Regime convergence within international linkage networks

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Abstract

I develop a theory of regime convergence through international linkage that gives central attention to the degree of **divergence between a country's own political system and the international environment it is embedded in.** When this 'network discrepancy' is high, states are exposed to a variety of both material and ideational diffusion mechanisms that subvert domestic political authority structures. I model domestic institutional change as a two-part process and find that when regime change occurs, autocratic countries that predominantly uphold ties to liberal democracies are likely to democratize, whereas democratic backsliding is facilitated by autocratic linkage.

Measuring network discrepancy

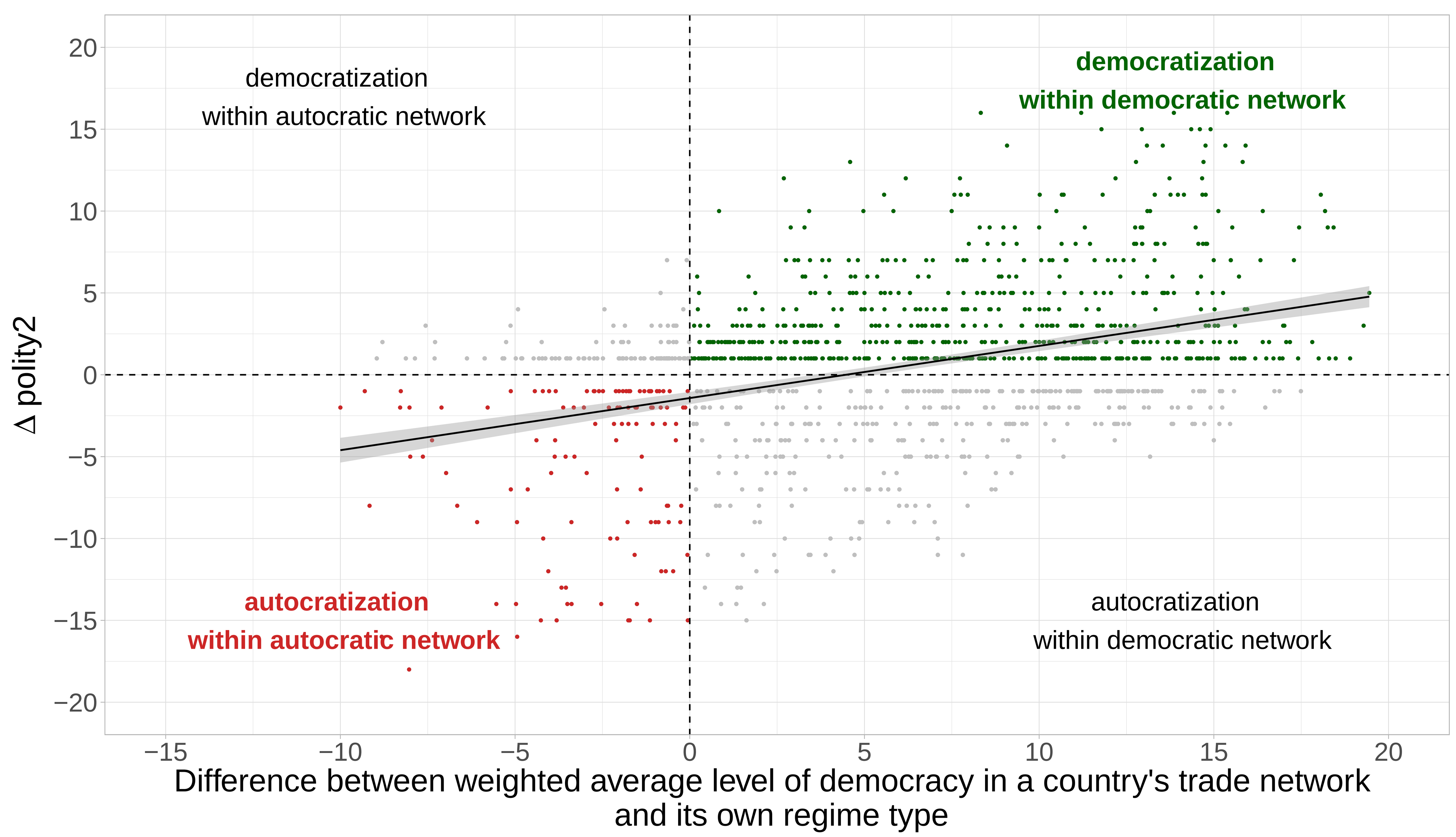
I proxy international linkage through bilateral trade ties and compute a row-standardized spatial weight matrix $\boldsymbol{W_t}$ where the spatial weight w_{ijt} measures the connectivity between units i and j in time period t.

$$w_{ijt} = \frac{\text{exports from country } j \to i}{\text{total imports of country } i \text{ in year } t}$$

the discrepancy between country i's international environment and its own political system is then given by:

$$\text{network discrepancy} = \left| \underbrace{\boldsymbol{w_{i,t-1} y_{t-1}}}_{\text{int. environment}} - \underbrace{y_{i,t-1}}_{\text{own political system}} \right|$$

Network discrepancy and institutional change 1827–2014



A generalized tobit model

$$\mathcal{L}(\boldsymbol{\theta}|\boldsymbol{y}) = \underbrace{\prod_{\Delta y_{i,t}=0} P(y^*_{1,i,t} \leq 0)}_{\text{no change}} \underbrace{\prod_{\Delta y_{i,t}\neq 0} f(y_{2,i,t}|y^*_{1,i,t} > 0)}_{\text{outcome equation}} \underbrace{P(y^*_{1,i,t} > 0)}_{\text{institutional change}}$$

- outcome of interest $\Delta y_{i,t}$: year-to-year changes in regime type (polity2 / UDS-scores)
- key independent variable: network discrepancy, operationalized through democracy scores $\boldsymbol{y_t}$ and bilateral trade data $\boldsymbol{W_t}$
- control variables: regime imposition by military force, oil income per capita, GDP per capita, GDP per capita growth

Institutional change as a two-part process

The DGP that determines whether political change occurs ($\Delta y_{i,t} \neq 0$) is distinct from the DGP that governs the magnitude and direction of institutional change, i.e. $E[y_{i,t}|y_{i,t} \neq 0, \boldsymbol{x_{i,t}}]$.

Mechanisms

- external material and financial support for democratic / autocratic factions within the state and civil society
- ideational diffusion of democracy / authoritarianism within international linkage networks

Assumptions

- trade ties are an adequate proxy for multidimensional linkage relationships across countries
- trade relationships are not endogenous to *future* changes in regime type

Main result

- The degree of divergence between a country's own political system and its linkage network is a very strong predictor of the magnitude and direction of institutional change, if it occurs.