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Democracy?
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EU's Record,
1977-2004*

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Do Sanctions Help Democracy? The US and EU's Record, 1977-2004*

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Abstract

Can sanctions help democracy? A form of foreign pressure, economic sanctions are often dismissed as ineffective instruments to achieve anything. This paper suggests that foreign pressure is more effective than usually thought. Sanctions may fail to turn a state democratic, but their use signals a growing intolerance for illiberal government. When country leaders understand that the consequences of subverting democracy are serious, they are more likely to move toward democratization without even risking sanctions. I use a new dataset to show that different regions of the world have been subjected to different amounts of pressure to democratize. Everything else equal, regions that experienced more pressure, experienced greater democratization. These results suggests the West, and the United States and Europe in particular, may be passing substantial unexploited opportunities to encourage democracy in places such as the Middle East and North Africa.

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1 Introduction

At 88, the number of democracies in 2002 exceeded the number of such countries for any year in recent history.¹ While many factors are bound to have contributed to this rise, the post-Cold War international context is likely to be especially important. Can external pressure help democracy? How much of the recent surge in democratization can be explained by a favorable international environment?

This paper looks at the role of outside pressure in the form of economic sanctions. It presents a new dataset that tracks the use of sanctions to promote democracy in the world. Since 1977, the use of economic pressure to further liberalization has increased dramatically. Between 1985 and 2000, the number of countries subject to such pressure increased fourfold, from 5 to 20. The West, and the United States and European Union (EU) member states in particular, have been especially prominent in this rising trend. More than 85 % of all sanctions for democracy have been levied with the participation of either Europe or the U.S.

Most observers are skeptical on the use of punishment strategies to promote anything, including democracy, in the international community. This paper takes an exception to this view. The use of sanctions to further democracy indicates that the international community is willing to apply democratic conditionality. *Ceteris paribus*, this makes illiberal institutions more costly to maintain. Democracy should be more likely to survive when would-be coup-leaders and dictatorially-minded incumbents cannot count on external support.

I show that in regions where the international community has been more willing to apply external pressure for democracy, we have seen more democratization. Even after controlling for wealth, regional effects, a country's past state of political liberty, and other factors, more external pressure in a given region increases the likelihood of democracy in the region. I find this in a cross-section time-series dataset of 137 countries observed between 1977 and 2002.

However, not all regions have been subjected to the same kind of external pressure. Latin America and Eastern Europe have focused much of the attention of the US and the EU, and illiberal states there have been punished with external condemnation. The Middle East, by contrast, has been virtually exempt from pressure. One of the main conclusions of the paper is, then, that part of the reason we have seen so little movement toward democracy in regions such as the Middle East has been the West's willingness to tread gingerly on the area's autocratic rulers.

¹Based on the Polity IV dataset (Marshall and Jaggers, 2002).

What did the literature studying the use of sanctions miss? Unlike other studies, I do not look for an effect of sanctions on the immediate target subjected to pressure. Rather, I rely on the average use of sanctions in a given region during particular point of time to construct a index of ‘intolerance of illiberal government’ for that region and point of time. If many illiberal states experience pressure, this index is high, and low otherwise. The philosophy behind the measure is that, even though sanctions may fail in terms of their immediate targets, they signal to other actors in the region what the consequences would be from abolishing liberal institutions domestically. Such signals encourage movement toward democracy even in countries that do not directly experience punishment.

It is probably also the case that sanctions proxy for positive conditionality. For example, it seems to be the case that since the end of the Cold War, the West has come to confer more foreign aid to African countries that liberalize their domestic political system. This would imply that the measure of negative conditionality that I construct is correlated with positive conditionality. The ‘intolerance for autocracy’ index offered here can be thought of in broader terms as a measure of the degree to which the outside world favors democracy over other forms of government.

The findings of the paper place into perspective an emerging tradition of encouraging democracy through external conditionality. It turns out that the United States and Europe, over time, have gradually converged on a common understanding of the importance of using pressure to help democracy. In 2004, Europe participated in roughly as many episodes of economic pressure as the United States did. This represents a marked change from fifteen-twenty years earlier, when Europe trailed far behind the US.

Finally, the paper points to substantial unexploited opportunities to do more in that respect, especially in regions such as the Middle East and North Africa.

2 Outside Pressure for Democracy: How Much, Where, and When?

The end of communism handed Western democracy a sizeable ideological victory. It has been suggested that this has produced a global normative climate favorable to democratic outcomes.² Importantly, not only ideas have been at work. A growing number of countries in various regions of the world have been subjected to democratic

²See Linz and Stepan (1996, p.74), Whitehead (2003).

conditionality, often by virtue of being members of international organizations.

Traditionally, the view held by the literature has been that a country's domestic political institutions cannot be imposed from without. For liberal institutions to survive, a country must have the right domestic conditions in place. These include, for example, economic modernization (Lipset, 1959), the existence of certain culture or values (Almond and Verba, 1989), or a specific interest group structure (Dahl, 1971; Lijphart, 1984). Democracy is home-grown, put quite simply.

Yet, democracy seems to have arrived and survived in countries where the existence of propitious domestic conditions was, at least *ex-ante*, doubtful. Countries with a turbulent past, deep social divisions, and comparatively low level of development have embraced democracy with more vigor than many observers initially expected.³

It may be that international factors help explain why democracy succeeded in some places, but not others.

Perhaps surprisingly, clauses requiring adherence to democratic principles have appeared in numerous international agreements and organizations. Free-trade agreements beyond Europe now routinely commit their members to democracy. Examples include the Mercado Comun del Sur (MERCOSUR), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Andean Pact in the Americas, and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Africa. Democratic clauses have appeared in other organizations which facilitate economic cooperation between their members: the Commonwealth, the group of franco-phone countries, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Lome Convention. In 2001, at least 130 countries were bound in some way or another by an explicit commitment to democratic governance and principles.⁴

Organizations that represent traditional spheres of influence for the major Western powers have also taken up the task of promoting democracy. The British Commonwealth passed the Harare Declaration in 1991; the Group Francophonie passed the Chailot Declaration, in the same year and the Organization of American States has passed resolutions and a special charter to that effect. In Europe's own periphery, the Council of Europe's democratization clauses impose commitments to democracy on 45

³Greece, El Salvador, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Niger, the Philippines are cases at point. One way in which scholars have sought to account for unexpected successes has been to look at elites. Agreement among key elites is seen as crucial and possibly sufficient for democracy to persist in otherwise unlikely places. See Rustow (1970), Karl (1986), O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), McFaul (2002), among others.

⁴Includes the total non-overlapping members of the organizations listed above, and the European Union. In line with the argument that these organizations promote democracy, Pevehouse (2002*a,b*) finds that as a state joins regional international organizations dominated by democracies, it is more likely to become and stay democratic.

member countries at present.

The European Union has made it a practice to condition trade benefits and other aspects of economic cooperation with developing states on the presence of, or progress toward, democracy. The Lome Convention attempts to bind scores of states in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Ocean to a respect for political rights and freedoms. The United States has developed its own initiative, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) that conditions special trade benefits for developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa on “political pluralism”. Even though the agreement falls short of actually calling for democracy, in practice trade benefits have been made contingent on it. For example, Eritrea in 2003 was denied benefits, while Gambia was allowed to participate, punishing and rewarding different performance on democracy.⁵

Finally, bilateral trade treaties may include political conditionality. The European Union has inserted special clauses that bind the parties to respect for democracy in agreements with Israel and Argentina, among others. The U.S. has extended Most-Favored Nation Status to Albania and Cambodia, in the hope of ‘helping democracy’. These appear to be the norm, rather than the exception.

Commitments would be cheap talk if they are not acted upon. Particularly after the end of the Cold War, it is difficult to come up with examples in which democracy was suspended without outside reaction, usually in the form of sanctions. In Latin America, five coups or other attempts to seize power from an elected government have been met by sanctions and protest: Haiti (1991), Peru (1992), Guatemala (1993), Paraguay (1996), Venezuela (2002). Outside reaction has met similar attempts elsewhere: Belarus (1997), Cambodia (1997), Pakistan (1999), Niger (1999), Zimbabwe (2002), Fiji (2000).⁶ While this does not mean that conditionality is always enforced, the contrast with the Cold War period is pronounced.

A look at specific cases confirms that foreign pressure can be an effective tool for sustaining adherence to democracy. For example, when MERCOSUR staged an attempt to restore democracy in Paraguay following the auto-golpe of President Oviedo in 1995, the attempt was highly successful. Democracy was restored in Fiji under pressure from the outside, and Georgia escaped a brush with autocracy after external condemnation and domestic opposition forced the reversal of a rigged election.

These observations suggest that it may be the case that the end of superpower rivalry in 1989 has contributed to the unprecedented expansion in democracy as a form of government. Can we say more about that? This paper presents a more systematic

⁵Results of the AGOA Country Review for 2003 Eligibility.

⁶The year sanctions were imposed is shown in brackets.

look at the world-wide distribution of pressure for democracy, and its (early) results.

2.1 Generating the Data

There are many ways to measure the incidence of democratic conditionality, the tendency to link access to economic opportunities to the existence of political freedom domestically. I present one particular coding which centers on the incidence of sanctions. Sanctions are defined as explicit restrictions on customary trade and aid relations, imposed with a clearly stated political objective. Specifically, I consider sanctions for democracy, or measures accompanied by demands for some form of political liberalization. The latter is defined inclusively, to cover demands to restore or institute democracy, but also demands to improve treatment of political dissidents and oppositions. An inclusive definition has the advantage of capturing cases in which, because the chances for democracy in a country may be deemed slim, the outside world may present a list of more moderate demands.

The research relied on key word search of reports in media sources of instances in which a given country has been subject to economic sanctions for the period 1977-2004. The period chosen can be extended back in time in a later research effort. Every independent country with population of at least half a million people was checked.⁷ A series of robustness checks, using alternative sources, and alternative key words was undertaken to verify the list of sanctions events produced by the search. Only minor discrepancies were found, suggesting that the resulting list is representative, and free of any serious bias.

In each case, a brief record of the sanctions event that took place was generated. The record includes media reports on the case, and a data sheet that asks: (1) about the duration of the episode; (2) who the states or entities levying sanctions are; (3) what kind of measures were implemented.

These data sheets, available for every country and every pressure episode identified, were converted into a statistical dataset. The dataset includes 73 separate ‘episodes’ or instances in which at least one foreign actor asked for greater political pluralism in a country, and was willing to impose a costly measure on the government subject to the demand.

The following section goes over some notable historical and regional trends in the use of foreign pressure to promote democracy.

⁷Based on population figure in 2004.

2.2 Trends

Before turning to the question of who uses conditionality, I describe who is subjected to pressure. The following figures summarize key regional and over-time trends.

Figure 1 shows the number of countries subject to some form of pressure to democratize by at least one or more foreign actors. The trend is rising, starting at below 5 before 1977 and peaking at 20 around 2000. Early sanctions reflect the turn in US foreign policy under Carter toward greater attention to human rights abuses. Especially in Latin America, this turn led to a few cases in which overt sanctions were imposed. A ‘September 11’ effect is apparent after 2000. The figures shows the number of countries subject to pressure dropping after that year, as dictatorships such as Pakistan are enlisted to fight against terror.

[Figure 1 about here.]

Figure 1 also shows the number of democracies in the world. This number has been steadily rising since the end of the Cold War, with a jump just around 1989. The figure suggests that the spread of democracy and the tendency to apply foreign pressure may be related.

Figure 2 shows a different look at the same data. One curve on the figure plots the prevalence of democracy as a form of government in countries in the world. The proportional share of such countries has been growing steadily over time.

[Figure 2 about here.]

More interestingly, the other trend traced by the figure uses the sanctions data to represent how intolerant the outside world has become toward autocracy. The ‘intolerance for autocracy’ index shown is constructed by dividing the number of illiberal countries that are subject to pressure to liberalize by the total number of illiberal states in the world. The index ranges between 0 and 1, and can be thought of as a hazard, or risk. For example, an illiberal state ran about 21 % risk of being subject to foreign pressure over its lack of political pluralism in the year 2000. This compares to only about 3 % in 1983. The data indicates, then, that having illiberal institutions domestically has become a greater liability internationally.

Can there be a causal connection between the rising intolerance for dictatorship in the world and the growing prevalence of democracy?

The next two figures allow further insights based on regional trends. Figure 3 plots the intolerance for autocracy against time for four regions: Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Asia. All four regions have experienced a marked

rise in the risk that autocracy will be punished. Latin America leads the way. A country in Latin America which experienced a lapse in democracy in 2000 had a greater than 80 per cent risk of being punished by outsiders.

[Figure 3 about here.]

As the figure shows graphically, the degree to which democracy is prevalent in a region, and the index measuring intolerance for autocracy, are remarkably correlated. Movement toward greater democratization in a region is nearly always associated with greater pressure on autocracies.

[Figure 4 about here.]

It is instructive to compare these trends with the situation in the Middle East and North Africa. It is well-known that there are virtually no democratic countries in that region. Figure 4 shows that. It also shows that there has been virtually no pressure on countries in that region to move them in a more liberal direction.

The evidence presented so far is suggestive but it does not suffice to establish a causal connection between the incidence of foreign pressure and democratization. It may be that other regional trends, or shifts in economic well-being over time, is causing movement toward democracy in these regions. I turn to an econometric test next. An econometric test can disentangle the separate effects of different variables contributing to the same outcome.

3 Results

I test whether sanctions contribute to democratization by examining all non-Western countries in the period 1977-2002. The question I ask is, does greater intolerance for autocracy in a given region contribute to democratization in that region, everything else equal? The unit of analysis is the country-year, which means that each country gives rise to one separate observation for each year it is observed.

Recall that the intolerance for autocracy index ranges between 0 and 1 and represents the proportion of non-democratic states subject to foreign pressure to liberalize. The index changes over time (in different years, more or fewer countries may experience pressure) and is different for each region (different regions are not equally attractive targets⁸). It is important to note that, in this operationalization, the test is not whether

⁸More on what makes a region more attractive will be said in the section examining differences between the US and EU use of sanctions.

sanctions succeed to turn a country democratic, but of whether more sanctions in a given region help keep or make more countries democratic.

The main dependent variable is a country's *Polity* score, a -10 to 10 score of a country's political freedom compiled by a team of researchers at the University of Maryland (Marshall and Jaggers, 2002). Higher score indicates more democracy. The main independent variable is $Pressure_{t-1}$, which is simply the value of the intolerance for democracy index for a region, lagged by one year. The lag is necessary to capture the causal mechanism through which pressure is supposed to have an effect. Actors in a region observe the history of prior punishment of illiberal government, and act, in part based on this information, to keep or subvert democracy.

A number of control variables are needed to make sure that we are attributing the right effect to outside pressure. Because it is unlikely that the pressure index captures all factors that are peculiar to a given region (such as history, culture, traditions), I include separate controls for all five regions under study: Eastern Europe (which includes also the former Soviet Union), Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

One important control is a country's past level of democracy. Political institutions are highly path-dependent. It is likely that countries will not deviate much from the level of political pluralism they have over a short period of time. I include a lagged value of the polity score, $Polity_{t-5}$. The value is lagged five years back to reflect the legacy of past political institutions over a medium-term period of time. Including the polity score transforms the regression into an equation of change. The coefficients on the other variables can be interpreted as indications of how much movement toward democracy (i.e., democratization) we get when the variable of interest changes by one unit.

I also include controls for income. Scholars have suggested that a country's level of development may be an important empirical correlate of democracy (Lipset, 1959; Przeworski and Limongi, 1997). Variable $Income_{t-1}$ is lagged one period to reduce endogeneity (it could be that democracy is causing income). The source of this variable is the International Monetary Fund's Directions of Trade Statistics, as augmented by Goldstein, Rivers and Tomz (2003).

Finally, two important controls are indicator variables for whether the Cold War has ended (true for all years following 1989) and for whether a country has oil. The Cold War produced massive shifts in geopolitics. Some of these, such as the withdrawal of the Red Army from Eastern Europe, are not captured by variables already included in the regression. Including oil is important because oil is believed to affect negatively

the chances for democratization (Ross, 2001). The source of this variable is Fearon and Laitin (2003).

The results of the estimation, based on a Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression, are displayed on Table 1.

[Table 1 about here.]

The main variable of interest, foreign pressure for democratization on a region, has a strong and statistically significant effect on democratization. As autocratic states in a given region are subjected to greater outside pressure, a country in that region is more likely to move toward democracy. The effect of foreign pressure on democracy is not trivial. It is greater in size than the democracy-inhibiting effect of having oil, for example.

The remaining variables are significant and signed as expected. A prior history of democracy, higher income and the end of the Cold War make democracy more likely. Having oil is a strong inhibitor of liberal institutions.

There are regional effects that are left unexplained. They are folded in the dummies and the intercept, to avoid contaminating the independent effects of interest.

The regression confirms that the foreign pressure is a democratizing force in its own right. While detractors may be right to claim that sanctions seldom by themselves cause democracy, they do increase the cost of having repressive political institutions. On average, this helps domestic supporters of democracy keep in check the dictatorial impulses of incumbents.

4 Comparing the US and EU's Record

The most recent history of using sanctions to promote democracy started with measures by the U.S. in the 1970's. Today, this kind of democracy promotion continues to be heavily dominated by the U.S., but Europe is roughly on a par with the United States in terms of its own participation in pressure episodes. Furthermore, most episodes in which a European state participates in sanctions involve the European Union as an actor. This suggests that there is an emerging US-EU partnership when it comes to raising the pressure on illiberal regimes around the world.

The United States and the EU member states allocate pressure differently with respect to the different regions of the world. Figure 5 shows some key trends.

[Figure 5 about here.]

The figure illustrates that the United States uses pressure frequently in Latin America. Europe, by contrast, has a very low interest in applying pressure on the region. This is consistent with what a geopolitical view of American foreign policy interest may suggest. Furthermore, the use of sanctions in Latin America began before the Cold War ended. Because the U.S. felt that Soviet influence in Latin America was negligible in the 1970s, American foreign policy could afford to push a democratizing agenda in the region before the global competition with communism officially ended.

Another region in which U.S. interest in using pressure to promote democracy predates the end of superpower rivalry is Asia. Here again, in cases such as the Philippines, or Pakistan, American policymakers felt that their grip on some countries was firm enough to allow for the promotion of democracy without risking defections to the other 'camp'. Again, in Asia the U.S. has traditionally been more active in using sanctions to push for democracy than Europe has been.

More recently, the European strategy for Latin America and Asia seem to be converging to the U.S. approach. Around the year 2000, the U.S. and Europe seem involved in the same number of sanctions' events to further democracy in the two regions.

Figure 5 also shows that (1) the Cold War was a key event unleashing American and European pressure in Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa, and that (2) U.S. and European strategies in these two regions have been remarkably consistent. The end of communism removed a powerful excuse for supporting dictators abroad, with significant consequences. Sub-Saharan Africa is also highly dependent on aid, which makes it an especially attractive target for Western pressure.

When it comes to using sanctions for the benefit of democracy, American and European strategies also agree in the Middle East and North Africa. Figure 6 shows that this region has been virtually immune from such pressures before, and after the Cold War. This is perhaps remarkable, given the attention devoted to the topic of promoting democracy in the region. At least one instrument for raising the cost of illiberal government has been basically left aside when it comes to this region.

[Figure 6 about here.]

Finally, Figure 7 shows the convergence over time between U.S. and European involvement in sanctions to promote democracy. The U.S. started out as the sole initiators of such events in the 1970s. In the year 2000, European countries were involved in 70 % of all cases of pressure applied on illiberal governments, same as the United States. A trans-Atlantic consensus on whether to use pressure to advance democracy seems to be emerging, even though the consequences of September 11 on that will take time to assess.

[Figure 7 about here.]

5 Conclusion

Many observers are skeptical of the virtues of promoting democracy from the outside. At the same time, the end of the Cold War is credited as having contributed to the spread of liberal political institutions world-wide. Which of these views is right? How do we know?

As this paper demonstrates, one of the important developments in the last fifteen to twenty years, is an increase in the cost dictators pay for maintaining illiberal institutions domestically. This finding is based on new data on the use of economic sanctions to further democracy around the world. The evidence indicates that the incidence of sanctions has increased measurably, with some regions experiencing higher shifts than others.

It would be inappropriate to consider only the immediate target of a pressure episode when evaluating the impact of foreign pressure on democracy. Other countries are drawing lessons from the evidence they see. Using sanctions sends a signal that a retreat from democracy will carry a price. When confronted with this signal, domestic actors may be more likely to undertake democratization or stick with democratic gains.

In this understanding, what counts is creating an environment intolerant of autocratic regimes. Indeed, it turns out that in regions where autocracies have come under the greatest threat of outside punishment, democracy has made the most gains.

By contrast, the Middle East and North Africa have spend the last few decades in ‘splendid isolation’ from overt pressure to democratize. This adds another wrinkle to the question of why democracy gained more ground in some regions but not others.

The United States and the European Union member states are behind much of the increase in the use of pressure to further democracy. The end of the Cold War afforded democracy promotion crucial breathing space by eliminating a key reason to support dictators. Tendencies that had started in the 1970s and 80s fully picked up speed in the 1990s. Recent nods toward members of the coalition fighting terrorism, including, apparently, Pakistan and Putin’s Russia, is not good news for democracy promotion. The principled approach of the 1990’s has had the most impact, and has the best potential, to keep the world safe for democracy.

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Figure 1: **The Rising Use of Economic Sanctions for Democratization.** Vertical axis shows number of countries subject to pressure.

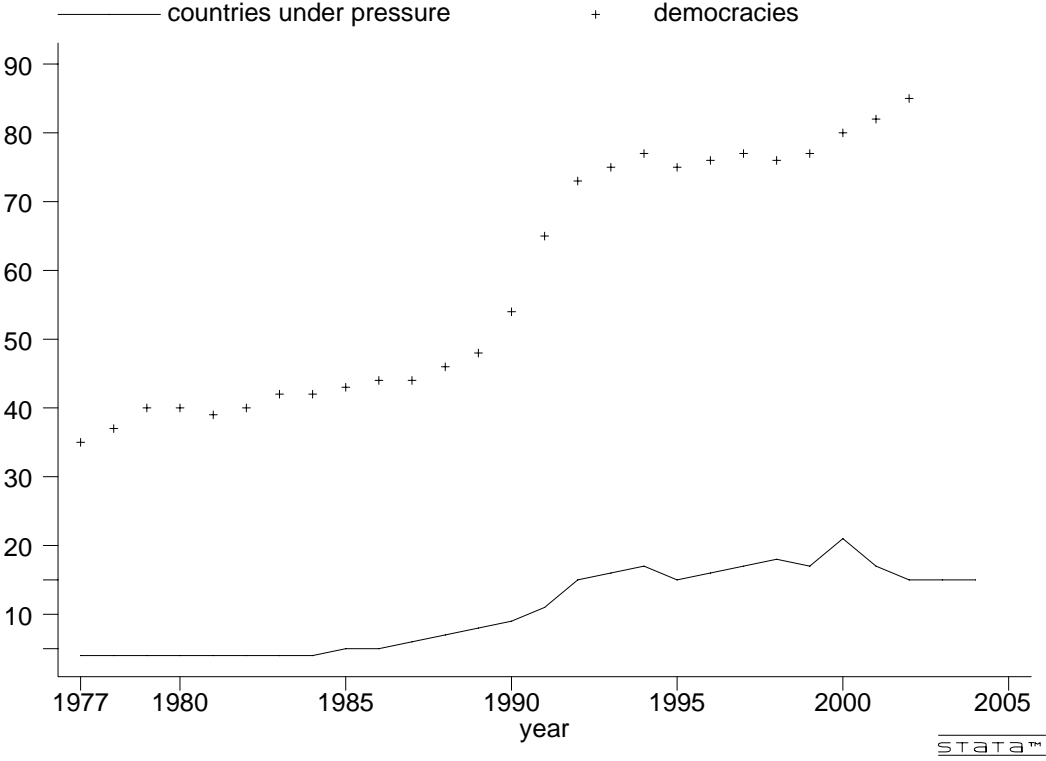


Figure 2: **The Joint Rise in Democracy *and* Intolerance for Autocracy.** Vertical axis shows number of countries subject to pressure.

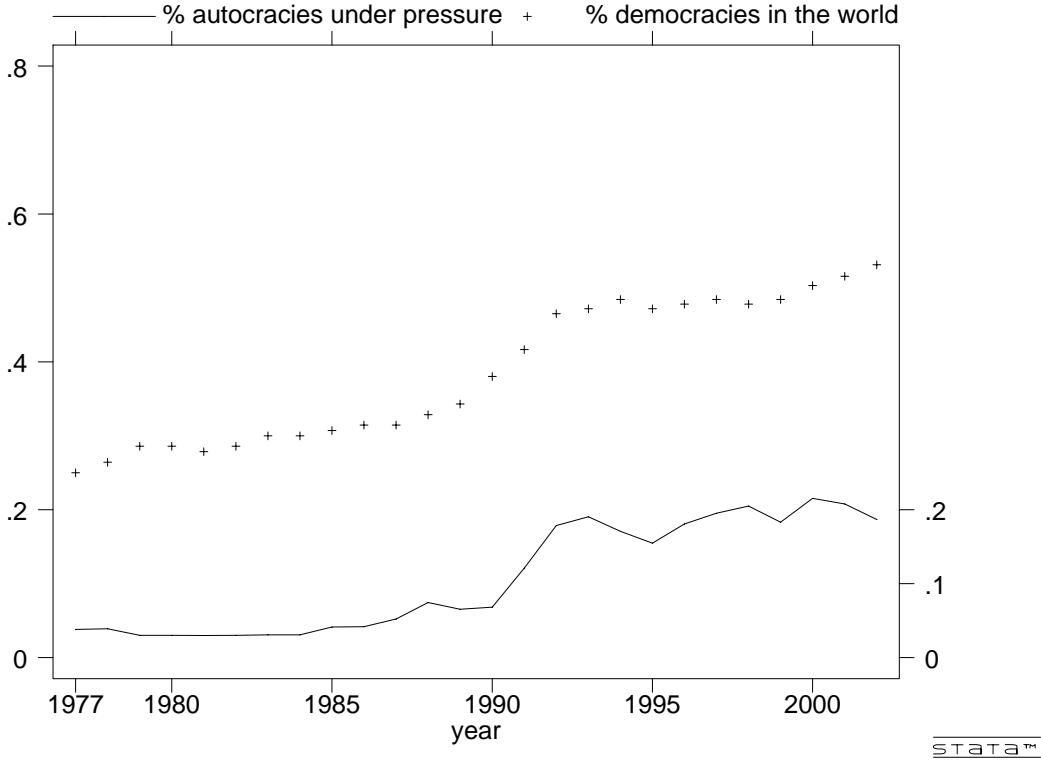
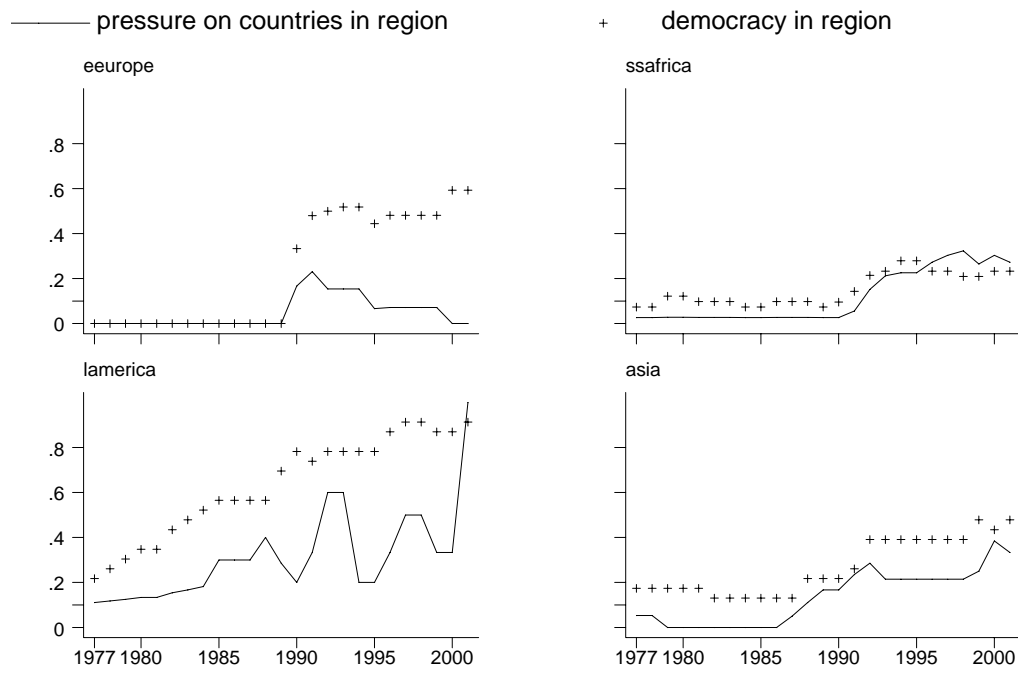


Figure 3: Outside Pressure for Democracy by Region



year
Graphs by region

STATA™

Figure 4: **The Middle East and North Africa: Immune from Pressure**

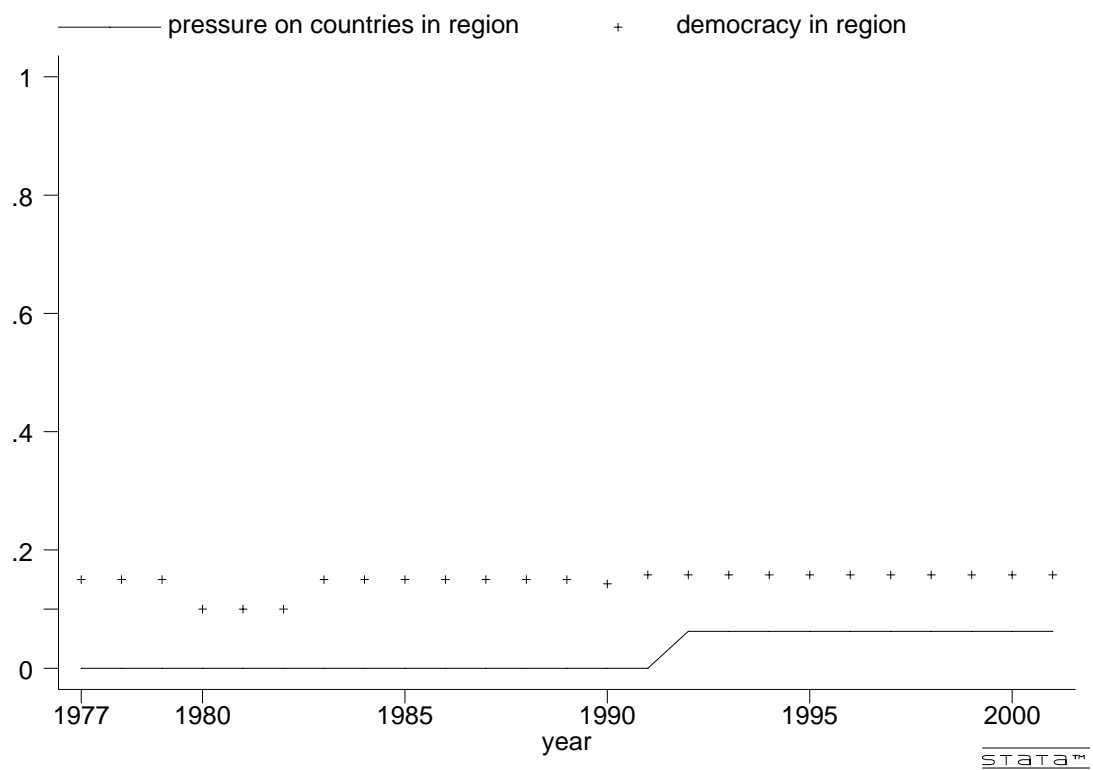
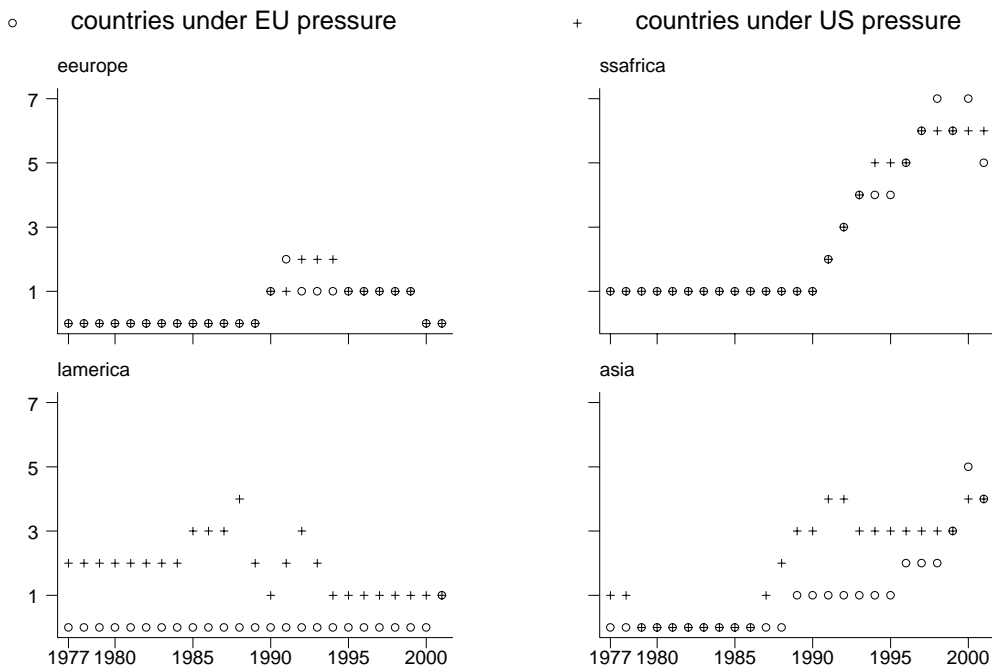


Figure 5: Countries Under US and EU Pressure By Region



year
Graphs by region

STATA™

Figure 6: The Immunity of the Middle East Revisited: US and EU Pressure

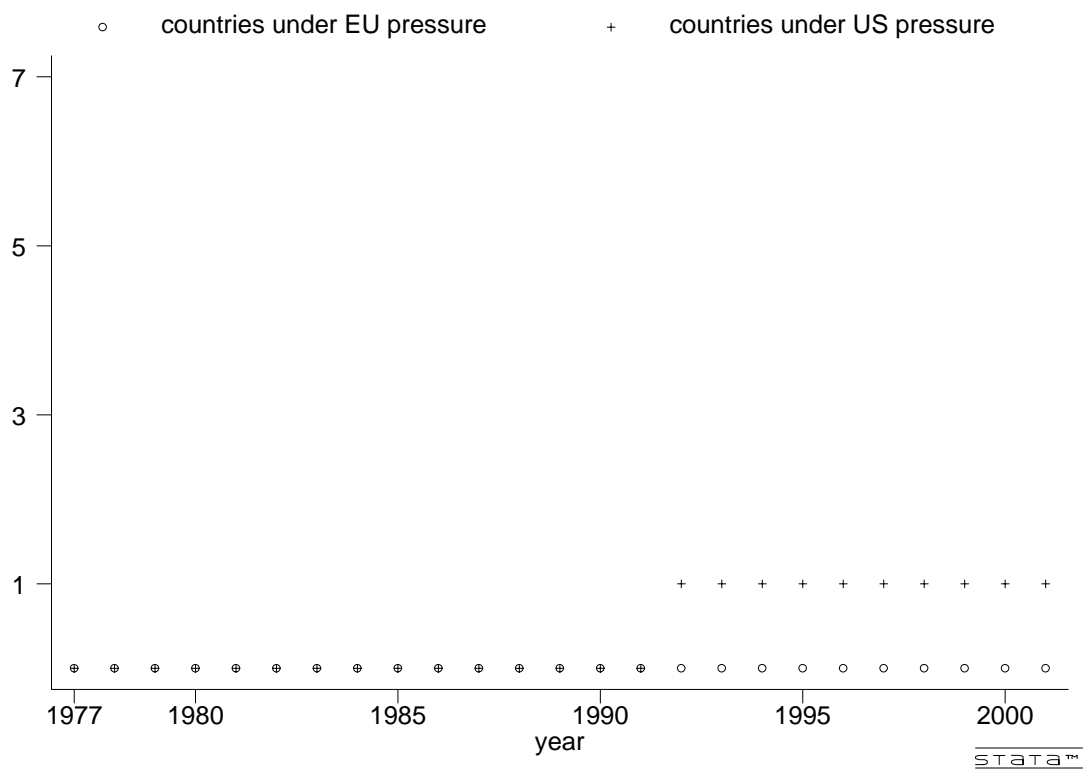


Figure 7: **Converging Views: US and EU Sanctions Participation**

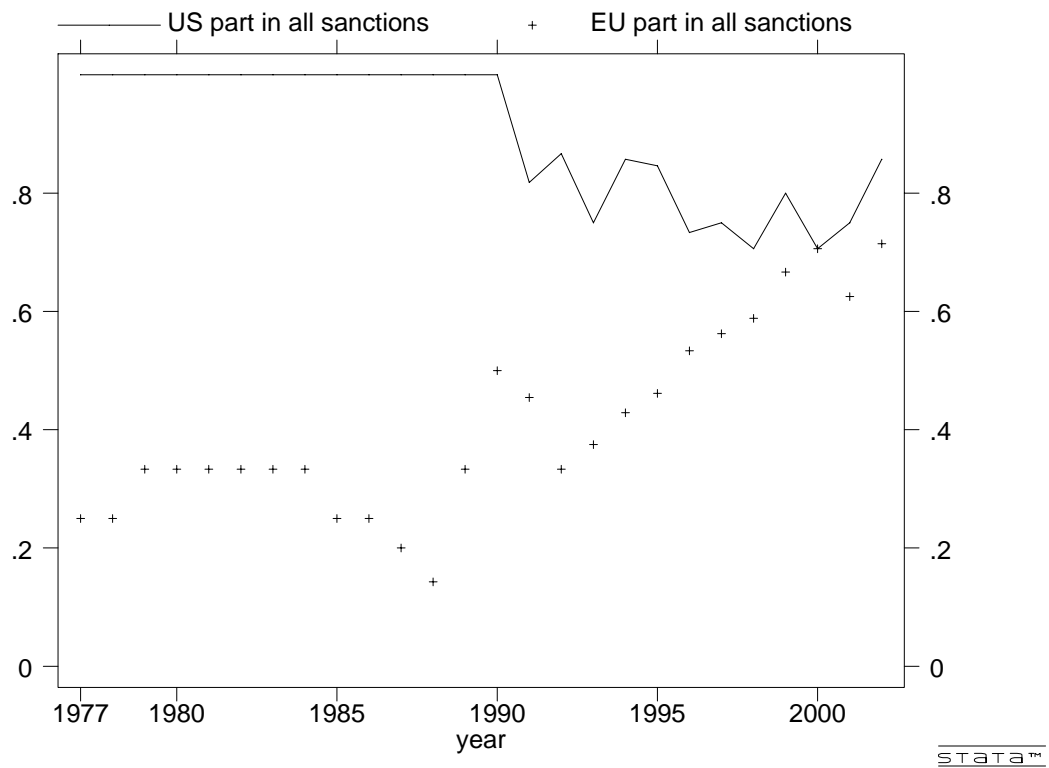


Table 1: **The Effect of Regional Pressure on Democratization** Dependent variable *Polity* score (higher *Polity* scores stand for greater degree of democratic freedoms). Regression: OLS. Standard errors in parenthesis. Significance at the 0.05, 0.01,0.001 levels=*, **, ***, two-tailed tests. Includes 137 non-Western countries.

<i>Variable</i>	β
<i>Intercept</i>	-4.31*** (1.22)
<i>Pressure</i> _{<i>t</i>-1}	3.37*** (0.91)
<i>Polity</i> _{<i>t</i>-5}	0.70*** (0.01)
<i>Income</i> _{<i>t</i>-1}	0.17*** (0.04)
<i>End of Cold War</i>	1.66*** (0.20)
<i>Oil</i>	-1.06*** (0.22)
<i>L. America</i>	-1.06** (0.36)
<i>E. Europe</i>	(intercept)
<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	-0.51 (0.29)
<i>North Africa/Middle East</i>	-1.12*** (0.30)
<i>Asia</i>	-0.62* (0.29)
<i>n</i>	2,879
<i>R</i> ²	0.68