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Ties to the Rest: Autocratic Linkages and Regime Survival

Oisín Tansey[1], Kevin Koehler[2], and Alexander Schmotz[1]

Abstract

The relationship between international linkages and the nature and survival of political regimes has gained increasing attention in recent years, but remains one that is poorly understood. In this article, we make three central contributions to our understanding of international linkage politics and autocratic regime survival. First, we introduce and develop the concept of "autocratic linkage," and highlight its importance for understanding the international politics of autocratic survival. Second, we use event history analysis to demonstrate that autocratic linkage has a systematic effect on the duration of authoritarian regimes. Finally, we complement our quantitative analysis with a focused comparison of autocratic linkage politics in the Middle East. We show that variation in Saudi Arabian support for autocratic incumbents in the wake of the Arab Spring protests can be explained in significant part by variation in linkage relationships.

Keywords

autocratic regime survival, international linkage, Arab Spring, survival analysis

Introduction

In late January 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Iran. He was one of the first world leaders to do so after the international sanctions imposed on

[1]King's College London, UK
[2]The American University in Cairo, New Cairo, Egypt

Corresponding Author:
Alexander Schmotz, Department of War Studies, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, UK.
Email: alexander.schmotz@kcl.ac.uk

Iran had been lifted. During his 2-day stay, he and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani signed 17 agreements, among them a commitment to raise trade volumes between the two countries to US$600 billion. According to Rouhani, they also discussed "science, modern technology, culture, tourism, [. . .] security and defence issues" ("Iran and China Agree Closer Ties After Sanctions Ease," 2016). Such diverse ties between two autocratic regimes in various socio-political spheres constitute what we call international autocratic linkage. In this article, we investigate whether and how international autocratic linkages contribute to the survival of autocratic regimes.

The relationship between international linkages and the nature and survival of political regimes has gained increasing attention in recent years, but remains one that is poorly understood. International linkages are cross-border ties between countries across a variety of political, economic, and/or social dimensions, and some have argued that they can have strong democratizing effects by raising the international costs of repression and strengthening democratic actors at the local level (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Others, however, have suggested that certain forms of international linkages can protect and embolden autocratic elites and reduce the political space for democratic openings (Cameron & Orenstein, 2012; Tolstrup, 2013; Vanderhill, 2013). Close ties to countries like Russia and Iran can serve to facilitate authoritarian stability by shielding incumbent autocrats from democratizing pressures and providing lifelines of diplomatic and material support. To date, however, this literature has been limited by a selective focus on a limited set of international networks and the absence of systematic empirical analysis of linkage politics across time and space.

In this article, we seek to enhance our understanding of international linkage politics and autocratic regime survival in three principal ways. First, we focus on ties to the rest, rather than ties to the West. We introduce and develop the concept of "autocratic linkage"—that is, linkages between autocratic states—and highlight its importance for understanding the international politics of autocratic survival. We measure autocratic linkage on four dimensions—trade, migration, diplomatic ties, and geographic proximity—and find that, in recent years, autocratic regimes have closed ranks on the international level, a trend that does not bode well for democratic development.

Second, we test the effect of autocratic linkage on the survival of 250 autocratic regimes between 1949 and 2008 using techniques of event history analysis, and demonstrate that autocratic linkage has a systematic effect on the duration of authoritarian regimes. In particular, we show that the higher the levels of autocratic linkages, the lower the risk of autocratic breakdown and the longer autocratic regimes are likely to survive. We argue that this is due to the fact that high levels of autocratic linkage give both international and

domestic actors a stake in the regime, and both sets of actors have incentives to maintain the status quo. Democratic and autocratic linkages are not equal in this respect, and we tease out the ways in which autocratic linkage creates particular incentive structures that favor authoritarian stability.

Third, we examine one important mechanism of autocratic linkage with a focused comparison of autocratic linkage politics in the Middle East. We trace Saudi Arabia's policies toward beleaguered Arab regimes during the Arab Spring and demonstrate that autocratic linkage helps explain variation in Saudi support to regime incumbents (while also taking into account that this support was not always successful).

The article proceeds in five sections. First, we review existing treatments of linkage politics and introduce our concept of "autocratic linkage." Second, we outline the ways in which autocratic linkage has implications for autocratic survival. Third, we identify trends over time in patterns of both democratic and autocratic linkage of autocratic regimes and reveal a recent surge in autocratic linkage. Fourth, using survival analysis, we examine the relationship between autocratic linkage and autocratic survival. Finally, we test one particular mechanism of the effects of autocratic linkage, demonstrating that regimes with close linkages to Saudi Arabia were more likely to receive support from the kingdom during the Arab Spring.

International Politics, Autocratic Linkage, and Authoritarian Rule

In recent years, the international sources of authoritarian stability have been the subject of increased scrutiny (Bader, 2015; Escriba-Folch & Wright, 2015; Tansey, 2016; Vanderhill, 2013). Much of this work has focused on the role that individual states (so-called "Black Knights") play in sponsoring autocratic regimes abroad, including both authoritarian powers such as Russia and China as well as democracies such as the United States (Bader, 2015; Brownlee, 2012; Burnell & Schlumberger, 2010; Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 41; Tolstrup, 2015). However, scholars have also focused on the various forms of cross-border ties that can contribute to regime survival in more indirect ways. The literature on diffusion has shown that the prospects of authoritarian breakdown depend in part on the international context within which a regime is situated, including regional levels of democracy and neighbor regime transitions (Beissinger, 2007; Brinks & Coppedge, 2006; Gleditsch & Ward, 2006; Kopstein & Reilly, 2000). Yet the diffusion literature rarely examines cross-border *relationships* directly, focusing instead on the characteristics of regimes across a given region. Elsewhere, studies of specific inter-regime connections have focused on isolated sets of

relationships, such as the role of trade (Manger & Pickup, 2016; Ulfelder, 2008), alliances (Boix, 2011; Boix & Svolik, 2013), and common membership of international organizations (Pevehouse, 2005; Vachudova, 2005). The preponderance of empirical findings from these studies has suggested that international linkages can create opportunities for democratic openings and thus act as a threat to authoritarian stability.

Recently, Levitsky and Way have sought to consolidate much of this literature within an analytical framework emphasizing two key international-level variables: Western leverage and linkage to the West (Levitsky & Way, 2010). While leverage concerns the vulnerability of a particular state to Western pressure, linkage concerns the density of ties and cross-border flows between particular countries and Western states and international organizations. According to Levitsky and Way, linkage to the West acts as a transmitter of international influence and contributes to democratization by heightening the international reverberation of non-democratic behavior, creating domestic constituencies for "democratic norm-abiding behaviour" and strengthening democratic opposition forces at the expense of autocratic leaders (Levitsky & Way, 2010, pp. 38-54). Leverage has limited impact in the absence of linkage.

More recently, several scholars have identified the need to consider how linkages can tie regimes to foreign powers in ways that are more likely to reinforce rather than undermine authoritarian rule at the domestic level. Brownlee's work on the long-standing ties between the United States and Egypt starkly highlights the ways in which linkage to Western states can help strengthen rather than weaken authoritarian rulers (Brownlee, 2012). Vanderhill places international linkages at the heart of her recent study of "authoritarianism promotion," arguing that linkages to authoritarian states can make the external promotion of authoritarianism more effective (Vanderhill, 2013). Tolstrup has rightly criticized a Western bias in much of the literature on the international politics of regime change and identified the ways in which linkages to Russia have helped autocratic elites, and harmed democratic ones, in several Eastern European states (Tolstrup, 2013). Several other studies also point to the role that international linkages to major authoritarian powers can play in bolstering autocratic incumbents (Ambrosio, 2009; Bader, 2015; Cameron & Orenstein, 2012).

Scholars have thus increasingly focused on the ways in which linkage politics can contribute to authoritarian stability. Yet our understanding of these dynamics remains incomplete, and the current literature exhibits a number of conceptual, theoretical, and empirical limitations. First, existing conceptions of cross-border linkages have either been too restricted or too ad hoc. Insights about cross-national ties often relate only to ties between a handful of selected

countries, often involving major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China. There is little work that explores linkage globally, and that empirically traces changes in global linkage over time. As a result, although we have a good understanding of how some forms of linkage matter for regime change and regime survival, we do not have a complete picture of the range of international (and often competing) linkage politics at work. Second, although existing work on linkage rests on some excellent case analyses, there is very little cross-national quantitative work that would complement the qualitative findings and facilitate the global analysis that is needed.

We overcome some of these limitations by conceptualizing "autocratic linkages" as distinct from linkage to the West or democratic linkages, and we systematically examine the nature and effects of autocratic linkage over time and throughout the world. Autocratic linkage can be conceived of in similar ways to linkage to the West, as the density of ties and cross-border flows between non-democratic regimes. Just as with linkage to the West, autocratic linkage is multi-dimensional and captures a range of connections between states, including economic and social connections and cross-border flows of communication and people (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

Autocratic Linkage and Regime Survival

We argue that autocratic linkages have important implications for the survival of authoritarian regimes because they foster preferences for status quo politics both among international partners and domestic constituencies. Although linkage with both democratic and autocratic regimes abroad may at times work to bolster autocratic regimes, we argue that autocratic linkage has distinct and powerful effects that democratic linkage does not. We identify four principal causal mechanisms that link autocratic linkage to autocratic survival.

One channel of linkage influence works through domestic constituencies. Levitsky and Way argue that linkage to the West provides a range of domestic actors with "personal, financial and professional" ties to West, and that such actors will have a strong interest in avoiding international isolation and sanction from Western democracies (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 47). Yet autocratic linkage may provide correspondingly strong incentives among domestic actors to maintain the status quo and avoid any change of regime that would threaten existing foreign ties. Authoritarian leaders often secure the support of key constituencies, such as the military and business leaders, through patronage and financial largesse (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Magaloni, 2006). Where state revenues depend in significant part on international autocratic linkages, any regime change could put patronage-based benefits at risk. New incumbents may wish to rely on the same constituencies that

underwrote the previous regime, but their capacity to do so is lessened if external partners shun them and squeeze their external revenue. Saudi aid to Egypt, for example, declined sharply after the election of Mohamed Morsi in 2012, who was viewed with antipathy in Riyadh.

Autocratic linkages also influence patterns of international democracy enforcement. According to Levitsky and Way, during times of contentious politics linkage to the West increases the probability that Western states will both notice and take action against government abuses of power during these crisis moments (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Yet autocratic linkage is unlikely to have such effects as democracy is rarely a foreign policy goal within autocratic regimes. As Donno (2013) suggests, authoritarian countries "are more likely to oppose enforcement, simply because they value democracy less" (p. 74). Consequently, countries with high levels of autocratic linkages are less likely to be subjected to costly sanctions that can weaken autocratic rule. This does not mean that countries will be free from any external democratic pressure, but it can ensure that democratic enforcement is not the universal response facing individual autocratic regimes during times of crisis. For example, the coup leaders who took power in Haiti in 1991 enjoyed few ties to autocratic states, and faced universal, UN-authorized enforcement measures that contributed to their departure from power (Legler & Tieku, 2010). By contrast, the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe has a diverse set of international linkages, and strenuous enforcement measures by Western actors were not matched by the regime's autocratic partners in the region and beyond, many of whom actively resisted calls for international sanctions (Masunungure & Badza, 2010; Phimister & Raftopoulos, 2004). Channels of autocratic linkage thus shape the intensity of democracy enforcement likely to be faced by norm-violating autocratic regimes.

Autocratic linkage also increases the likelihood that external actors will actively support autocratic incumbents. While the absence of international sanctions can be a welcome relief, the presence of robust external sponsorship (including economic and military assistance) contributes more directly to autocratic regime survival (Tansey, 2016). International linkages increase the stakes that external actors have in the domestic regimes of other countries, but autocratic and democratic linkages are not equivalent in this respect. In particular, autocratic linkage heightens the fear of contagion between autocratic countries, and makes it more likely partners will assist one another in times of crisis. Scholarship on diffusion has shown how models of regime contention can spread quickly from one setting to another, especially between densely connected countries (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011). Consequently, when autocratic stability is threatened in one country, its autocratic partners will have a strong incentive to support the imperiled incumbents and prevent

democratization as a means of protecting the status quo in their own countries. For example, in the wake of the color revolutions in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Putin's regime in Moscow became concerned that a wave of democratic transitions in the region could lead to domestic overthrow in Russia. The result was an increasingly assertive foreign policy, entailing cooperation with and support for regional autocrats as part of a counterrevolutionary push (McFaul & Spector, 2009; Silitski, 2010). We explore this mechanism further in the final section of the article.

Finally, just as close autocratic linkages can enable fear of contagion to spread, so too can they facilitate processes of learning and emulation associated with diffusion. Incumbent elites with close linkages to other autocratic regimes will be more able to learn from, and cooperate with, foreign autocrats. Cross-border learning has contributed to authoritarian retrenchment in a number of settings, including the Arab Spring and in the wake of the fall of communism in Eastern Europe (Ambrosio, 2010; Heydemann & Leenders, 2011; Koesel & Bunce, 2013). Networks of autocratic regimes have shared technologies designed to restrict political and civil liberties with one another, with less advanced countries, such as Venezuela and Belarus, learning from their more advanced partners, such as Russia and China (Koesel & Bunce, 2013). Regional autocratic linkages can facilitate such processes, as autocratic "first-movers" influence the policies of their regional partners. In Southeast Asia, for example, Singapore has acted as an exemplar for its neighbors in developing Internet technology without sacrificing authoritarian control (Kalathil & Boas, 2010).

We thus argue that international linkages are important for autocratic regime survival, and that autocratic linkages in particular are likely to prolong the duration of autocratic regimes:

> **Hypothesis:** The higher the levels of autocratic linkages, the lower the risk of autocratic regime breakdown.

The Rise of Autocratic Linkage

Autocratic linkage is constituted by cross-border ties between autocratic regimes. To approximate the economic, social, political, and geographic facets of international autocratic linkage, we construct four indicators: autocratic linkage by trade, migration, diplomatic ties, and geographic proximity.

We first identify our sample of autocratic regimes using the well-known data set by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). Each linkage indicator is then constructed in a manner that reflects the intensity of ties a given autocracy entertains with autocratic partners in a given year. More

precisely, for each autocratic regime in each year we sum up the volume of trade exchanged (in US$), the number of people migrating to and from, the number of diplomatic envoys sent and received, and the distance (in kilometers) to all other autocracies. The resulting figures are then put in relation to the given autocracy's GDP (trade) or population (migration, diplomatic ties). Analogously, we construct indicators of each autocratic regime's democratic linkages.

In addition, we construct a set of alternative indicators based on average rather than total linkages, dividing the totals by the number of autocracies in the world, minus one. The two approaches allow us to examine two different understandings of how autocratic linkage can be compared over time. Particularly, total linkage levels are more easily affected by the changing numbers of autocratic regimes in the world during the last decades. Total autocratic linkage is likely to be higher if there are more autocracies to link to. By contrast, the variant employing the average linkage is less sensitive to fluctuating numbers of linkage partners and only reflects them if newly found or lost linkage connections are above or below average magnitude. This latter operationalization can be understood as capturing the degree to which potential linkages are realized. It can result in similar linkage levels based on different numbers of linkage partners.

Between the two operationalizations, we are confident to capture important variation in international linkage. We use and understand the four indicators as proxies to the complex and multi-faceted underlying concept of autocratic linkage. They represent reliable and valid measures of the most important economic, demographic, political, and geographic dimensions of international linkage. They enable us to capture the intensity of linkages that each autocratic regime has to the rest of the world's autocracies, taking into account their size and economic capacity. They are also derived from the best available sources of country-dyad data, which facilitates fine-grained descriptive and statistical analysis of linkage patterns over several decades. We collect figures on trade and diplomatic relations from the Correlates of War project's respective data sets (Barbieri, Keshk, & Pollins, 2009; Bayer, 2006). Migration data are from the World Bank's Global Bilateral Migration Database (Ozden, Parsons, Schiff, & Walmsley, 2011). We construct the indicators of average autocratic proximity from the *cshapes* data set (Weidmann, Kuse, & Gleditsch, 2010). All these data sets are organized in a yearly country-dyad format, allowing us to assign regime types to both countries in a dyad, and then distinguish democratic from autocratic linkages.[1]

Figure 1 illustrates an average autocratic regime's linkage with both autocracies and democracies entertained on the four linkage dimensions between 1948 and 2009. To provide important context to these developments,

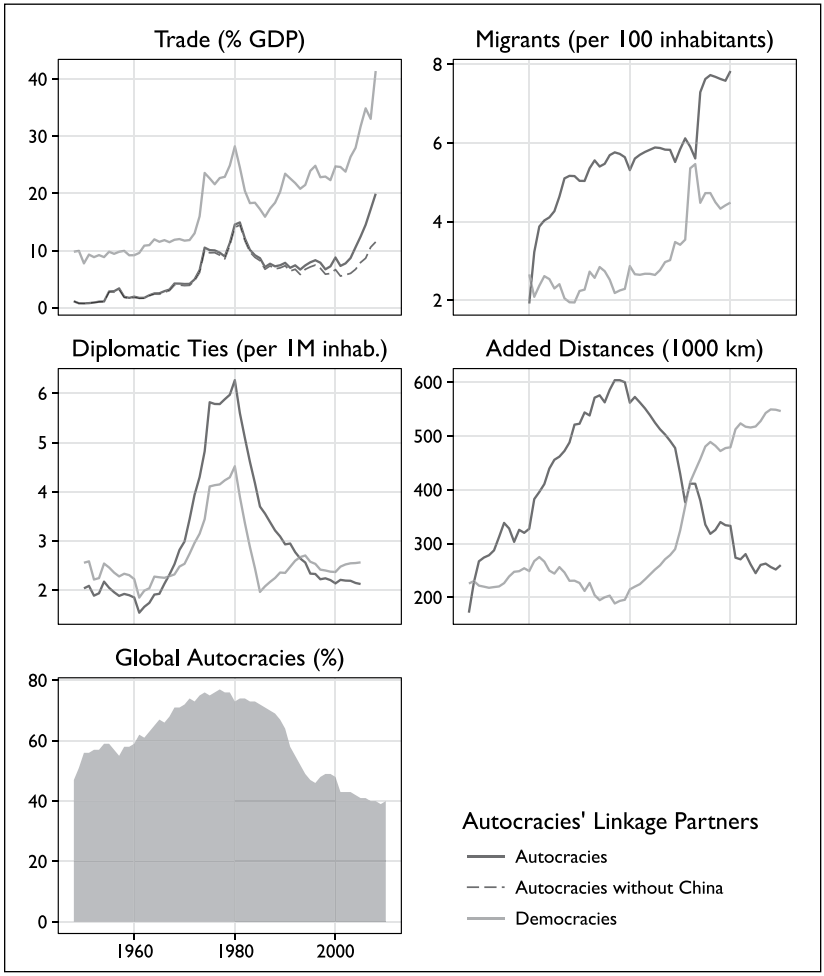

Figure 1. Average level of autocratic and democratic linkages of autocratic regimes, 1948-2009, on four linkage dimensions, and percentage of autocracies worldwide.

we also show the proportion of autocracies in the world during this period. Our indicators provide strong evidence that autocratic linkage is on the rise, and that this development is decoupled from the decrease in the number of autocratic regimes in the world. Note that while Figure 1 shows average linkage based on the sum aggregation discussed above, a very similar picture reveals itself when resorting to the average aggregation (see the online appendix). An average autocracy's linkage to other autocracies by trade and

migration has been increasing, particularly during the most recent period of observation, and is now higher than it has ever been. Remarkably, these developments take place while the number of autocratic regimes in the world has been decreasing since the late 1970s and, as a consequence, so has the average added distance to other autocracies (see the fourth and fifth panel in Figure 1). Note that the increase in autocratic trade can only in part be attributed to the growing economic power of China. Even if trade with China is excluded, inter-autocratic trade increases remarkably in the most recent period. In contrast, average diplomatic linkage between autocracies has declined sharply since the 1980s. This is due to the fact that the number of autocratic regimes has dwindled since then. While trade and migration linkage can still be expanded by increasing exchanges with the remaining autocracies, the number of diplomatic ties has a natural cap induced by the number of available partners. The sensitivity of diplomatic linkage to the number of available linkage partners also explains the spike during the 1980s: This was the high-time of authoritarianism in the world, and when many autocracies disappeared in the early 1990s, the number of diplomatic linkages among the remaining ones would naturally decrease.

The increase in autocratic linkage by trade and migration may well be the result of an intentional move to close ranks internationally. Particularly, the fact that linkage increased relative to linkage between autocracies and democracies points to such an intentional shift in autocratic linkage politics. The exception is diplomatic linkage, which did not increase. Naturally, global proximity linkage is a function of decreasing number of autocratic regimes and cannot be attributed to any intentional maneuvers. However, we have to be cautious interpreting the rise in autocratic linkage as an intentional change in autocratic foreign policy. Alternative explanations are possible. For example, the rise in trade linkage might also reflect general economic development in some heavily autocratic regions.

Although we use these indicators as proxies for our underlying concept of autocratic linkage, each also has a direct connection with autocratic survival. In the theoretical discussion above, we identified four central causal mechanisms through which autocratic linkage shapes the prospects of survival, and each of our indicators is associated with at least one of these mechanisms.

The role of international trade illuminates the workings of our first causal mechanism, where important elites are incentivized to support the existing regime out of fear that any replacement would put external revenue at risk. Trade is an important source of state revenue, but trade policy is highly political and scholars have shown that trade is particularly likely to decline after leadership change in autocratic regimes (McGillivray & Smith, 2004). Russia, for example, has offered favorable trade terms to close allies (such as

the Yanukovych regime in Ukraine) while making it clear that such favorable terms would be at risk in the event of regime change (Tolstrup, 2013). Consequently, the higher the levels of trade linkage between autocratic states, the greater the incentive that domestic elites have to maintain support for the existing regime and protect the status quo economic relations.

The role of migration in our story concerns the risk to autocratic elites that comes with the spread of anti-regime mobilization. Put simply, migration among autocratic regimes heightens the fear of contagion that arises when one regime experiences a destabilizing crisis. "Immigrant activism" is a key hallmark of transnational forms of mobilization and contentious politics (Tarrow, 2005, p. 48) and immigrant communities can act as a conduit of political unrest from their home country to their host country. Protests in one regime are thus more likely to cause concern among elites in other regimes where migration flows have served to bridge the gap between home and host country and where immigrant activists can act as potent agents of diffusion. Such concerns in turn increase the chances that these regimes will act to pre-empt domestic challenges at home and stave off potential contagion from neighboring countries experiencing mass mobilization.

Diplomatic ties also have implications for the fear of contagion. When autocratic states have diplomatic relations together, they are more likely to gain information about the nature of, and threat from, protest events taking place in partner countries. The fear of contagion can thus be driven by both elite and non-elite forms of autocratic linkage. Diplomatic linkage also plays an important role in facilitating our fourth causal mechanism of elite learning. Elites can not only learn about the nature and extent of the threat from their diplomatic contacts, but are also more likely to learn how to suppress domestic challenges when they have close diplomatic connections with regimes with experience in suppressing public mobilization. For example, Syrian efforts to withstand mass public protests in 2011 were informed in part through learning from long-standing and close diplomatic allies in Iran, and regime learning in the broader region during the Arab Spring was facilitated by diplomatic connections in the Gulf Cooperation Council (Heydemann, 2013; Heydemann & Leenders, 2011).

Finally, we argue that geographic proximity can also heighten the fear of contagion between regimes and facilitate inter-regime learning. Waves of regime contention often have their most significant impact on countries closest to the first-movers, as actors perceive conditions to be most similar among neighboring states (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011). As a result, mass mobilization in one country is likely to pose a serious threat to neighboring autocratic elites, who may thus wish to offer robust support to their besieged neighbors and stem the tide at its source. Close neighbors are thus more likely to work

to preserve each other's regimes in times of crisis and reduce the chances of autocratic collapse (e.g., Saudi Arabia intervened to support the regime in Bahrain in part due to the risk of contagion created by such close proximity). Geographic proximity also facilitates learning, as elites can more easily gain information about the strategies of control used by neighboring countries and employ them at home to stave off mass uprisings within their own regime. Just as processes of popular mobilization can diffuse more easily among proximate countries, so too can processes of "counterdiffusion" operate more easily in neighboring countries, as elites learn how to respond to threats from below and employ strategies of concession or repression to pre-empt successful uprisings (Weyland, 2010, p. 1165).

Statistical Analysis and Results

We now test the effect of the four indicators of autocratic linkage on the survival of autocratic regimes. We employ Geddes et al.'s (2014) data on the survival of autocratic regimes to specify our dependent variable. Their data are unique in capturing the transition of one autocratic regime to another. Alternative measures of autocratic persistence often equate autocratic breakdown with democratization, therefore missing out on most of the variation.

We include a number of control variables that might confound an association between the level of autocratic linkage and the longevity of autocratic regimes. First, we control each indicator of autocratic linkage for the corresponding indicator of democratic linkage. This ensures we do not conflate the effects of autocratic linkages with the effects of international linkages in general.

Second, we control the effects of autocratic linkage by total and average trade, migration, and diplomatic ties for the total and average proximity to other autocratic regimes, respectively. Geographic linkage plays a particular role in our research design. While proximity can serve as a valid linkage indicator in its own right, it might also be a driver of trade linkage, migration, and diplomatic ties. However, we believe autocratic linkage is more than just proximity. While proximity might facilitate establishing linkages in various political and socio-economic dimensions, we believe that deliberate attempts to strengthen linkage ties transcend mere neighborhood effects. If this is true, effects of linkage by trade, migration, and diplomatic ties should be robust to the inclusion of proximity as a control variable. At the same time, proximity as a linkage indicator should exert a significant effect itself.

Third, we control for the effects of linkage with two predominant autocratic Black Knights, China and Russia, making sure that any relationships we find are not the result of linkage with these two influential autocratic patrons. Indicators of Black Knight Linkage, analogous to our other linkage

indicators, give the sum or average trade, diplomatic ties, migration, or distance of a given autocratic regime to China and Russia.

Fourth, we control for the global proportion of autocratic regimes in all models, making sure that the effects of autocratic linkage we find are not simply the consequence of a more or less autocratic world.

We further control for GDP per capita and GDP growth (Bolt & van Zanden, 2013; retrieved from Teorell et al., 2015), both of which are likely to be associated with at least two of our linkage indicators, trade and migration. Richer and faster growing economies often trade more, and the numbers of both immigrants and emigrants may vary with economic performance of a country and its partners.

We also control for state capacity in all models, as strong states may be more likely to survive and may provide a fertile environment for trading enterprises and attract immigration. We employ the composite index of national capacity composed by the Correlates of War project (Singer, 1987).

We include a dummy variable marking the Cold War period in all models. This helps us isolate the effect of our linkage indicators from endogenous dynamics of the Cold War period in which autocracies were persistent and linkages were elaborate due to the confrontation of the Western and Eastern blocs.

In addition, we control for natural resource abundance (measured as the sum of oil and gas production as a proportion of GDP) and oil price (in dollars per barrel) in the trade model (Ross, 2013; retrieved from Teorell et al., 2015). Resource-rich autocracies are known to be remarkably stable (e.g., Karl, 1997; Ross, 2001). At the same time, oil and gas exporters naturally have higher trade figures. Changing oil prices can bring resource exporters under duress and affect trade figures of both importers and exporters of oil.

Finally, the occurrence of internal armed conflict is controlled for when testing the effect of migration linkage (Themner & Wallensteen, 2014).

We use the Cox proportional hazards survival model to assess the effect of indicators of autocratic linkage on autocratic regime survival. We test the crucial proportional hazards assumption and, following established best practice, adjust for non-proportional hazards by including interaction terms with the logarithm of survival time for problematic covariates (Box-Steffensmeier & Zorn, 2001; Golub, 2007, 2008).

Table 1 presents the results of six Cox models employing in turn the trade, migration, and diplomatic exchange indicators of autocratic linkage in the two variants discussed above. All models include the fourth linkage indicator, autocratic proximity (or rather, autocratic distance). Note that we use standardized versions of the indicators to render effect sizes commensurable. Note also that we do not run a model including all linkage indicators. Our argument concerns the effects of autocratic linkage in general, rather than the

Table 1. Cox Survival Models of the Effect of Autocratic Linkages on Autocratic Regime Breakdown.

	Autocratic breakdown					
	Trade (sum)	Migration (sum)	Diplomatic (sum)	Trade (mean)	Migration (mean)	Diplomatic (mean)
Autocratic linkage	−1.994***	−0.272**	−0.499**	−1.576***	−0.240**	0.294
	(0.566)	(0.124)	(0.221)	(0.485)	(0.122)	(0.248)
Democratic linkage	0.364**	−0.059	0.578***	0.206	−0.067	−0.003
	(0.154)	(0.155)	(0.178)	(0.276)	(0.138)	(0.159)
Autocratic distance	0.185*	0.243**	0.176*	0.188**	0.222**	0.222**
	(0.099)	(0.104)	(0.101)	(0.085)	(0.091)	(0.088)
Black knight linkage	0.457**	−0.263	−0.173	0.477**	−0.312	−0.069
	(0.232)	(0.242)	(0.123)	(0.221)	(0.293)	(0.148)
Global autocracies	−4.239*	−9.029***	−6.227**	−3.323	−7.350**	−4.657**
	(2.318)	(3.454)	(2.515)	(2.128)	(3.264)	(2.064)
GDP per capita (ln)	0.046	−0.099	−0.058	−0.014	−0.099	−0.071
	(0.102)	(0.123)	(0.111)	(0.105)	(0.123)	(0.109)
GDP growth	0.409	−4.159***	0.421	0.174	−4.162***	0.663
	(2.037)	(1.168)	(2.225)	(2.240)	(1.174)	(2.171)
State capacity	−24.125*	−28.593*	−43.703**	−25.268	−27.534*	−46.893**
	(12.925)	(14.988)	(21.767)	(15.868)	(15.429)	(23.415)
Cold War	0.606	1.538**	1.024**	0.338	1.318*	0.680
	(0.478)	(0.715)	(0.490)	(0.454)	(0.692)	(0.441)
Resources	−1.626**			−1.244*		
	(0.700)			(0.749)		
Oil price	0.001			0.0002		
	(0.004)			(0.004)		

(continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

	Autocratic breakdown					
	Trade (sum)	Migration (sum)	Diplomatic (sum)	Trade (mean)	Migration (mean)	Diplomatic (mean)
Conflict		−0.022			−0.012	
		(0.096)			(0.098)	
Autocratic Linkage × ln(T)						−0.236***
						(0.091)
Democratic Linkage × ln(T)			−0.181***			
			(0.060)			
Global Autocracies × ln(T)	2.441**	4.561***	3.168***	2.153**	4.283***	2.678**
	(1.082)	(1.439)	(1.147)	(1.049)	(1.413)	(1.100)
GDP Growth × ln(T)	−2.551**		−2.543**	−2.116**		−2.619***
	(0.996)		(1.006)	(1.046)		(1.014)
Cold × ln(T)	−0.492**	−1.008***	−0.627**	−0.414*	−0.947***	−0.512**
	(0.247)	(0.303)	(0.263)	(0.235)	(0.295)	(0.251)
Events	206	164	199	200	164	199
Observations	3,912	3,051	3,737	3,588	3,049	3,737
Log likelihood	−913.319	−684.135	−873.607	−871.193	−684.305	−874.497
LR Test	70.782***	51.321***	64.438***	64.901***	50.606***	62.656***
	(*df* = 14)	(*df* = 12)	(*df* = 13)	(*df* = 14)	(*df* = 12)	(*df* = 13)

Entries are Cox regression coefficients with robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses. Linkage indicators are standardized total and average trade volumes as a GDP share, standardized total and average migration per capita, standardized total and average diplomatic exchange per capita, and standardized total and average distance in kilometers. All covariates lagged by 1 year. LR = Likelihood Ratio Test.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

relative effect of a particular variable. We understand our linkage indicators as proxies of a country's overall linkage and put less emphasis on the specificities of individual linkage dimensions. (The exception here is proximity linkage, which is likely to be driving factor of all other linkage dimensions as well as a linkage indicator in its own right, and is thus entered as a control variable in all models.) Only if we were interested in the effects of autocratic trade as opposed to autocratic migration and diplomatic ties (and vice versa) would we need to control one for the others. In addition, inclusion of multiple linkage indicators is likely to result in multicollinearity, which is best avoided.

The findings lend strong support to our hypothesis. Autocratic linkage across all four linkage dimensions significantly reduces the risk of autocratic breakdown, as can be seen from the negative and significant coefficients of autocratic linkage by trade, migration, and diplomatic ties, and the positive and significant coefficients of autocratic distance. According to the first three models employing the sum aggregation of overall linkage, an increase by one standard deviation in overall inter-autocratic trade (equivalent to 18.3% of GDP), migration (8.9% of the population), and diplomatic ties (4.6 diplomatic ties per 1 million inhabitants), and a decrease by one standard deviation in the cumulative distance to autocracies (186,652 km) decreases the risk of autocratic breakdown by 86%, 24%, 39%, and 17%, respectively.[2] Note that effects hold when the first three linkage indicators are controlled for autocratic distance, indicating that these linkage dimensions are not a mere function of geography. The findings are also robust when controlling for democratic and Black Knight linkage, and the proportion of autocracies in the world. The effects are substantively very similar, albeit slightly smaller, when the average aggregation indicators are considered (the last three models in Table 1). Note that diplomatic linkage when aggregated via global averages appears to exert a time-dependent effect, represented by the negative and significant interaction term with survival time, and implying that average diplomatic linkage stabilizes autocracy only in autocratic regimes of a certain age. We included the time-interactive term following a proportional hazard violation of the covariate. The effects of all other linkage indicators are constant over time. We subject these findings to a rigid set of robustness tests involving different operationalizations of the dependent variable, different constellations of control variables, and different time lags (see the online appendix). The findings of these tests provide further strong support for our argument.

Figure 2 illustrates and substantiates these findings. Using the results from the models above, we simulate the effects of our linkage indicators (King, Tomz, & Wittenberg, 2000; Licht, 2011). Higher values within the interquartile range of trade, migration, and diplomatic linkage (plotted on the *x*-axis) are associated with lower risks of autocratic regime breakdown

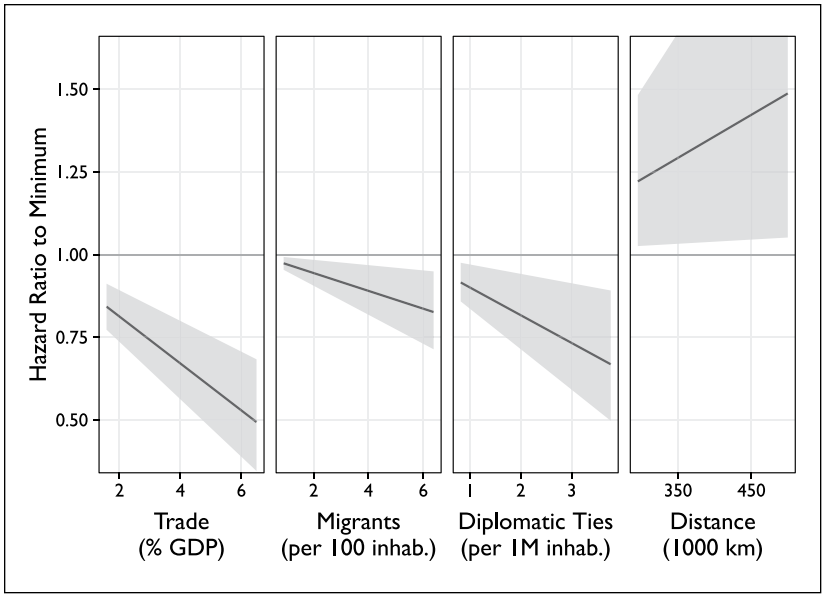

Figure 2. Simulated Effects of Autocratic Linkage Indicators on Autocratic Regime Breakdown.

(plotted on the *y*-axis) relative to the risk associated with the minimum observed value in our data. In contrast, as the cumulative distance to autocracies increases, so does the risk of regime breakdown relative to the regime with the smallest autocratic distance. It appears that the effects of trade and distance are similarly strong, while migration and diplomatic ties exert a somewhat weaker effect. Note that the inner 95% of 1,000 simulations (illustrated by the gray shaded area and analogous to a 95% confidence interval) exclude a hazard ratio of 1, implying that the effects are substantively significant at (at least) the 5% level.

The combination of our four measures of autocratic linkage as well as a series of time lags we employ (Table 2) safeguards our findings against endogeneity. Regarding the trade and diplomacy linkage indicators, the causal arrow could well point in the other direction. Autocratic regimes that have been around for longer have had more time to establish trade and diplomatic relations with other autocracies. In other words, autocratic durability could cause higher autocratic linkage, rather than the other way around. If this were the case, we would wrongly take causes for effects. However, while endogeneity could be a problem with regard to trade and diplomatic linkage, an inverse causal relationship between autocratic persistence and migration is

Table 2. Coefficients of the Effect of Lagged Autocratic Linkage Indicators on Autocratic Regime Breakdown.

	Trade (sum)	Migration (sum)	Diplomatic (sum)	Trade (mean)	Migration (mean)	Diplomatic (mean)
No time lags						
Autocratic linkage	−1.846***	−0.358**	−0.707***	−1.846***	−0.358**	−0.707***
	(0.699)	(0.160)	(0.238)	(0.699)	(0.160)	(0.238)
Autocratic distance	0.253***	0.286***	0.257***	0.253***	0.286***	0.257***
	(0.094)	(0.102)	(0.099)	(0.094)	(0.102)	(0.099)
Two-year lags						
Autocratic linkage	−1.285***	−0.255**	−0.295	−1.285***	−0.255**	−0.295
	(0.455)	(0.123)	(0.214)	(0.455)	(0.123)	(0.214)
Autocratic distance	0.178*	0.199**	0.184*	0.178*	0.199**	0.184*
	(0.100)	(0.100)	(0.100)	(0.100)	(0.100)	(0.100)
Three-year lags						
Autocratic linkage	−1.330***	−0.311**	−0.187	−1.330***	−0.311**	−0.187
	(0.481)	(0.136)	(0.193)	(0.481)	(0.136)	(0.193)
Autocratic distance	0.142	0.181*	0.179*	0.142	0.181*	0.179*
	(0.089)	(0.096)	(0.093)	(0.089)	(0.096)	(0.093)
Four-year lags						
Autocratic linkage	−1.236***	−0.285**	0.288	−1.236***	−0.285**	0.288
	(0.466)	(0.139)	(0.266)	(0.466)	(0.139)	(0.266)
Autocratic distance	0.168**	0.204**	0.187**	0.168**	0.204**	0.187**
	(0.079)	(0.091)	(0.086)	(0.079)	(0.091)	(0.086)
Five-year lags						
Autocratic linkage	−0.662	−0.293**	−0.119	−0.662	−0.293**	−0.119
	(0.410)	(0.132)	(0.186)	(0.410)	(0.132)	(0.186)
Autocratic distance	0.146*	0.184**	0.193**	0.146*	0.184**	0.193**
	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.088)

Entries are Cox regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses from models using different time lags. Linkage indicators standardized. Control variables (same as in Table 1) not shown: GDP, growth, state capacity, Cold War resources, oil price, conflict.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

hardly plausible, and outright impossible with regard to proximity. We do not have reason to expect that in longer lasting autocracies, people tend to migrate more to other autocracies than anywhere else. And of course, autocracies do not move geographically closer to one another the longer they exist. As a further precaution against endogeneity, we show our findings when employing different time lags of the covariates (Table 2). Most of the effects we found maintain up until a 4-year time lag, with the exception of both indicators of diplomatic linkage, which are negative throughout, indicating an autocracy sustaining effect, but only significant in the model without lags,

and the 1-year lag-model presented in Table 1. Finally, lagged by 5 years, trade linkage also loses significance.

The effect of democratic linkage is ambiguous at best. It is insignificant in most models in Table 1, and has a positive effect only in the first and a time-dependent effect in the third model. This ambiguity matches mixed accounts in the literature: While sometimes democratic influence from abroad is said to undermine autocratic regimes, democracies have also been shown to support autocratic regimes if it serves their purposes (Brownlee, 2012; Cox, Ikenberry, & Inoguchi, 2000; Schmitz, 2006). The interesting (non-)finding would deserve more attention. However, a more detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this article and must be pursued in future research.

Similarly, the supportive effect of Black Knight linkage pointed out in the literature on the influence of China and Russia does not seem to hold when contrasting it against global autocratic linkages. In most models, the coefficient is negative but insignificant. In the two trade models, it is significantly positive, indicating in stark contrast to the literature that Black Knight linkage might undermine rather than fortify autocratic regimes.

Finally, we can confirm that a more autocratic global climate, captured here by the proportion of global autocracies, significantly reduces the likelihood of autocratic regime breakdown. However, this effect seems to wear off in older autocracies, judging from the significantly positive, albeit smaller, time-interactive effect found in all models. Importantly, however, the proportion of autocracies in the world does not inhibit the effects of autocratic linkage. Autocratic linkage supports autocratic rule, regardless of how many autocracies there are.

Autocratic Linkages in the Arab Spring: The Saudi Counterrevolution

Having demonstrated that autocratic linkages contribute to the stability of authoritarian regimes, we now submit our theory to a different type of test by turning to the events of the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring presents an ideal test case for our theory: While six Arab countries saw regime-threatening instability in early 2011, only three experienced regime breakdown as a result of popular uprisings.[3] Following the literature (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2015), we treat Libya as a case of non-breakdown because Gadhafi lost power in the context of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led external intervention, not as a result of the mass uprising proper. Based on our findings, we would expect cases of non-breakdown to exhibit a significantly higher density of autocratic linkages. Moreover, at a lower level of analysis,

Table 3. Linkage Density and Regime Outcomes in the Arab Spring.

	Breakdown			Non-breakdown			
	Egypt	Tunisia	Yemen	Bahrain	Libya	Syria	All
Trade (% of GDP)							
All	−0.18*	−0.15*	−0.10	1.20***	0.11	−0.15*	0.14**
AS	−0.35**	−0.32**	−0.26*	1.27***	−0.01	−0.32**	0.52***
Migration (per thousand)							
All	−0.77***	−0.98***	−0.51**	1.93***	0.21	−0.81***	0.76***
AS	−0.62	−0.83*	−0.36	2.08**	0.37	−0.65	0.60
Diplomatic (per million)							
All	−0.024	0.008	−0.017	0.284***	0.068***	−0.014	0.014
AS	−0.087*	−0.057	−0.079*	0.277***	0.022	−0.076*	0.124***
Distance (km)							
All	−1,541***	−443	−1,296**	−861**	−1,486**	−1,123**	−1,131***
AS	−491***	805***	−202*	312**	−426***	3	62

The rows labeled "AS" use the Arab Spring countries as a comparison group, while the columns labeled "all" use all countries; in both cases, averages for the 2000s are compared in one-tailed *t* tests. All cell entries are differences in means; shaded cells contain differences in line with our expectations.
*$p < .1$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

we should also be able to observe how dense linkages are translated into concrete measures of support.

On the aggregate level, to begin with, the connection between high linkage levels and regime durability we observed above is also visible in the Arab Spring. As Table 3 shows, the cases of non-breakdown (Bahrain, Libya, and Syria) show higher linkage levels on three of the four measures (trade, migration, and distance) when compared with all other countries. Moreover, all of our linkage indicators with the exception of distance suggest a higher level of autocratic linkages for the non-breakdown group than for the group of countries that experienced breakdown as a result of mass protests (Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen). Moving to individual countries, our measures are strong predictors of regime trajectories in the Arab Spring as well. Based on linkage density alone, we would have failed to correctly predict the outcome only in the Syrian case,

where relatively low linkage density would have suggested a higher likelihood of regime breakdown. In the remaining five cases, our linkage indicators point in the direction suggested by our theory with only minor exceptions. Merely the distance component does not perform well, a fact that can be explained with the above-average concentration of autocratic regimes in the Middle East.

Instead of concluding that our argument is supported by the Arab Spring and stopping the analysis here, we follow suggestions in the methodological literature and test implications of our theory beyond the original set of hypotheses discussed above (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994). In particular, exploiting the strengths of small-*N* case studies, we use evidence from the Arab Spring to examine one of our four causal mechanisms in detail, and explore the ways in which autocratic linkage increases the likelihood that an authoritarian regime will receive external support in times of crisis. As Lieberman observes, this strategy "requires a *shifting* of levels of analysis" turning from the aggregate level to "an examination of *within*-case processes" (Lieberman, 2005, p. 440; emphasis in original).

We thus start from the observation that, in accordance with our theory, countries with denser autocratic linkages were less likely to experience regime breakdown in the Arab Spring. In a further step, we examine one way in which dense autocratic linkages are connected to regime survival: via supportive action by international allies. To observe this causal mechanism, we focus on the actions of a single external actor. As has been observed, Saudi Arabia "positioned itself as the chief architect of a counterrevolution to contain, and perhaps even to reverse, the Arab Spring as much as possible" (Kamrava, 2012, p. 96). The Saudi regime mobilized its considerable diplomatic, financial, and even military resources to support some of the region's autocrats in times of crisis (al-Rasheed, 2011; Kamrava, 2012; Rieger, 2014). Yet, Saudi policy toward the Arab Spring was not as uniform as is sometimes implied by proponents of the counterrevolution narrative: Only in three cases out of six—namely, in Bahrain, Egypt, and Yemen—did the Kingdom actually intervene on the side of the incumbent regime. In the three other cases—in Libya, Syria, and Tunisia—Saudi policy ranged from benign disinterest (Tunisia), to support for international military action against the regime (Libya), and active support of the armed opposition (Syria). In brief, Saudi policy toward the Arab Spring was not driven by a mere reflex in favor of the status quo, but varied across different cases. If our causal mechanism is well specified, we would expect Saudi Arabia to act in support of embattled autocrats in cases of dense linkages, but remain silent or even voice support for the opposition in cases of low linkages.

International support in times of regime crisis does not perfectly predict autocratic survival and the Saudi counterrevolution in the Arab Spring is no

exception in this regard. In Egypt and Yemen, to begin with, autocrats eventually fell despite Saudi support although in both cases Saudi Arabia continued to influence post-breakdown dynamics. In Syria, however, Bashar al-Assad survived in office despite Saudi opposition. In this section, we aim to show that autocratic linkage density increases the likelihood that an embattled incumbent will receive support from international autocratic allies. We are not claiming, however, that international support is always effective, much less that autocratic linkage can explain regime outcomes in the Arab Spring more generally. As the comparative literature on regime outcomes in the Arab Spring has demonstrated, regime trajectories in the Arab Spring were significantly shaped by domestic factors, notably the behavior of the coercive apparatus (Bellin, 2012; Brownlee et al., 2015). We do not purport to offer an alternative explanation for regime trajectories in the Arab Spring, but merely to illustrate how—all other things equal—autocratic linkage contributes to authoritarian stability by inducing international allies to lend support to their embattled allies.

Saudi Responses to the Arab Uprisings

One advantage of focusing on crisis periods is that our theory makes clear predictions on the expected behavior of international actors. In a nutshell, when authoritarian regimes are confronted with an immediate challenge to their stability, we would expect external autocratic allies to intervene in support in cases of high linkage density, but not in cases in which linkages are weak. External autocratic sponsorship can take a variety of forms, and here we focus on two broad categories of support (Tansey, 2016). First, external actors can seek to divert potential pressure against embattled regimes originating from other international actors, for example, by blocking international sanctions. Second, supportive actions by international autocratic allies can also include direct material or political interventions at the domestic level, including financial assistance or the supply of weapons. The Saudi reaction to the Arab Spring comprised both types of external support to autocratic regimes under stress. We first outline these reactions and then turn to the role of linkages in explaining variance in Saudi behavior.

Diluting external pressure. The repression of domestic uprisings often creates punitive international costs, as external actors seek to sanction and isolate the regime. Yet autocratic allies can support beleaguered autocratic incumbents by blocking attempts at international condemnation or sanctions. Saudi Arabia's actions in support of the Mubarak regime in Egypt provide an important example. The late King Abdallah was an open critic of the public protests in

Egypt and notified U.S. President Obama by phone that Saudi Arabia would substitute for U.S. aid to Egypt if the United States were to withdraw their assistance ("Al-Malik Abdallah talaba Obama bi-l-imtina' 'an idhlal Mubarak," 2011). This was a clear signal to the United States that contemplating economic sanctions against Egypt by withholding U.S. assistance would be pointless as Saudi Arabia would cover the bill. Even as late as February 8, 2011, three days before Mubarak's forced resignation, Saudi Arabia joined the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel among other Middle Eastern allies of the United States in lobbying the White House not to put too much pressure on Mubarak ("Allies Press U.S. to Go Slow on Egypt," 2011).

Saudi Arabia used the same strategy in support of the new military rulers in Egypt after the military coup of July 3, 2013, again offering to compensate Egypt for potential losses in American aid in the context of the military's crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Riyadh also offered vocal diplomatic support in ways that clearly signaled the strength of the new regime's international alliances. Following the July 3, 2013 return of the Egyptian military to political power, the Saudi announced that "the people and government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stood and still stand today with our brothers in Egypt against terrorism, extremism and sedition, and against whomever is trying to interfere in Egypt's internal affairs" (cited in Rieger, 2014, p. 11). Quite predictably, the Saudi, Emirati and Kuwaiti authorities were the first to congratulate Adly Mansour who became interim president after Morsi's deposition and expressed strong support for the Egyptian military (Rieger, 2014).

By contrast, the Saudis never used comparable language to describe the protests in Tunisia. They merely affirmed their support for the "brotherly people of Tunisia," simultaneously making it known that Ben Ali was not to engage in political activities while a guest in Saudi Arabia ("Khashoggi," 2011). In the case of Libya, moreover, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) referred to the Libyan regime as "illegitimate" and spoke of the demands of the Libyan people early on in the crisis. Published in the wake of a meeting of GCC foreign ministers in Riyadh on March 10, 2011 (and thus 4 days prior to GCC intervention in Bahrain), the statement denounced the use of violence against civilians and called on the Arab League and the United Nations to impose a no-fly zone ("Al-nas al-kamil li-l-bayan al-sadir 'an ijtima' wuzara' kharijiya duwal majlis al-ta'aun al-khaliji," 2011). In brief, Saudi public pronouncements on the uprisings in the Arab Spring clearly followed a differentiated policy, designed to divert pressure from and generate international support for specific regimes and to foster opposition against others.

Direct support for domestic incumbents. As well as seeking to minimize international costs and maximize international support, external autocratic allies can

also seek to bolster autocratic incumbents through direct assistance at the domestic level. By directly intervening in support of an authoritarian incumbent (through surges in financial aid, arms transfers, or even direct military intervention), autocratic allies cover parts of the direct, material costs of the conflict and enhance the regime's room to maneuver. Saudi intervention in Bahrain under the cover of the Peninsula Shield Force (*quwwat dir' al-jazira al-mushtarika*) maintained by the GCC offers a clear example of such material support. Officially acting on the request of the Bahraini government, observers have suggested that the initiative actually came from the Saudi regime itself, which felt threatened by the potential cross-border implications of political change in Bahrain (also see Odinius & Kuntz, 2015; Rieger, 2014). Part of the reason for this threat perception was the fact that Saudi Arabia was concerned about the effects of the Bahraini uprising on its own restive Shia minority in the Eastern Province (Wehrey, 2013). Given the tight interconnections between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, the Saudi regime had an interest in containing the situation in Bahrain. While Saudi troops were not directly involved in repressive activity, they nevertheless freed up Bahraini capabilities that could then be deployed against the protesters. In brief, by sending troops to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia took over parts of the direct costs of repressing the Bahraini uprising.

GCC stabilization efforts in Bahrain also included financial aid. In March 2011, the GCC foreign ministers set up a US$20 billion fund for Bahrain and Oman with the aim of bolstering these two poorer member states' capacity to counteract economically motivated domestic dissent. Bahrain used these resources in part to create 20,000 new jobs in the Ministry of Interior, no small feat in a country of 600,000 inhabitants (Hertog, 2011).

Financial aid was also an important instrument in Saudi policy toward the post-revolutionary Egyptian regime. The Saudis supported the return to power of Egypt's military elite by first starving the post-Mubarak MB-led regime of financial aid, and then massively increasing aid flows immediately after the July 2013 military takeover. Although Saudi Arabia had pledged support to Egypt in the form of a US$4 billion loan in May 2011, the actual disbursement of this loan was delayed. Similarly, in October 2011, the UAE had pledged US$3 billion in aid to Egypt, but then failed to disburse the amount until July 2013, arguing that the mechanisms of delivery had not yet been decided upon (Farouk, 2014). The flow of GCC (with the exception of Qatari) money into Egypt only resumed following the July 3 military takeover. On July 9 and 10, 2013, about a week after the coup, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait each announced aid packages to Egypt with a total volume of US$12 billion. By January 2014, the Central Bank of Egypt declared that it had already received US$9 billion and even returned a US$2 billion deposit made earlier by Qatar (Farouk, 2014).

In Yemen, finally, Saudi influence was equally consequential. Saudi Arabia had long cultivated networks of supporters among the Yemeni tribes. While systematic figures are not available, in the year 2000, Saudi Arabia's Special Committee for Yemeni Affairs (SCYA) through which Saudi influence was channeled had a budget of US$3.5 billion and estimates on the number of Yemeni political actors on the Saudi payroll before the 2011 uprising go into the thousands (Burke, 2013; Phillips, 2011). In 2008, the Kingdom confirmed that it had paid a monthly stipend of US$800,000 to the paramount *shaykh* of the Hashid tribal confederation (the most important tribal group in the country to which President Salih belonged) and that it would continue to pay the same amount to the *shaykh*'s sons after his death (Phillips, 2011, Chapters 3 and 4; U.S. Diplomatic Cable, 2009). In the context of the uprising in Yemen, Saudi Arabia used these connections to create domestic support for its transition plan (later known as the GCC initiative) that included not only President Salih's resignation but also "ensure[d] roles for as many members of the Saleh regime as possible" (Horton, 2011). In particular, the GCC initiative made sure to exclude the Houthi-movement, Saudi Arabia's most vocal internal critic, from the transitional process—a decision that significantly contributed to the failure of conflict resolution in Yemen and also explains Saudi Arabia's armed intervention in the Yemeni crisis since early 2015.

Linkage Intensity and Saudi Support

How well do these different forms of support align with the density of linkages between Saudi Arabia and the countries hit by uprisings during the Arab Spring? On the aggregate level, to begin with, the evidence supports our hypothesis: Employing the operationalization of autocratic linkages in terms of trade volumes, migration flows, and diplomatic ties we introduced above, the three countries that received some kind of support from the Saudi regime during their respective crises (Bahrain, Egypt, and Yemen) show significantly higher levels of linkage density than the three countries that did not (Libya, Syria, and Tunisia).

As Table 4 shows, those countries that were supported by Saudi Arabia in the Arab Spring traded significantly more with the kingdom than those that were not, they contributed more to the immigrant population in Saudi Arabia,[4] they universally had full diplomatic relations at all times between 1990 and 2005, and the distance between their capitals and Riyadh is significantly smaller. In brief, our four different linkage indicators align well with Saudi policies toward the Arab uprisings on the aggregate level.

If we break this information down to the country level, the picture becomes less clear-cut, but still offers considerable support for our arguments. Table 5

Table 4. Linkage Density with KSA and Saudi Reactions to the Arab Spring.

	Trade			Migration			
	Million U.S. dollar	% of GDP (receiver)	% of GDP (KSA)	Absolute	% of sender population	Full diplomatic relations (*N*)	Distance (in km)
Support	1,280	11.16	0.59	358,448	1.03	3	1,135
No support	71	0.21	0.03	4,786	0.05	2	3,545
Difference	−1,209[a]	−10.95[a]	−0.55[a]	−353,662	−0.98	1	2,409[a]

Values for trade and migration are averages for the 2000s; diplomatic relations captures whether full diplomatic relations were ever interrupted between 1990 and 2005, and distance is the distance between Riyadh and the respective capital of the Arab Spring state in kilometers. KSA = Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
a. Difference in means significant in a *t* test at 95% confidence level.

Table 5. Linkage Density between KSA and Arab Spring Countries.

	Trade volume as % of GDP		Migrants in KSA as % of population	Diplomatic relations with KSA (2000s)	Distance (in km)	Linkage strength
	Receiver	KSA				
Bahrain	42.42	0.86	0.04	Full	428	Strong
Egypt	0.56	0.68	1.39	Full	1,636	Strong
Libya	0.21	0.02	0.01	Interrupted	3,375	Weak
Syria	0.85	0.58	0.65	Full	1,406	Strong
Tunisia	0.20	0.05	0.10	Full	3,714	Weak
Yemen	0.81	0.22	1.99	Full	1,072	Strong

The trade data are averages for 2000 to 2009, the migration data are for 2000, and the diplomatic relations data are for the 2000s. Diplomatic relations are interrupted if ambassadors have been withdrawn at any point during the 2000s. KSA = Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

displays the strength of linkages with Saudi Arabia for all six Arab Spring countries. There are two cases with weak linkages to Saudi Arabia (Libya and Tunisia), and four cases with relatively high linkage density (Bahrain, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen).

Bahrain, the country that arguably saw the most intense form of Saudi intervention during the Arab Spring also has the highest level of linkage density. In the Bahraini case, this is mainly a function of the extraordinarily dense trade relations between the two Gulf countries: As displayed in Table 5, the trade volume with Saudi Arabia accounted for more than 40% of Bahraini GDP during the 2000s, a fact that can in no small measure be explained by Bahraini dependence on Saudi oil. Egypt and Yemen, in turn, show lower, but still considerable levels of linkage density with Saudi Arabia

in terms of trade volumes and migration flows, and Saudi Arabia's reaction aligns with linkage patterns in the expected way.

The same can be said for Libya and Tunisia. As Table 5 reports, trade linkages and migration movements between Saudi Arabia and both Libya and Tunisia were weak. In addition, Libya did not maintain uninterrupted diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia throughout the 2000s. In accordance with our expectations, Saudi Arabia did not offer any support to these two countries during the Arab Spring. While linkages between Saudi Arabia and Libya were negligible, the Kingdom's opposition against Qadhafi was probably also influenced by his erratic nature and the ongoing, personal row between the Libyan leader and the Saudi King.[5] In Tunisia, the Saudis applied a cautious and largely indifferent strategy. While they continued to back Egypt's Husni Mubarak at about the same time, they did not come out in support of Tunisian President Zine al-Abidin Ben Ali. Although Ben Ali was granted exile in Saudi Arabia, he was not allowed to engage in political activities while in Saudi Arabia ("No Saudi Mediation for Bin Ali," 2011).

The only case that does not conform to our expectations is Syria. As reported in Table 5, Syria actually enjoyed relatively strong linkages with Saudi Arabia both in terms of trade and migration flows. As all other Arab Spring countries with the exception of Libya, Syria also enjoyed full diplomatic relations with the Saudi monarchy throughout the 2000s. At the same time, however, Saudi policy in the Syrian crisis has not only been non-supportive, but actually outright hostile toward the Syrian regime. While this aspect of Saudi policy toward the Arab Spring is probably driven by regional strategic considerations—such as Syria's alignment with Iran and Hizballah—it nevertheless goes against our expectations.

This points to a major limitation of probabilistic arguments. While linkage density—as measured by trade, migration, diplomatic ties, and proximity—provides a strong explanation on average, linkage patterns cannot account for all observable variation. Neither do our linkage measures capture all the nuances of international and regional alliances, nor does linkage completely determine the foreign policy of autocratic states. The fact that Syria is an outlier both when compared with all other autocracies globally (Table 3), and when compared with the other Arab Spring countries (Table 5), is illustrative of this limitation. On average, however, our measures represent a valid approximation of linkage density and we find strong support for the stabilizing effect of autocratic linkage. This claim is supported by our statistical results and the remaining five Arab Spring cases with the exception of Syria.

Moreover, we find no plausible alternative explanation that can account for the pattern of Saudi support. The principal alternative explanations would focus on Saudi national interests, variously defined in terms of the containment of Iran

as a major Shia power, the protection of fellow monarchies in the region, or the stabilization of their immediate neighborhood (see Ennis & Momani, 2013). None of these arguments provide a better alternative to linkage patterns. Confessionalism and the containment of Iran, to begin with, could be adduced as an explanation for Saudi intervention in support of the Sunni-led minority regime in Bahrain, but hardly provide a convincing explanation for Saudi support to Egypt (but not Sunni Tunisia) or the fact that the kingdom traditionally maintained ties of patronage to Zaydi Shia tribal elites in Yemen. Monarchical regime type or proximity do not fare much better as alternative explanations. Saudi Arabia gave support to both monarchies and republics in the Arab Spring. Proximity as an isolated factor might explain the kingdom's support for the regime in neighboring Bahrain and Saudi indifference toward the events in faraway Tunisia, but proximity alone does not explain variation in Saudi reactions among the group of countries that share similar distances to Saudi Arabia, nor can proximity account for Saudi hostility toward distant Libya.

In sum, we find ample empirical evidence to back up the plausibility of our hypothesized causal mechanism linking autocratic linkage to external support in times of crisis. Our argument is not that autocratic linkages are completely independent of strategic considerations, but rather that once created, they can have independent effects. Linkages create vested interests on both sides and, once in place, generate path dependencies that shape the likelihood of specific foreign policy choices. As the Syrian outlier suggests, high linkage density operates more as a necessary, rather than sufficient, condition for external support. Nonetheless, the pattern of Saudi policy across the Arab Spring cases points to a compelling and important role for autocratic linkage in shaping a key mechanism in our causal story, namely, the role of external support for beleaguered autocratic incumbents in times of contentious politics.

Conclusion

In recent years, various scholars have sought to account for the effects of international linkage on regime survival. These studies, however, have tended to deal only with a truncated sample of international linkages and have lacked a systematic analysis of linkage over time and across regions. We have made several significant contributions to our understanding of the nature of international linkages and their effects on regime survival. We have shown the importance of viewing autocratic linkage as a distinct form of cross-border relationship that has varied over time independently of democratic linkages. Although autocratic linkages have been slow to develop, in recent years they have been growing at a greater rate than democratic linkages. We have also shown that autocratic linkages are crucial in explaining patterns of autocratic survival in recent decades. Authoritarian regimes that have higher autocratic

linkages are likely to survive longer, and the stronger the linkages, the greater the effect. We have demonstrated this effect empirically through a robust quantitative analysis of global patterns of international linkages over several decades, and have thus offered one of the first statistical tests of linkage-based theories of regime survival. An analysis of Saudi policies in the wake of the Arab Spring provides further evidence of the importance of international linkage in shaping patterns of external support for authoritarian regime survival.

Our findings have important implications for the future prospects of democracy. As discussed above, we have witnessed a surge in autocratic linkages since 2000 that shows no sign of abating. Autocratic regimes are increasing their trade, migration flows, and diplomatic exchange with other autocracies even as the total number of democracies in the world declines. As these ties make autocratic breakdown less likely, we should expect the world's remaining authoritarian regimes to be more resilient to prevailing democratizing pressures than those of the recent past. This is a sobering finding for those who have an interest in the further spread of democracy. The tightening of relations between autocratic states poses significant challenges to would-be democratic reformers, and as the rise in levels of autocratic linkage is ongoing, the future holds out little prospect for radical democratic transformation in much of the world. As long as autocratic linkages remain firm, autocratic rulers will be difficult to dislodge.

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Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion of the characteristics of the linkage indicators, please refer to the online appendix, codebook, and replication code available from http://cps.sagepub.com/supplemental

2. Following from hazard ratios of $HR_{\text{Autocratic Trade}} = \exp(b_{\text{Autocratic Trade}}) = \exp(-1.994) = 0.136$, $HR_{\text{Autocratic Migration}} = \exp(b_{\text{Autocratic Migration}}) = \exp(-0.272) = 0.762$, $HR_{\text{Autocratic Diplomatic}} = \exp(b_{\text{Autocratic Diplomatic}}) = \exp(-0.499) = 0.607$, and $HR_{\text{Autocratic Distance}} = \exp(-b_{\text{Distance, Model 1}}) = \exp(-0.185) = 0.831$, computed from the first three models in Table 1.
3. Following Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds (2015), we treat Libya as a case of foreign induced regime change (FIRC).
4. Numbers of Saudi migrants in Arab Spring states are generally lower and do not show significant differences across the two groups.
5. Qadhafi had called Abdallah a U.S. slave in the context of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and a liar at the 2009 summit of the Arab League in Doha.

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Author Biographies

Oisín Tansey is senior lecturer at the Department of War Studies, King's College London. He is the author of *The International Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

Kevin Koehler is assistant professor of political science at the American University in Cairo. His research interests include civil-military relations and authoritarian rule in the Middle East. His work appeared in *Comparative Politics*, *International Political Science Review*, and *Democratization*, among others.

Alexander Schmotz is a postdoctoral research associate at the Department of War Studies, King's College London, and works on autocratic and hybrid regimes and quantitative research methodology.