The coding for this independent variable was based on our trichotomous measure of democracy. The value of this variable theoretically ranges from zero, if none of the other 19 countries in the region (including Cuba) were democratic in a given year, to 19 if all 20 countries were democratic in that year. We exclude the country in question to avoid problems of endogeneity. We expected a more democratic regional environment to encourage democracy.
The other regional variable is US foreign policy. As a hegemonic power in the Americas, the US can affect the likelihood of transitions to competitive regimes and of regime breakdowns. We code a 0 for years in which US foreign policy subordinated democracy to other issues (1945-76, 1981-84) and 1 for years in which democracy was a priority.

As control variables, we use the level of economic development, class structure, economic performance, party system fragmentation, and party system polarization. We measure the level of development using per capita GDP in 1995 US dollars, following the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2001). We use the percentage of labor force in manufacturing as a gross indicator of the numerical leverage of the working class. Two variables measure a regime’s economic performance: change in per capita income (i.e., the rate of economic growth) and the consumer price index (inflation). For both growth and inflation, we use a short term measure (the previous year) and a medium-term measure (average growth or inflation of a given regime since its inception, for up to ten years).xxii To assess whether presidential regimes with fragmented party systems are more prone to breakdown, we created a dichotomous variable coded as 1 if the effective number of parties in the lower (or only) chamber was equal or greater than 3.0 in a given year. The effective number of parties (ENP) is a mathematical calculation that weights parties according to their size and indicates the level of party system fragmentation; an effective number of 3.0 or more parties clearly indicates multipartism.xxiii We employ a dichotomous indicator for theoretical reasons and because of missing information on the precise number of parties for Ecuador in the 1950s and Peru in the mid-1940s.xxiv To measure party system polarization for democratic and semi-democratic regimes, we used Coppedge’s (1998: 556--57) index of party systems in 11 countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela). His index adopts values between 0 (when all votes in an election are located at the center of the
political spectrum) and 100 (when all the votes are equally split between extreme left and extreme right parties). Unfortunately, scores for the remaining eight countries in our sample are not available.xxv

Our dataset covers a total of 19 countries over 54 years (1946--99), providing data for 1,026 country-years. We model regime change using rare event logistic regression (RELogit), a statistical technique designed for dependent variables in which the distribution of the dichotomous outcome is very uneven. This is the situation with regime changes. In our data set with 1026 regime-years, there are 53 regime changes (32 transitions to democracy or semi-democracy and 21 breakdowns).

Notwithstanding burgeoning interest in international diffusion and dissemination effects on democracy, our work on this issue has two distinctive features. This is one of the first papers to examine regional diffusion and dissemination effects in terms of the conventional regions of the world (see also Teorell and Hadenius 2004). Brinks and Coppedge (forthcoming) and Gleditsch (2002) looked at regional effects, but they measured region in terms of the geographic proximity of one country to the next. This is a reasonable proxy for measuring region, but our approach, looking at regions as more conventionally (though less precisely) understood, is also worthwhile. Second, most of this recent work has focused on the diffusion and dissemination of democracy (for an exception, see Sanchez 2003); we do this but also look at the diffusion and dissemination of authoritarianism.

Transitions to Democracy and Semi-Democracy

Between 1946 and 1999, 32 transitions from authoritarianism took place in the region. Table 2 presents two statistical models based on rare events logistic regression of transitions from authoritarian rule into democracy or semi-democracy for 1946-99. Years are coded 1 if a
transition took place, 0 otherwise. The first model includes structural and macroeconomic predictors of democracy and the regional political variable. The region variable is highly significant and has the expected positive coefficient; a larger number of democracies in the region in a given year enhanced the likelihood that any particular authoritarian regime would undergo a transition. It is the only statistically significant variable; other independent variables that other scholars have found to be important in explaining regime transitions, such as regime economic performance, had no effect. Model 2.2 treats US foreign policy separately from other regional environmental effects. The results are very similar to those obtained in Model 2.1; region remains the only significant variable.

Table 2

Regional effects thus help explain the wave of democratization that spread throughout Latin America from the late 1970s until the early 1990s. Based on the results presented in Model 2.1, we estimated the expected probability of a transition from authoritarian rule in two historical periods: 1946-77 and 1978-99. Assuming that all independent variables except for the regional context stayed at their historical means (i.e., for 1946-99), the expected probability of facing a transition for the typical authoritarian regime would be of 4.5% in 1946-77 (when the average number of democracies surrounding authoritarian enclaves was 4.4) and would rise to 8.7% in 1978-99 (when the average number of democracies was 7.1).

More than any other variable we quantified, a more favorable regional political environment helped boost the rate of transitions to competitive regimes after 1977. International factors only occasionally are the driving force behind a transition to democracy; in our large data set, Panama in 1990, with the US invasion that deposed an authoritarian regime and installed a democratically elected president, was the only unequivocal example. But international factors can significantly alter the odds for or against transitions. This finding is consistent with Brinks
and Coppedge’s (forthcoming) and Gleditsch’s (2002) conclusions based on larger samples of countries.

Because of our interest in regional specificities in this paper, it is notable that many previous analyses have argued that economic performance affects regime durability (Diamond 1999: 77-93; Diamond and Linz 1989: 44-46; Gasiorowski 1995; Geddes 1999; Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Lipset et al. 1993; Przeworski et al. 2000). We find no such effect for the durability of authoritarian regimes in Latin America. Thus, on this issue, too, it appears that Latin America has distinctive political dynamics.

**Democratic Breakdowns and Durability**

We are also interested in the impact of the regional political environment on regime change in the opposite direction, from democracy to authoritarianism. Our data set contains 525 regime-years of democracy and semi-democracy between 1946 and 1999. We have information covering all the independent variables discussed above for 517 cases (344 cases if we include the index of party system polarization, which is available for only 11 countries). During these 517 regime-years of democracy and semi-democracy, there were 21 regime breakdowns.

Table 3 shows the results of a rare events logistic regression predicting a change from democracy or semi-democracy to authoritarianism in any particular regime-year for the entire 1946-99 period. In Model 3.1, as anticipated, a more democratic regional environment reduces the chances of breakdown (p<.001). Model 3.2 includes Coppedge’s (1998) index of ideological polarization (available for 11 countries). The regional political environment remains important in explaining the likelihood of democratic breakdowns. Model 3.3 distinguishes US foreign policy from other effects of the regional political environment. Whereas the region variable was
significant for explaining transitions even when US foreign policy is treated separately, for breakdowns, the US policy variable is more important, a result consistent with Sanchez (2003).

Table 3

Changes in the regional context help explain the vastly greater stability of democratic and semi-democratic regimes after 1978. The regional context changed from an average of 4.2 democracies surrounding competitive regimes in 1946-77 to 9.2 in 1978-99. Taking Model 3.2 as the reference, and assuming that all other variables remained at their 1946-99 means while the region variable shifted from 4.2 to 9.2, the predicted probability that a given democracy or semi-democracy would break down in a particular year would have plummeted from 5.6% to 0.4%. No other variable has an impact that is nearly as great in explaining the increased stability of democratic regimes after 1978.

A more favorable regional political environment is (measured through either the region or the US policy variables) a key to understanding the sharp post-1978 reduction in the breakdown rate. Changes in the levels of the other independent variables did not have much effect on the predicted probability of a democratic breakdown. Once again, the regional political environment stands out as a central explanatory variable. One implication is that domestic and international influences jointly shape regime outcomes; comparative political scientists who work on regimes must take the regional political context into consideration.

Table 3 also indicates a regional specificity. Przeworski et al. (2000) showed that at a global level, democratic governments are more likely to endure at a higher per capita income level. Their finding was consistent with a much larger literature that argued that more developed countries were more likely to be democracies. A higher level of development, however, had no immunizing impact for democracy in Latin America. Democratic and semi-democratic regimes were vulnerable to breakdown at even fairly high levels of development. This finding is
consistent with O’Donnell’s argument (1973) that the more developed countries of South America were especially prone to bureaucratic authoritarianism in the 1960s and 1970s and also with our finding (see above) that in a wide income band, Latin American countries with a higher level of development were less likely to be democratic (see also Landman 1999).

**Why are There Regional Dissemination and Diffusion Effects?**

A growing body of literature has recognized the importance of dissemination and diffusion effects on political regimes (Gleditsch 2002; Gleditsch and Ward forthcoming) and of regional political influences in policy-making (Meseguer 2002; Weyland 2004). But what are the mechanisms through which regional dissemination and diffusion occurs? The statistical analysis above does not answer this question. Meseguer (2002) and Weyland (2004) have addressed this issue in relation to economic policy ideas, Pevehouse (2002a, 2002b, 2005) has examined how membership in regional organizations shapes diffusion of democracy; and Gleditsch (2002) and Gleditsch and Ward (forthcoming) have analyzed regional influences on democratization. Here we briefly mention three regional causal mechanisms in relation to waves of democracy and authoritarianism in Latin America: the dissemination of norms and ideas; the presence of transnational actors; and the policies of regional hegemons and international organizations. These mechanisms do not exhaust all possible explanations for region-wide trends, but they provide a theoretical foundation for the regional diffusion patterns found in the previous section.

First, the dissemination of norms and ideas affects the way domestic actors perceive their political interests and can thereby affect their regime preference and their political behavior. For example, the region-wide dissemination of anti-communist ideologies during the Cold War reinforced the willingness of some actors to support military coups in Latin America. The broad dissemination of pro-democratic norms in recent decades has raised the costs of coups. The
cross-national dissemination of norms has also inspired human rights activists to fight for restoring democracy where it does not exist (Htun 2003; Keck and Sikkink 1998). This dissemination of norms and ideas frames the way political actors perceive political regimes and their own interests and political preferences. The dissemination of norms can legitimize and empower some domestic groups at the expense of others.

Many channels of international dissemination and communication about politics are more powerful within than across regions. Some actors that have an important effect on political regimes (e.g., the Organization of American States, or OAS) function mainly or exclusively in a given region (Pevehouse 2002a, 2002b, 2005). In a region such as Latin America, a language common to most countries facilitates cross-national communication and helps explain why regional communication and dissemination of ideas is powerful, independently of cross-regional communication and dissemination.

A second mechanism through which diffusion occurs is that some international actors operate in many or all countries in the same region. Although these organizations have different impacts in different countries, their change in orientation over time can affect political regimes in different countries. For example, in Latin America, changes in the Catholic Church in many countries positively affected the regional political environment for democracy. The Church has traditionally been an actor of political import in most Latin American countries, and until the 1960s, it frequently sided with authoritarians. Since the 1970s, the Catholic Church has usually supported democratization (Huntington 1991: 74–85). Under the sway of the Second Vatican Council of 1962–65, the Church came to accept and promote democracy in most of the region. In Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Peru, and Nicaragua, the Church strengthened the coalition of forces that worked for a transition to democracy. Change in the Catholic Church affected prospects for democracy in other regions, but Latin America is the only overwhelmingly
Catholic region of the world, hence change in the Church affected Latin America more than other regions. Moreover, although the Catholic Church is global in scope, it has regional specificities that stem from a combination of responding to some regionally specific opportunities and challenges, a regional leadership organization (the Latin American Bishops’ Conference), and regional communication among theologians, priests, religious, and bishops.

A third mechanism of diffusion is that powerful external actors such as the US can affect the likelihood of coups and democratic transitions in a range of ways: 1) moral suasion that changes the attitudes and behavior of domestic actors; 2) symbolic statements that embolden some actors, strengthen their position, and weaken other actors; 3) sanctions against governments; 4) conspiracies against governments; 5) military actions that overthrow the regime and install a new one. In the first three kinds of influence, external actors shape regime change by influencing domestic actors; in the final one, external actors directly determine regime change. This final possibility has been the rare exception in Latin America, but external actors, especially the US government and since 1990, the Organization of American States, have frequently shaped the logic, costs, and benefits of domestic actors through the first three kinds of influence. By doing so, the US and OAS have significantly affected the regional political environment.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the US supported several coups and helped create an ideological environment in which conservative actors in Latin America believed that the US would not object if they fostered coups (Robinson 1996; Sanchez 2003). During most of the post-1977 period, the US has supported transitions to competitive regimes and has opposed breakdowns of such regimes. Its positions have raised the costs of coups to potential coup players. Under such circumstances, some players that would otherwise have probably supported coups have not done so. The threat of sanctions by the US and the OAS makes the expected
benefit-cost ratio of supporting a coup unfavorable. The US exerts much more influence in Latin America than in other regions of the world; its influence in Latin America is another reason for the existence of important regional influences in democratization.

Multilateral organizations such as the Organization of American States can also exert a region-wide influence on political regimes (Pevehouse 2002a, 2002b, 2005). Of course, this does not mean that their influence is homogeneous across all countries of the region.

Since 1991, the OAS has significantly influenced several political regime outcomes in Latin America. In 1991, the OAS passed Resolution 1080, which called for a meeting of the foreign ministers of the western hemisphere countries within the first few days of a democratic breakdown and legitimated OAS intervention in such cases. Resolution 1080 prompted OAS interventions in Haiti (1991), Peru (1992), Guatemala (1993), and Paraguay (1996). In the aftermath of approving Resolution 1080, in December 1992, the OAS approved the Washington Protocol, which enables the OAS General Assembly to approve suspending the membership of any member country that experiences a coup (Burrell and Shifter 2000; Perina 2000). Resolution 1080 raised the costs of a coup and in several crisis moments altered the calculations and behavior of domestic political actors. In Latin America, the threat of international sanctions against coup players was clear when coup mongers in Paraguay (1996) and Guatemala (1993) backed off when confronted with the likelihood of sanctions, and when Fujimori (Peru, 1992) responded to international pressures by restoring elections (Pevehouse 2005).

Democratic governments in Latin America have supported efforts to encourage democracy and to impose sanctions against authoritarian regimes. Collectively, NGOs, multilateral agencies, and the governments of Latin America, Western Europe, and North America have created a norm of disapproval of authoritarianism and support—ideological, if not
material—for democracy. These norms are coupled with sanctions that can hurt coup players’ interests.

Other subregional organizations also help to explain why diffusion occurs. In July 1996, the presidents of the Mercosur countries—Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Chile—signed an agreement stating that any member nation would be expelled if democracy broke down. Pressure from neighboring Mercosur nations helped avert a coup in Paraguay in April 1996. In an age of growing international economic integration, authoritarian governments now faced the possibility of economic sanctions such as those that crippled the economies of Panama under Noriega and Haiti after the military deposed Aristide. Together, the US, OAS, and Mercosur have raised the costs of coups and of retaining authoritarian rule.

CONCLUSION: REGIONS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Notwithstanding the traditional organization of comparative politics along regional lines, very little work has built a case for why regions are substantively important. In an excellent book, Gleditsch (2002) argued that regions are important in understanding world politics, especially international relations. We have extended this argument to comparative politics. Regions of the world are important in understanding such important political phenomena as the level of democracy and changes in political regimes.

Empirically, we have made this argument by looking at two different kinds of evidence. First, regional specificities are important in understanding political processes across regions (see also Bunce 1995, 1998, 2000). The impact of the level of development on democracy is different across regions. In the oil exporting countries of the Middle East, autocracies rule despite high levels of per capita income. In Latin America, per capita income has a distinctive non-monotonic impact on the level of democracy.
Second, regional dynamics are important in shaping prospects for democracy (Gleditsch 2002). Hence, it is impossible to understand regime change by focusing only on individual countries or only on global trends. Political regimes were traditionally a subject matter for comparative political scientists who focused on domestic processes, but regime dynamics are not exclusively domestically driven. Both because of regional specificities and because of regional influences, social scientists and historians must be attentive to the importance of regions in politics.

While advocating the importance of regions in comparative politics, we argue for some approaches to studying regions and against others. We reject the assumption that regions are relatively homogeneous, and we reject gross generalizations about regions as a whole unless there is empirical evidence to support them. Our approach looks at regional specificities and diffusion mechanisms, but it nevertheless treats the countries within the region as distinct. We treated each country differently by virtue of assigning each one a different score for every independent and dependent variable. For a region as heterogeneous as Latin America, an assumption of homogeneity hinders understanding. It is possible (though in social science research it has been uncommon) to acknowledge profound heterogeneity within a region of the world and to simultaneously treat regions as important. Equally important, the only way to verify whether a region has specific dynamics is to compare it with other regions or with some broader set of cases.

Methodologically, our work on regional specificities lies between two extreme positions in political science. On the one hand, our emphasis on regional specificities removes us from universalizing approaches to political science that deny the importance of context. Generalizations are important, but political scientists also should be attentive to causal heterogeneity (Hall 2003; Ragin 2000: 88–119) and contextual differences (Adock and Collier
Some universalistic approaches to social science claim to be more scientific than other approaches (Bates 1997; Ferejohn and Satz 1995), but an awareness of causal heterogeneity is fully consistent with rigor and can be superior to universalistic claims in advancing understanding of key issues (Beck and Katz 2004; Luke 2004; Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). If a casual mechanism holds in some circumstances but not others, social scientists best be aware of this fact.

On the other hand, an examination of regions also separates us from individualizing approaches, which pursue a detailed understanding of every case. By treating (through the quantitative analysis) each country in a given year as having different attributes, in one respect we share with individualizing approaches an awareness of the importance of national differences. But our interest in trends beyond a single country and in cross-regional differences signals a profound departure from individualizing social science research.

Social science should be built on a diversity of research strategies, some stressing generalization above specificities (though such work must also be attentive to some specificities), others paying greater attention to specificities while working within an understanding of broader comparative and theoretical conceptions (Fishman 2005). Different units of analysis in social science contribute to the larger picture of how politics and society function. Just as large N global analysis help and case studies understand this larger picture, so, for some research questions, does a focus on regions. Indeed, it is impossible to grasp some important political dynamics without awareness of regional specificities and influences.

Within this conception of social science, one of the least developed strategies in studies on political regimes (and in other fields as well) is an intermediate N strategy. Region-wide studies of democratization that are sensitive to intra-regional differences are uncommon (for an exception, see Bratton and van de Walle 1997). Both the intermediate N strategy and the
regional research design, which in principle are discrete but in our case are combined, are useful compliments to the large N and small N studies that overwhelmingly dominate democratization studies.
ENDNOTES

* Valérie Bunce, Michael Coppedge, Frances Hagopian, Mala Htun, Wendy Hunter, Gerardo Munck, Susan Stokes, Kurt Weyland, and seminar participants at the Pompeu Fabra University gave us valuable criticisms on earlier drafts of this paper.

i Munck and Snyder coded all 319 articles published in *Comparative Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, and *World Politics* between 1989 and 2004. Western Europe received the greatest attention (22 percent of the articles), followed by Latin America (16 percent). Three quarters of the articles dealt with five countries or less (Munck and Snyder 2005, Tables 5 and 12).

ii For example, the *European Journal of Political Research*, *Latin American Politics and Society*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, and *West European Politics*.

iii We agree with Bates that traditional area studies work that focuses on one country or region without addressing broader theories and literatures has serious limitations.

iv This paper is part of an ongoing project on regional trends in democracy and authoritarianism in Latin America since 1945. In this paper, we ask a methodological question germane to the project as a whole: Why focus on a region of the world?

v The literature on dissemination and diffusion is more developed than the scant literature on regional specificities. International (Boix and Stokes 2003; Gasiorowski and Power 1998; Przeworski et al. 2000) as well as regional (Bernhard, Reenock, and Nordstrom 2003; Gasiorowski 1995; Gasiorowski and Power 1998; Pevehouse 2002a; Starr 1991) diffusion effects are increasingly included as control variables in democratization models.

vi In the large-N literature cited in this paper, only Coppedge (1997), Gasiorowski and Power (1998), and Ross (2001) used regional dummies in their analysis.
For arguments similar to Bunce’s, see Howard (2003); Kwon (2004); Linz and Stepan (1996); McFaul (2002). Notwithstanding important convergences between Bunce’s arguments and ours, there are differences in our approaches. Whereas Bunce made her argument on the basis of qualitative cross-regional comparisons, we make ours on the basis of quantitative data. It is possible through either quantitative or qualitative approaches to come to the central argument of this paper: that regions are important in politics. More important, Bunce looks mainly at the regime legacies of post-communist rule and only secondarily at regional influences and specificities in a geographic sense; we focus on region as a geographic construct. If the type of authoritarian regime that existed prior to a democratic transition is the key independent variable that explains different outcomes, then region is merely a proxy for this antecedent regime type. That is, the effect of regions would be spurious.

For a more nuanced cultural approach to regional specificities, see Inglehart and Carballo (1997), who are more attuned to intra-regional differences than many culturalists.

A partial exception to this consensus is Acemoglu et al. (forthcoming), who used fix effects models. Controlling for unspecified country-specific factors, the level of development did not help account for changes in the level of democracy.

Landman (1999) and Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2003) tested for and found regional specificities for Latin America. Ross (2001) argued that there are regional specificities for the Middle East. Coppedge (1997) tested for regional specificities and argued that they do not exist.

The Polity score is computed by subtracting the autocracy (0-10) score from the democracy (0-10) score. These scores reflect the competitiveness and openness of executive recruitment, the competitiveness and regulation of political participation, and the constraints on the chief executive. Revised Polity scores recode missing values to conventional scores in the (-10, 10) range. Regime transitions (coded as -88 in the original dataset) are linearly prorated across the
span of the transition; cases of foreign intervention (-66) are treated as system missing; and cases of “interregnum” or anarchy (-77), are converted to a “neutral” score of 0 (Marshall and Jaggers 2002, 15-16).

xii Elsewhere we modeled this non-linear function using a cubic and a fourth-degree polynomial (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2003). Problems of collinearity prevented this strategy in the present analysis.

xiii Information on British colonial past and social fractionalization was originally collected for the project “The Effects of US Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building” with support of USAID (Finkel, Pérez-Liñán, and Seligson 2005).

xiv See Bartels (1996) for a discussion of how quantitative social science can pursue awareness of causal heterogeneity.

xv Along similar lines, Bates (1997: 166) argued that “social scientists seek to identify lawful regularities, which … must not be context bound.” Another prominent example of a sweeping universalizing claim at odds with the importance of contextual specificity (or causal heterogeneity) is King, Keohane, and Verba (1994: 93): “The notion of unit homogeneity (or the less demanding assumption of constant causal effects) lies at the base of all scientific research.” Contrary to their assertion, considerable quantitative research, by using interaction terms and exponential terms, demonstrates that scientific research does not depend on unit homogeneity or on constant causal effects. For a fourth prominent claim that social science should rest on universal arguments, see Ferejohn and Satz (1995).

xvi In other words, where a voter lives has indirect (i.e., mediated thought the impact on values) as well as direct effects on voting. See Shanks and Miller (1990) for a convincing argument that social scientists should be attentive to the indirect effects and should avoid collapsing direct and
indirect effects into the same equation (as King implicitly does) to conclude that a demographic variable (such as class, sex, or domicile) has no impact.

xvii This is an ideal, but not one that can be easily achieved. Even if ideally we might be able to identify all sources of regional specificity and treat them as nomothetic variables, in practice, the factors that make Latin America different from other regions are too path-dependent to fully disentangle. See Hall (2003) for a discussion of how path dependence challenges conventional assumptions of causality.

xviii One obvious reason for Latin American specificities is the impact of the United States on the region. Latin America has other specificities that could help account for the distinctive dynamics underscored in this paper, including greater inequalities than any other region of the world.

xix Universal findings hold for most representative samples of the same population (that is, the relevant set of cases). But the definition of the population is itself an analytical task (Ragin 2000: 43-63). For instance, “universal” may simply mean all US voters in the second half of the 20th century.

xx For a good example of how presumably universal findings may be historically bounded, see Boix and Stokes (2003).

xxi For more details, see Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2005.

xxii The impact of inflation on regime changes should be non-linear, given the existence of many episodes of three and four digit inflation rates in our Latin American sample (Gasiorowski 1995, 1998). For this reason, we used the natural logarithm of the inflation rate. The actual formula employed was ln[1+i(t-1)] for any case of i≥0 and −ln[1+|i(t-1)|] for i<0 (i.e., deflation), where i is the annual percent change in the consumer price index (Gasiorowski 2000: 326).

xxiii The formula for the effective number of parties is 1/sum(p^2), where p is the proportion of seats obtained by each party (Laakso and Taagepera 1979).

xxiv A threshold of 3.0 is a stronger indicator of multipartism than a lower number, but a 2.5 threshold did not alter the overall results.
For operational reasons, we assumed that ideological polarization could change at each election but remained constant between elections.

There were some ignominious exceptions to this generalization. For example, the Church in Argentina and Guatemala supported repressive authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and early 1980s.

If the Catholic Church were the only such actor that had an impact across several Latin American countries and if it had an equal impact in countries outside Latin America, it would be more appropriate to think of this as a Church rather than a regional impact. In reality, several important actors had a cross-national impact within Latin America.

The search for universal theory can sometimes hinder understanding in the social sciences (Green and Shapiro 1994). Downs (1957) implicitly presented his theory of party motivation (winning votes) and behavior (adopting ideological positions that enhance the capacity to win votes) in a universalistic way. Subsequent innovations improved on his work in countless ways but most subsequent work in spatial modeling of party competition retained the idea that all parties focus on winning votes or seats; they maximize their utility in an electoral game. However, in contexts of unstable democracy where some actors might prefer authoritarian rule, parties might sacrifice votes and seats so as to maximize their preferred outcome in a regime game—either to preserve democracy or to thwart it. In these contexts, it is impossible to understand parties’ objectives and behavior through analysis focused exclusively on electoral competition (Mainwaring 2003). The original universalistic theory could conceivably be revised in a more comprehensive manner, but it would have to be a more context-dependent universalistic theory.

Case studies can make valuable contributions to social science. For arguments about contextual specificity and how to balance it with some generalization, see Adock and Collier
(2001: 534–536); Verba (1967). Fishman (2005) persuasively argues that at the core of Max Weber’s approach to social science was a balance between the effort to build general theories and a keen awareness of the specificities of different cases—a position we fully endorse.

Many works focus on differences across a few cases in a given region, but few simultaneously take a region as a whole and evince a strong interest in intra-regional differences.

Region: Country (N=Years in sample).

Asia (including Oceania): Afghanistan (20), Armenia (12), Australia (52), Azerbaijan (10), Bangladesh (32), Bhutan (22), Cambodia (9), China (50), Fiji (33), Georgia (12), India (52), Indonesia (42), Japan (52), Kazakhstan (12), Korea, Republic of (49), Kyrgyzstan (12), Laos (18), Malaysia (45), Mongolia (21), Nepal (42), New Zealand (52), Pakistan (52), Papua New Guinea (28), Philippines (52), Singapore (38), Solomon Islands (21), Sri Lanka (52), Taiwan (46), Tajikistan (12), Thailand (52), Timor Leste (1), Turkmenistan (12), Uzbekistan (12), Vietnam (18).

Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: Albania (22), Belarus (12), Bulgaria (22), Croatia (12), Czech Republic (10), Estonia (12), Hungary (42), Latvia (12), Lithuania (12), Macedonia (12), Moldova (12), Poland (32), Romania (42), Russian Federation (13), Serbia and Montenegro (6), Slovakia (10), Slovenia (11), Ukraine (12).

Latin America: Argentina (52), Bolivia (52), Brazil (52), Chile (51), Colombia (52), Costa Rica (52), Cuba (10), Dominican Republic (51), Ecuador (51), El Salvador (52), Guatemala (52), Haiti (42), Honduras (52), Mexico (52), Nicaragua (52), Panama (52), Paraguay (51), Peru (51), Uruguay (52), Venezuela (52).

Middle East and North Africa: Algeria (41), Bahrain (21), Egypt (52), Iran (47), Iraq (29), Israel (52), Jordan (48), Kuwait (35), Libya (26), Morocco (46), Oman (41), Saudi Arabia (33), Sudan (42), Syria (42), Tunisia (41), Turkey (52), United Arab Emirates (28), Yemen (12).

North America and the British Caribbean: Canada (52), Guyana (37), Jamaica (43), Trinidad and Tobago (41), United States of America (52).

Sub-Saharan Africa: Angola (27), Benin (42), Botswana (37), Burkina Faso (42), Burundi (39), Cameroon (42), Central African Republic (42), Chad (42), Comoros (27), Congo, D.R. (Zaire) (41), Congo, Republic of the (42), Cote d'Ivoire (42), Djibouti (15), Equatorial Guinea (34), Eritrea (10), Ethiopia (52), Gabon (42), Gambia (37), Ghana (44), Guinea (43), Guinea-Bissau (29), Kenya (40), Lesotho (37), Liberia (41), Madagascar (42), Malawi (39), Mali (42), Mauritania (42), Mauritius (34), Mozambique (27), Namibia (14), Niger (42), Nigeria (42), Rwanda (42), Senegal (42), Sierra Leone (42), Somalia (29), South Africa (52), Swaziland (32), Tanzania (41), Togo (42), Uganda (39), Zambia (39), Zimbabwe (33).

Western and Southern Europe: Austria (52), Belgium (52), Cyprus (42), Denmark (52), Finland (52), France (52), Germany (32), Greece (51), Ireland (52), Italy (52), Netherlands (52), Norway (52), Portugal (52), Spain (52), Sweden (51), Switzerland (52), United Kingdom (52).
Table 1. Models of Regional Causal Heterogeneity

<table>
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<td>Intercept</td>
<td>Baseline b00</td>
<td>-9.27 (1.47)</td>
<td>-8.96 (2.09)</td>
<td>-1.06 (2.92)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa b01</td>
<td>-3.85 (1.83)</td>
<td>-8.28 (2.38)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North America and British Caribbean b02</td>
<td>-4.22 (3.08)</td>
<td>3.03 (3.71)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America b03</td>
<td>0.80 (1.87)</td>
<td>-4.83 (2.57)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa b04</td>
<td>-6.90 (1.90)</td>
<td>-10.58 (2.39)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asia (including Oceania) b05</td>
<td>-4.43 (1.63)</td>
<td>-6.77 (2.26)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe b06</td>
<td>-5.71 (2.16)</td>
<td>-3.88 (2.88)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Religious Fractionalization b07</td>
<td>1.67 (2.41)</td>
<td>1.00 (2.17)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnic Fractionalization b08</td>
<td>-1.63 (2.02)</td>
<td>-1.02 (1.82)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Former British Colony b09</td>
<td>3.62 (1.04)</td>
<td>3.52 (0.92)</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Baseline b10</td>
<td>0.42 (0.04)</td>
<td>0.46 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.24 (0.19)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa b11</td>
<td>-2.03 (0.54)</td>
<td>0.62 (0.77)</td>
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<td>North America and British Caribbean b12</td>
<td>0.53 (0.28)</td>
<td>2.03 (0.52)</td>
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<td>Latin America b13</td>
<td>-2.30 (0.46)</td>
<td>0.14 (0.85)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Middle East and North Africa b14</td>
<td>-0.59 (0.13)</td>
<td>-0.34 (0.26)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asia (including Oceania) b15</td>
<td>0.06 (0.09)</td>
<td>0.32 (0.27)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe b16</td>
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<td>-0.03 (0.82)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP2</td>
<td>Baseline b20</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.00)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.00)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa b21</td>
<td>0.16 (0.08)</td>
<td>-0.06 (0.08)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North America and British Caribbean b22</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.01)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America b23</td>
<td>0.17 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.09)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa b24</td>
<td>0.02 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asia (including Oceania) b25</td>
<td>0.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe b26</td>
<td>-0.04 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.07)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Predictors</td>
<td>Growth (t-1) b3</td>
<td>-0.97 (0.74)</td>
<td>-0.89 (0.74)</td>
<td>-0.43 (0.32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population (ln, thousands) b4</td>
<td>0.03 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.36 (0.18)</td>
<td>0.20 (0.24)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diffusion (World-Wide) b5</td>
<td>0.16 (0.01)</td>
<td>0.16 (0.01)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.02)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Diffusion (Regional) b6</td>
<td>0.10 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.11 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariance Parameters</td>
<td>Variance of Level 1 Residual e0</td>
<td>12.36 (0.23)</td>
<td>12.13 (0.23)</td>
<td>25.03 (2.86)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Variance of the intercept Ut</td>
<td>26.16 (3.06)</td>
<td>22.73 (2.79)</td>
<td>6.50 (2.95)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rho ρ</td>
<td>0.93 (0.01)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>R² (Predicted, Polity)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.790</td>
<td>0.794</td>
<td>0.664</td>
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<td>Proportional Reduction in Error (Level 1)</td>
<td>0.325</td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td>0.424</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportional Reduction in Error (Level 2)</td>
<td>0.332</td>
<td>0.420</td>
<td>0.379</td>
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<td>N=5745</td>
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</table>

Notes: Dependent variable is Polity IV scale. **Bold** indicates that coefficients are significant at the .05 level. The reported R² is the square of the correlation between the predicted values of each model and the observed values for the dependent variable.

Figure 1. Regional Heterogeneity: Four Hypothetical Cases
Middle East and N. Africa: Regional environment 30% democratic
Western Europe: Regional environment 30% democratic
Latin America: Regional environment 10% democratic
Latin America: Regional environment 60% democratic
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>2.1</th>
<th>2.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per capita GDP (t-1)</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.214)</td>
<td>(0.216)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force in industry (%)</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
<td>(0.068)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth (t-1)</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.057)</td>
<td>(0.057)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation (ln, t-1)</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.206)</td>
<td>(0.211)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth (last 10 years)</td>
<td>-0.169</td>
<td>-0.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation (ln, last 10 years)</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
<td>-0.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.277)</td>
<td>(0.289)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>0.255***</td>
<td>0.198**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td>(0.098)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Policy</td>
<td>0.438</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.503)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-5.603***</td>
<td>-5.314***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.080)</td>
<td>(1.124)</td>
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</table>

Entries are Rare Event logistic regression coefficients (robust standard errors adjusted for clustering by country). Pseudo $R^2$ corresponds to standard logistic model with equivalent specification.

* Significant at .1 level
** Significant at .05 level
*** Significant at .01 level
<table>
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<th>Model Variable</th>
<th>3.1</th>
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<th>3.3</th>
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<tr>
<td>Per capita GDP (t-1)</td>
<td>0.317**</td>
<td>0.394**</td>
<td>0.298**</td>
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<td>(0.136)</td>
<td>(0.158)</td>
<td>0.142</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labor force industry (%)</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
<td>-0.103*</td>
<td>-0.087*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
<td>(0.053)</td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Growth (t-1)</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0.045</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.043)</td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inflation (ln, t-1)</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>-0.221</td>
<td>0.209</td>
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<td>(0.212)</td>
<td>(0.170)</td>
<td>(0.291)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth (last 10 years)</td>
<td>-0.121**</td>
<td>-0.137*</td>
<td>-0.091*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.055)</td>
<td>(0.076)</td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation (ln, last 10 ys.)</td>
<td>0.349</td>
<td>0.559***</td>
<td>0.466*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.229)</td>
<td>(0.143)</td>
<td>(0.278)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>-0.601***</td>
<td>-0.561***</td>
<td>-0.233</td>
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<td>(0.109)</td>
<td>(0.161)</td>
<td>(0.220)</td>
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<td>Multipartism</td>
<td>1.210***</td>
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<td>1.082**</td>
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<td>(0.434)</td>
<td>(0.617)</td>
<td>(0.439)</td>
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<td>Semi-Democracy</td>
<td>2.546***</td>
<td>3.105***</td>
<td>2.161***</td>
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<td>(0.382)</td>
<td>(0.546)</td>
<td>(0.374)</td>
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<td>IP (Polarization Index)</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. Policy</td>
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<td>-2.861**</td>
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<td>(1.449)</td>
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<td>-1.966**</td>
<td>-3.312***</td>
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<td>(0.723)</td>
<td>(0.860)</td>
<td>(0.933)</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>517</td>
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<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.3028</td>
<td>0.3256</td>
<td>0.3277</td>
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</table>

RELogit coefficients (standard errors adjusted for clustering by country). Pseudo R² corresponds to standard logistic model with equivalent specification.

* Significant at .1 level; ** at .05 level; *** at .01 level

References


Levitsky, Steven and Lucan Way. Forthcoming. “Linkage versus Leverage: Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change.” *Comparative Politics*.


