Foreign Pressure and the Politics of Autocratic Survival
Book Proposal

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As events in the Middle East and North Africa unfolded after the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, policy makers and scholars have grappled with how democracies should deal with dictatorships. Can international pressure from democratic countries reduce repression and encourage democracy in autocratic countries? Looking beyond the Middle East and North Africa, what foreign policy strategies should democracies use to engage dictatorial regimes in Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and Zimbabwe? Should democracies coerce dictators through economic pressure? Should governments and international financial institutions use aid as a carrot to coax dictators to behave better? Do international campaigns that name and shame repressive leaders alter politics in targeted countries? Do human rights prosecutions deter dictators from leaving power? Will military intervention increase the prospects of a democratic transition or simply destabilize the regime to see it replaced by another dictatorship?

Democracies and international organizations use a variety of coercive foreign policy instruments in attempts to shape the behavior of autocratic regimes. For example, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently pledged that foreign aid would become a “crucial component of American foreign policy and a signature element of smart power.”\(^1\) For over a decade, the United Nations pursued sanctions against Iraq seeking to destabilize President Saddam Hussein’s regime. Now foreign ministers grapple with sanctions targeting the Iranian regime and leaders in Syria. In response to repression against civilians in Sudan’s Darfur region, international organizations rolled out a naming and shaming campaign\(^2\) which resulted in an International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment against the Sudanese president for crimes against humanity. The ICC was uncharacteristically quick to issue arrest warrants for Muammar Qaddafi and two close associates in response to the Libyan regime’s violence towards civilians in 2011. However, we still know very little about whether these foreign policy tools influence authoritarian survival. To date, there is no systematic analysis of whether and how foreign pressure influences politics in these countries.

The primary tools of coercive foreign policy more often than not target dictatorships. Since 1960, the majority of foreign aid from wealthy countries and multilateral organizations has flowed to autocracies. Over three-quarters of all sanctions since 1990 have targeted dictatorships, while almost all human rights naming and shaming campaigns in the past three decades are directed at actors in autocratic countries. Similarly, hostile foreign military interventions by democratic countries principally target dictatorships. Despite decades of foreign policy focusing on autocracies, only 43 percent of the world’s population in 2011 lived in fully free and democratic countries.\(^3\) Another measure of democracy indicates that only 57 percent of countries had democratic institutions in 2010, leaving a significant share of the world’s nations under some form of non-democratic rule.\(^4\) Thus, authoritarian government persists in many parts of the
world even though democracy promotion has become an accepted foreign policy objective in most of the international community (McFaul, 2004).

This project examines how foreign policy tools such as economic sanctions, foreign aid, human rights shaming and prosecution, and military intervention influence the survival of dictatorships. We begin with the simple premise that autocratic leaders want to stay in power. The greatest price a dictator can pay – short of losing his life – is to be removed from power. Whether foreign pressure is successful in its proximate goal, such as deterring nuclear investment or spurring democratic reforms, depends on the extent to which foreign pressure can impose political costs on the regime in power. To assess foreign policy effectiveness, we first need to know whether foreign pressure can destabilize autocracies. If these tools can impose political costs on dictatorial regimes, then our analysis will help us understand the domestic political contexts in which these different foreign policy options are most likely to succeed.

We build on this initial premise by further observing that even though all dictators want to stay in power, at least in the short term, they pursue a variety of strategies to do this. The political institutions they construct, the support coalitions they form, and their relationships with political parties and the military vary considerably. Party-based regimes build lasting institutions with relatively large and deep support coalitions. They frequently rotate leadership, and in some cases win elections without resorting to fraud or repression. Even after they lose their monopoly on power, they often compete in multiparty elections and sometimes win power anew, as the recent election of a candidate from the long-ruling autocratic party in Mexico illustrates. Military regimes typically have the greatest capacity for repression, increasingly rule with a narrow coalition of supports, and are susceptible to splits from within the military itself. Still other dictators are successful in consolidating power: they create their own personal political party, weaken the military, and face few institutional checks on their power. These differences have implications for the strategies authoritarian rulers use to stay in power and how their regimes end. To understand when foreign pressure is likely to work, we must examine the interaction between different types of foreign pressure and these domestic political institutions.

The core empirical part of this manuscript addresses the survival of both autocratic leaders and autocratic regimes. We discuss how these concepts differ and why examining the stability of each is important. Destabilizing a particular leader may be helpful insofar as it creates external pressure for this leader to change policy. However, destabilizing leaders is not the same as regime change. In some autocratic countries, a deposed leader is simply replaced by another selected from the same group of elites. Thus, while international pressure may have a short-term effect, if the targeted leader is simply replaced by another from the same elite supporters, this pressure may not bring lasting change.

Regime change typically means substantially altering the group of elites who have access to power. For example, when Islamic revolutionaries overthrew Reza Shah Pahlavi in Iran in 1979, the group that had access to power and the ability to select leaders changed dramatically. One authoritarian regime fell and another took its place. In 1997, Laurent Kabila and a foreign-backed group of rebels marched across what was then known as Zaire in Central Africa and kicked out the long-time dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko. The departing leader’s family and close circle of elite supporters fled across the Congo River to Brazzaville. Kabila’s new government had mostly new faces but was no more democratic than the previous regime. As some critics of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq have pointed out, toppling a dictatorship does not necessarily
mean democracy will follow. These are instances of regime change, but they are not democratization.

Authoritarian regimes sometimes democratize. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, many Soviet bloc countries democratized. Military rule in numerous Latin American countries during the 1970s and 1980s ended in peaceful transitions to democracy. Many dictatorships in sub-Saharan Africa opened up their politics by holding multiparty elections in the 1990s in the wake of poor economic performance and declining foreign support. These regime changes entailed replacing the group of ruling elites with democratically elected civilian leaders.

Thus autocratic regime collapse can result in one of two outcomes: a transition to a democracy or a transition to a subsequent authoritarian regime. Understanding how foreign pressure affects both types of outcomes is crucial to pinpointing when foreign pressure is likely to lead to democratization instead of another dictatorship.

Foreign policy tools can influence leadership turnover in dictatorships as well as both types of regime transition. Therefore, we consider three dependent variables in this project. All three concepts of authoritarian failure are costly to those who lose power. But different foreign policy tools may be more effective for producing one type of failure than another, depending on the institutional structure of the regime and the likely post-tenure fate of its leaders. To understand the usefulness of particular foreign policy tools, policy makers want to know if foreign pressure is likely to simply lead to leadership turnover – for example Dmitry Medvedev replacing Vladmir Putin as President of Russia in 2008 – or if it can destabilize the entire regime. And once an incumbent autocratic regime collapses, we want to know if the subsequent regime is likely to be a democracy.

We show that foreign aid is most effective at promoting democracy when targeted toward dictatorships with relatively broad and deep support coalitions. Aid buys reform in these regimes because liberalizing political reform is less costly to the autocratic elite, who stand a greater chance of retaining some power after a democratic transition than their counterparts in other types of autocracies. Sanctions can destabilize authoritarian leaders, but only in highly personalist regimes because these autocracies are the most reliant on economic rents to maintain their support coalition. Though destabilizing, sanctions rarely lead to transitions to democracy. Human rights shaming has little direct effect on authoritarian leaders, though it can decrease the flow of international aid and trade in some regimes and provide assistance to nascent pro-democracy movements, particularly in dictatorships where democracy has prevailed in the past. Further, while some critics argue that human rights prosecutions deter dictators from leaving power, we find that this logic only works for personalist dictatorships. In other autocracies, human rights prosecutions are unlikely to entrench autocratic regimes. Finally, we show that military interventions targeting personalist regimes destabilize these autocracies, but these regimes are likely to be replaced by new dictatorships. On the other hand, destabilizing foreign intervention targeting military dictatorships is associated with an increased risk of democratic transition.

These conclusions suggest that foreign aid and economic sanctions can impose political costs on some dictators and thus change the behavior of certain types of authoritarian regimes. Consequently, policy makers should carefully consider the domestic political costs of democratic liberalization when using aid to buy reform; and states using economic sanctions to pressure dictators should assess the extent to which the targeted regime depends on economic rents to retain the support of their core constituency. Human rights
prosecutions are more likely to entrench autocratic rule in countries where the elites have weak domestic institutional guarantees of post-exit power and thus few tools to evade punishment for past crimes. Finally, the political consequences of using military force against dictators varies considerably across autocracies; in countries where dictators have weak institutions, destabilizing intervention is more likely to lead to a new dictatorship than to a democratic transition.

Audience

This project will be of interest to both policy makers and scholars concerned about many foreign policy outcomes: regime change, democratization, human rights protection, the spread of nuclear weapons, trade policy, economic reform, and even conflict initiation. We anticipate the specific academic audience to include scholars of international political economy and comparative foreign policy and scholars of international law, particularly those interested in international organizations, human rights, economic sanctions, foreign aid, and military intervention.

Our project addresses issues of central concern to foreign policy makers in government and international organizations. We examine how common foreign policy tools influence the main levers of power in authoritarian countries, and in doing so, shed light on how this pressure translates into political costs borne by targeted regimes. While many policy makers are concerned about proximate goals, such as deterring nuclear investment or reversing human rights abuses, our project puts these issues in the context of authoritarian political survival. For example, in the debate over whether sanctions “work”, policy makers and scholars frequently skip right to questions about how economic pressure will affect one particular policy area, such as electoral reform or nuclear inspections. Our analysis provides the tools to assess the likelihood of success in these proximate goals by first answering the larger question of how foreign pressure influences authoritarian survival.

Our findings will be of interest to scholars who study domestic politics in low- and middle-income countries because authoritarian survival matters for much of the developing world. While students of democracy want to know how international factors affect the prospects of democratization, we also examine the larger question of regime stability. Internal political instability in authoritarian contexts can influence a wide array of outcomes – from war and civil conflict to trade policies and environmental change. The central question in the burgeoning literature on authoritarianism is why and how these regimes change and fail, and our project provides the first systematic analysis of how foreign pressure affects regime survival. We thus expect this book to draw interest from the comparative politics audience, including those with sub-field interests in authoritarian politics, democratization, and foreign sources of regime change.

We have written the manuscript in a style that appeals to a wide readership. Each chapter draws upon theories in comparative politics and international political economy; and we discuss case studies of particular autocratic countries in each of the substantive chapters, providing numerous historical examples to illustrate our argument. The statistical evidence is presented in an accessible format for a broad audience by providing graphs for descriptive statistics and plots of substantive outcomes based on advanced statistical analysis. Advanced methods to demonstrate the robustness of the empirical analysis are placed in tables in appendices. Our intent is to make this book accessible to non-specialists and experts alike.
Scholars have addressed how many international factors affect the survival of political leaders and regime change outcomes such as democratization. For example, Pevehouse (2005) looks at the role of international organizations in the process of democratization. Goemans and Chiozza (2011) offer a systematic analysis of how war affects the survival of leaders, both democratic and authoritarian. Others examine the diffusion of democracy (Gleditsch and Ward, 2006) and describe the rise of democracy since the mid-1970s (Huntington, 1991). Case study compendiums have examined various international dimensions of democratization in particular countries (Whitehead, 1996). However, none of these studies examine how specific tools of foreign policy influence autocratic regime survival.

Of the foreign policy tools we examine, economic sanctions is the most well trod. As the number of new sanctions episodes initiated has significantly increased in the past few decades, many scholars have studied how they work in practice. In the Hufbauer et al. (2007) data set, however, over three-quarters of the episodes that started since 1990 targeted autocracies. Despite their continued use as a tool of foreign policy, there is little consensus as to whether sanctions can be effective in destabilizing authoritarian rulers (Van Bergeijk, 1989; Haas, 1997; Mueller and Mueller, 1999; Nurnberger, 2003). In fact, the most recent empirical research finds evidence that sanctions may only be effective against democracies and are unlikely to destabilize authoritarian leaders (Lektzian and Souva, 2007; Marinov, 2005; Nooruddin, 2002). Foreign aid, human rights shaming, and military intervention have also borne scrutiny as international sources of political change (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse and Sikkink, 1999; Carothers, 1999; Peceny, 1999).

None of this research, however, looks specifically at authoritarian survival, nor does it consider how domestic politics varies across different autocratic contexts. The only projects that do this from an international relations perspective are Weeks (2012) and Frantz and Ezrow (2011). These books look at how different autocratic regime types affect the likelihood of war in non-democratic settings. Their work comes closest to ours in terms of analytic perspective, but it focuses on international conflict initiation and participation.

Our central concern is autocratic survival, and we emphasize how different types of autocratic regimes rule. This puts us firmly within the authoritarian literature in comparative politics, but our work is the first in this tradition to conduct a systematic analysis of the role of international factors such as foreign aid, economic sanctions, human rights regimes, and military intervention. Seminal works address broad themes of authoritarian durability, and more recent books have looked at specific cases (Moore, 1966; Huntington, 1968; Magaloni, 2006; Brownlee, 2007; Greene, 2010; Slater, 2010; Blaydes, 2011). Recent work in authoritarian politics focuses on domestic explanations of authoritarian survival. Gandhi (2008) examines domestic political institutions, such as political parties and legislatures, to explain authoritarian survival; and Svolik (forthcoming) addresses how these institutions affect power-sharing and accountability among elites. Levitsky and Way (2010) examine competitive authoritarianism in 35 countries to explain how structural characteristics, such as international linkage and leverage, affect the prospects of democratic transition and consolidation. Their analysis, however, excludes the vast array of authoritarian regimes that do not hold semi-competitive elections, leaving out some of the most repressive regimes. Our project is similar to Levitsky’s and Way’s because both examine international factors and democracy. However, our manuscript examines all types of autocratic failure – not just democratization – and analyzes the effect of specific foreign policy tools.
Chapter outline

Chapter 1: Introduction (10,600 words)

In this chapter we show that many countries and international organizations use democracy promotion as a cornerstone of their foreign policy. We argue that the democracy promotion policy debate boils down to the question of how states and international organizations can effectively use foreign policy instruments to deal with authoritarian governments. We then introduce the main foreign policy tools we examine: foreign aid, economic sanctions, human rights shaming, and military intervention. We describe the use of foreign pressure in various authoritarian settings and compare the incidence of foreign pressure to the use of military intervention against autocratic regimes since 1946.

Chapter 2: Foreign Pressure in Authoritarian Regimes (15,600 words)

The second chapter begins with a brief review of the literature on authoritarianism. We introduce the regime classification we use throughout the book and describe the main characteristics of each authoritarian regime type with respect to elite dynamics, coalition formation, and the structure of the leader’s incentives. We then examine different types of failure outcomes and discuss the strategies distinct types of authoritarian regimes employ to stay in power, in particular spending and repression. We introduce the main dependent variables – leader and regime failure – and explain how they differ. We then briefly discuss the literature on how foreign factors influence transitions to democracy.

Chapter 3: Foreign Aid and Regime Change (20,300 words)

This chapter examines how foreign aid affects authoritarian regime change and leader survival. We focus on the domestic political incentives authoritarian leaders face when they receive foreign aid that comes with political conditions. We begin with the observation that political reform in recipient countries is more costly to some authoritarian leaders than to others. We argue that the prospects of winning competitive (or semi-competitive) elections is a useful way to think about these political costs, and suggest that authoritarian regimes with broad distributional coalitions and deep political networks will be the most competitive. These factors make the trade of aid for political reform less costly to authoritarian leaders.

We focus on the dictator’s decision to pursue political reform to show that if future aid flows are contingent on political liberalization, the likelihood of receiving future aid diminishes as the dictator becomes less likely to survive political liberalization in power. Thus, dictators who stand little chance of surviving liberalization will not be swayed by promises of aid, but dictators who are likely to retain some power if they liberalize view the promise of future aid as an incentive to democratize. The effect of aid on democratization, therefore, will vary by factors that increase the chances of a dictator surviving political liberalization intact. The depth and breadth of authoritarian support coalitions is the key factor that increases the likelihood that aid will induce democratization. We employ cross-national empirical tests of the main hypothesis with particular attention to missing data issues. We examine the case of Ghana in the 1990s to illustrate the main causal mechanism in our argument.
Chapter 4: Economic Sanctions and Authoritarian Survival (17,700 words)

This chapter examines how economic sanctions affect leader and regime survival. Sanctions can impose economic costs on the targeted country, and thus we begin the chapter with a discussion of how these economic costs are translated into political costs in different types of authoritarian regimes. Because personalist regimes are more sensitive to the loss of external sources of revenue to fund patronage, rulers in these regimes are more likely to be destabilized by sanctions than leaders in other dictatorships. In contrast, party-based and military regimes are able to increase their tax revenues and reallocate their expenditures to increase the level of cooptation and repression even when faced with economic sanctions.

We use descriptive data on sanctions, spending, and repression to illustrate how dictators respond domestically to the economic costs imposed by sanctions. We then test the main hypotheses with cross-national time series data, correcting for selection into the sample of targeted regimes. We find that personalist dictators are more vulnerable to foreign pressure than other types of dictators, but that sanctions have little effect on the likelihood of democratization. We illustrate our argument with a case study of sanctions directed against Idi Amin’s regime in Uganda. Finally, we show that policy makers face a dilemma when considering the imposition of economic sanctions because they are most likely to harm citizens, measured as a reduction in average calorie consumption, in the same group of countries where they are most likely to successfully destabilize the regime – namely personalist dictatorships.

Chapter 5: Naming and Shaming Dictators (22,600 words)

The fifth chapter explores how international campaigns to name and shame human rights abusers influence politics in targeted regimes. Proponents of ‘naming and shaming’ campaigns argue that they pressure leaders who violate human rights violations to stop. In the best case scenario, naming and shaming would deter other dictators from using repression as well. Further, shaming tactics may provide a signal and/or material support to help coordinate internal opposition to the dictator, potentially resulting in the increased likelihood of a transition. An alternative argument, however, suggests that shaming campaigns can be counter-productive because they provide dictators with an additional incentive to cling to power if they face incrimination abroad. If this argument is correct, shaming campaigns may prolong authoritarian rule.

We test these arguments and find that naming and shaming campaigns have the potential to destabilize non-military dictatorships and those with little prior democratic experience by increasing the chances of violent regime change. In military regimes and those with prior democratic experience, however, we find that shaming can bolster non-violent opposition groups. We illustrate these arguments with case studies of military rule in Chile under General Augusto Pinochet and the brief personalist dictatorship of Moussa Dadis Camara in Guinea.

This chapter closes by examining whether human rights prosecutions in transition countries deter incumbent dictators in other countries from stepping down from power. While critics of human rights regimes argue that the precedent of prosecution increases the chances they too will meet this fate should they leave office, there has been no systematic test of this proposition. We argue and find evidence that human rights prosecutions in neighboring countries only deter personalist dictators from leaving office because these rulers are the least likely to have strong domestic guarantees of a safe haven once their time in power ends.
Chapter 6: Military Intervention and Regime Change (17,900 words)

The final substantive chapter uses cross-national data to examine how hostile military interventions by both democracies and autocracies influence autocratic stability. We find that hostile military interventions are associated with an increased risk of transition to new dictatorship in personalist regimes but intervention raises the risk of democratic transition in military regimes. These findings suggest that policy makers considering military interventions against personalist dictatorships should consider the increased risk of a new dictatorship emerging to replace the targeted regime. The chapter then uses a series of case studies to delineate the causal mechanism in each positive case linking military intervention to regime change. This exercise shows that the results for democratic transition in military regimes hinge on two cases of military intervention against small population military dictatorships in the Caribbean basin.

Chapter 7: Conclusion (5,300 words)

We conclude with a discussion of the main theoretical expectations for how tools of foreign pressure influence authoritarian survival in different regimes. We argue for renewed attention to the vast differences among distinct variants of authoritarian rule and describe how future research can better measure theoretically relevant concepts in autocratic contexts. We close by suggesting some basic guidelines to help policy makers understand whether foreign pressure is likely to destabilize authoritarian rule.

Total Words: 110,000
Methodology

Our core empirical analysis in this project uses a new data set of autocratic regimes (Geddes, Wright and Frantz, 2012). The data set contains information on episodes of autocratic rule, regime types, individual leaders and regime failures. This data distinguishes between regime failures that end in democracy and those that end in a transition to a subsequent autocratic regime. The data on autocratic leaders allows us to test specific hypotheses about leadership turnover within the duration of an authoritarian regime. Because our central concern is autocratic survival, we employ duration methods using limited dependent variable models that account for time dependence and non-proportional hazards (Box-Steffensmeier, Reiter and Zorn, 2003; Carter and Signorino, 2010). Importantly, we account for the fact that the underlying hazard differs by regime type (Wright, 2009).

We use data on foreign aid from the OECD DAC, available through the World Development Indicators 2010 (WDI). In the empirical analysis in Chapter 3, we pay careful attention to missing data issues by using imputed data methods for time-series, cross section data (Honaker and King, 2010). In doing so, we address the fact that Soviet bloc Communist countries in Central and Eastern European do not receive foreign aid from Western donors.

To examine how economic sanctions influence autocratic survival, we employ the latest version of the Hufbauer et al. (2007) data on sanction episodes. We use descriptive data on repression and spending. The repression data combines information from different political terror scales (Gibney and Wood, 2010). The spending data are from the WDI data base. We employ selection models to account for non-random assignment of sanctions targeted towards countries that are more likely to be unstable (Nooruddin, 2002; Escribà-Folch and Wright, 2010).

The data on human rights shaming are from Hafner-Burton (2008) and have been used in Lebovic and Voeten (2009). This data set codes episodes of human rights shaming from the United Nations, various media outlets, and Amnesty International. It contains information on shaming campaigns targeted at all countries, including authoritarian states. We again employ selection models in this chapter to address the non-random targeting of shaming campaigns. Data from Kim and Sikkink (2010) help us test whether human rights prosecutions in transition countries deter dictators from leaving power. To put aid, sanctions, and shaming in context, we use data on foreign military interventions from Pickering and Kisingani (2009). These updates distinguish between hostile interventions targeting dictatorships initiated by both autocratic and democratic countries.

While our core empirical analysis relies on time-series, cross-national data, we include case studies in each empirical chapter to illustrate the main causal mechanism in our theory. Our case studies include: Chile (human rights shaming), Ghana (foreign aid), Guinea (human rights shaming), and Uganda (sanctions). The chapter on military interventions contains short studies of 19 cases where military intervention coincides with autocratic regime failure.
Author Biographies

Abel Escribà i Folch is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra. He received his Ph.D. in 2007 from the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences at the Juan March Institute in Madrid and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Previously he was a Visiting Scholar at New York University, a Visiting Researcher at the University of Sussex, and a postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institut Barcelona d’Estudis Internacionals. Abel writes on economic sanctions, authoritarian institutions, political repression, and civil conflict. He has published in *Democratization, British Journal of Political Science, Comparative Political Studies, European Journal of Political Research, International Political Science Review, International Studies Quarterly, Journal of Peace Research*, and *Kyklos*.

Joseph Wright is the Jeffrey L. Hyde and Sharon D. Hyde Early Career Professor in Political Science at Pennsylvania State University. He received his Ph.D. in 2007 from the University of California-Los Angeles and has been a postdoctoral Research Associate at the Niehaus Center for Governance and Globalization at Princeton University and a Visiting Faculty Fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He has been a consultant for the Political Instability Task Force and the United Nations. Joe has published on foreign aid, authoritarian politics, and comparative political economy in the *American Journal of Political Science, Annual Review of Political Science, British Journal of Political Science, Comparative Political Studies, International Studies Quarterly*, and *Journal of Politics*. His research has been funded by the National Science Foundation and the Minerva Research Initiative.
References


Notes


4 According to the latest release of the Polity data (through 2010), 93 of 162 countries have a combined democracy score of 6 or greater. Available at: http://www.systemicpeace.org.

5 An authoritarian regime can end in two other possible outcomes that we do not consider: state collapse (e.g. Somalia after Siad Barre) and being subsumed by a larger country (e.g. East Germany and South Vietnam).

6 To arrive at this figure, democratic regimes are defined as those with a score of 6 or more on the Polity scale.