

Territorial Threat and Democratic Regime Reversals

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October 18, 2015

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Abstract

Why do some democracies revert to non-democratic forms of governance? We develop an explanation of democratic reversals that emphasizes the role of states' border relations for domestic politics. Territorial threats encourage political centralization of authority in the executive to defend against threats to the homeland and the construction and maintenance of large land armies to defend against and/or fight the threatening neighbor. Combined, these changes increase leaders' domestic power, weaken democratic institutions, encourage other conditions threatening democratic survival, and, ultimately, lead to democratic reversals. Our argument finds strong support in an empirical test using a new measure of latent territorial threat on the relevant population of countries, all democracies with contiguous neighbors, from 1946-2012.

Why do democratic countries sometimes revert to autocratic governance? Many scholars have pointed out that democratic forms of government have an abundance of desirable consequences in a wide range of economic, social, and international issues (e.g., Halperin, Siegle, and Weinstein 2009). The proliferation of democratic forms of governance and pro-democracy movements across the world in the past decades also suggests that the presumptive advantages of democracy have appeal far beyond scholarly writings. In fact, Mitchell (2012) points out that democracies are now so common and command so many of the world's resources that democratic norms set standards of international—and increasingly domestic—behavior for democracies and non-democracies alike.

Despite the putative benefits of democratic forms of governance, democracies do not always survive once established. As early as the 1960s, Huntington (1968; 1991) famously observed that democracies revert to non-democratic forms of governance with some regularity, with waves of democratization preceding 'reverse waves' of democratic backsliding. In a broad sense, events after the 2011 Arab Spring follow this pattern. Pro-democracy movements called for democratization in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa, and multiple countries experienced political and regime change during this period. Since then, however, trends toward democratization have reversed in a number of these countries—with Tunisia being perhaps the only country where democratic reforms are lasting as of this writing.

Reversals to non-democratic systems are puzzling if democratic systems are preferable to a majority of the population, and if democratic institutions lend power to a majority of the population. Yet, since 1946 several dozens of times democratic countries have reverted to autocratic institutions. Over 10 of these incidents have occurred since 2000. Answers to this puzzle from extant research mostly point to domestic institutional, economic, and other factors. We argue in this study that such explanations are incomplete without an emphasis on the influence of democracies' external environment.

Specifically, we argue that a country's threat environment—in particular the threat to its territorial integrity from its neighbors—is an important but overlooked factor in determining which form of governance a country adopts and keeps. The argument builds upon the long-standing logic

that only those countries existing in relatively safe and peaceful environments can afford to democratize, while those living in threatening situations are likely to remain autocratic (Desch 1996; Hintze 1975; Thompson 1996; Tilly 1985; Gibler 2012; Gibler and Tir 2010; 2014). We expand this logic to explain why democracies fail. Our argument suggests that countries with democratic institutions in threatening environments will face greater challenges to maintain these institutions and, consequently, have a higher risk of reversal.

This logic supplants extant arguments on democratic reversals. For example, just as democratic transitions are more likely for countries in areas with more democratic neighbors, democracies are less likely to survive in neighborhoods with fewer democracies (Huntington 1968; 1991; Gleditsch 2002a; Gassebner, Lamla, and Vreeland 2013). Existing explanations for this regional clustering of democracies mostly focus on the regional diffusion of democratic norms (Elkins and Simmons 2005) as well as the role of international organizations (Pevehouse 2002; Hawkins 2008; Donno 2010) in promoting norms or bolstering domestic democratic institutions and processes. Conversely, in regions without strong democratic norms or established democracy-promoting organizations, reversals would be more likely. While these explanations build sophisticated theoretical and empirical accounts of regional patterns in democratic reversals and their prevention, they omit territorial threat as an important source of democratic reversal that has a more fundamental impact on regional environments.

The remainder of the study is organized as follows. We first clarify that extant work on democratic reversals fails to take into account the importance of territorial threat. The subsequent section explains why territorial threat gives rise to some of the domestic and international correlates of democratic reversals. Empirically, we generate a measure of latent territorial threat using Bayesian estimation. We show that this measure is consistently associated with a heightened risk of democratic reversals, even taking into account measurement uncertainty as well as other key predictors of reversals. We conclude with implications for the scholarly literature on determinants of democratic reversals as well as for policy efforts on democracy promotion and related issues.

Why do democracies revert?

As one of the large research clusters in comparative politics research, the literature on democratization and democratic consolidation has developed several explanations for democratic reversals. We briefly review this scholarship, separated into domestic and international factors, in order to show that the impact of territorial threat on consolidation and reversals should be considered in conjunction with, or even prior to, extant explanations.

Domestic Factors

Scholars have identified a number of purely domestic concepts behind the dynamics of democratic reversals. Foundational for modernization theory, Lipset (1960, chapter 2) argued democracies with poor economies are more likely to revert to autocratic institutions. In their large-scale test of this and other arguments, Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi (2000) found that wealthier democracies are far less likely to transition back to autocracy. More recently, both Boix (2003) and Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) suggested that among economic factors, inequality and the resulting demand for redistribution are key drivers of both democratization and new democratic institutions' prospects for survival. Although debates about the empirical support for this conjecture persist (Benhabib, Corvalan, and Spiegel 2011; Freeman and Quinn 2012), the economy in broad terms, most commonly operationalized as economic development, is typically identified as one of the most powerful predictors of democratic survival (Gassebner, Lamla, and Vreeland 2013, 191).

With an eye toward historical legacies, scholars have pointed out that a country's past experience with democratic transitions are crucial in explaining whether new democratic institutions persist. Boix and Stokes (2003, 536) found robust evidence for a strong association between previous democratic reversals and the increased odds of democratic breakdown. This association remains in the presence of economic variables (Boix and Stokes 2003; Gassebner, Lamla, and Vreeland 2013) and implies that past reversals induce path-dependent patterns of future reversals. That reversals to autocracy tend to occur repeatedly *within* one country suggests the presence of

an underlying factor that drives these repeated reversals. Below, we suggest that territorial threat is such an underlying factor which can be linked both directly to reversals and also to some of the other domestic sources behind these reversals.

International Factors

Aside from economic development and past trajectories, extant studies emphasize the importance of regional patterns in which reversals toward autocracy occur. Here, the influence of neighboring countries as well as the role of international institutions, for instance through strengthening civil society or requiring democratic standards for accession, have emerged as robust correlates of democratic survival. The democracy diffusion and clustering literature (see, e.g., Gleditsch 2002a; Elkins and Simmons 2005; Gleditsch and Ward 2006; O’Loughlin, Ward, Lofdahl, Cohen, Brown, Reilly, Gleditsch, and Shin 1998; Wejnert 2005) has emphasized a number of theoretical processes behind the finding that new democracies with a larger number of democratic neighbors are more likely to remain democracies. Elkins and Simmons (2005), for instance, highlight two mechanisms behind the regional clustering of policies, including democratic consolidation. New democracies may adapt to altered conditions, specifically democratic standards in a region. Political actors in new democracies may also be increasingly likely to engage in learning processes that sustain democracy if a majority of proximate countries is democratic.

Furthermore, international institutions appear to be associated with democratic survival. Pevehouse (2002) argues that international institutions exert a democracy-stabilizing influence on member countries that recently democratized. Hawkins (2008) suggests that international institutions can strengthen democracy by offering access to domestic non-governmental organizations and civil society. And considering the central importance of elections and preventing election fraud for the survival of new democratic systems, Donno’s (2010) findings about the role of international institutions in protecting the legitimacy and integrity of the electoral process further illustrate the role of international factors in explaining democratic consolidation.

The considerable breadth of evidence on the causes of democratic reversals then allows to

describe a generic case of a country at high risk of democratic reversal. Such a country would be comparatively poor, have a short record of democratic institutions but a history of reversals to autocracy, be situated in a region with few other democracies, and not be deeply embedded in international organizations. This generic description leads to our main argument in this study: several of these “risk factors” of democratic reversals can be traced to a country’s relations with its neighbors over territory. Studies suggest that lingering territorial conflict can be linked to a number of political processes and variables, including democratization (Gibler and Tir 2010), regional democratic patterns (Gibler and Tir 2014), political centralization (Gibler 2010), political mobilization (Hutchison 2011), political intolerance (Hutchison and Gibler 2007), and the salience of ethnicity (Gibler, Hutchison, and Miller 2012). Some of these variables are central to the aforementioned “risk factors” for regime reversals as well as the more direct dynamics of regime reversals as well. Further below, we suggest that higher levels of territorial threat destabilize democratic institutions and eventually increase the odds of democratic reversals.

Sources of short-lasting democratization

Given that we argue that territorial threat undermines democracy, a natural question to ask is why countries at risk of reversal become democratic in the first place. After all, territorial issues tend to be long-standing, with territorial claims persisting for decades (Huth 1996; Huth and Allee 2002), causing frequent militarized fights (Hensel 1994), and even evolving into full-fledged enduring rivalries (Tir and Diehl 2002). Too, according to the logic and evidence presented in works such as Desch (1996), Hintze (1975), Thompson (1996), Tilly (1985), and Gibler and Tir (2010; 2014), threatening environments preclude democratization.

Nevertheless, some democratizations may occur *despite* threatening environments. Consistent with popular arguments in the comparative study of political systems (Almond and Verba 1963; Lipset 1960; Moore 1993; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Vanhanen 1991), the literature on external influences on democratization assumes the actual transition to democracy to be a domestically-driven process. When external threat is reduced, domestic actors can challenge

the centralized decision-making political system and the authority of the military by demanding democratic reforms. This process, according to these arguments, ultimately results in democratization.

Throughout the past decades, however, a number of factors have contributed to democratization in potentially threatening environments. Domestically, economic pressure and distributive conflict (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006), urbanization (e.g., Bates 1981), and intra-elite conflicts (Haggard and Kaufman 2012, 500) are key themes in the democratization literature. At least the first two factors are structural and can generate pressures for democratization even in the presence of territorial threat, and rally-round-the-flag dynamics may also reduce the propensity of intra-elite conflict driving democratization in threatening environments. These factors may induce unstable democratizations, even in states with high levels of territorial threat. In other words, some of the key factors associated with democratization, especially during the second wave after World War II, can apply even in countries facing high levels of territorial threat from neighbors.

Similarly, as Boix (2011), Haggard and Kaufman (2012), and many others suggest, external interveners, aid donors, and international organizations have each exercised a strong push for democracy at least in the “third wave” of democratization from the 1970s through the early 1990s. Elements of this push include a pro-democracy discourse, exemplified by Fukuyama’s dictum of “the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Fukuyama 1992, xi). They also include tangible benefits such as promises of economic aid (Goldsmith 2001; Dunning 2004), opportunities to accede to or associate with IGOs and large markets such as the European Union (Kelley 2004; Vachudova 2005) and alliances such as NATO (Gheciu 2005), as well as trade expansion that were conditioned on candidate countries’ progress toward democratization (Hafner-Burton 2005; Eichengreen and Leblang 2008).

How prevalent these factors, particularly international influences, are in cases of democratization can be seen in a closer look at the history of the cases of democratic reversal we investigate in this study. From Czechoslovakia in 1945 to the former Soviet states of Belarus and Armenia in 1991, almost one-third of the cases (15 of the 49 we analyze) entered or re-entered the state system

as democratic governments. In most of these cases, democratic institutions governed in high-threat areas in which liberal governments could hardly be sustained according to our logic. Hence it is not surprising that nine of these fifteen cases ended in military-led coups d'état. Of the remaining six cases, many were replaced by right-wing governments with strong ties to the military.

We are agnostic toward the specific causes of initial democratization, but it is important for our argument to acknowledge that the aforementioned dynamics behind many, if not most, causes of democratization are not connected to territorial threat. That is, both structural internal as well as external pressures for democratization operate regardless of whether a country has resolved territorial tensions with neighbors. Yet, territorial threats to the state continue following the transitions in these countries. Subsequently, these threats stall or undermine democratic reforms and ultimately result in regime reversal.

Consistent with this logic, we observe that the vast majority of reversals happened in countries with a short history of democratic institutions. As many as seventy-five percent of reversals happened less than 10 years after transition to democracy, and two-thirds of reversal occurred in countries with fewer than 10 years of experience with democracy since the country's founding (see Figure A1 in the supporting information).

Altogether, a combination of extant explanations for democratization and evidence from the cases we study suggests that while territorial threat poses challenges for democratization, there are good reasons to expect instances of democratization even in states facing substantial territorial threats. In these cases, however, democratic institutions are typically short-lived. We argue in the next section that territorial threat is the determinant factor in explaining the brevity of democratic institutions in these situations. In addition, we explore the circumstances under which these cases democratized and reverted following our large-N empirical test.

Territorial threat and democratic reversals

Border relations invariably have domestic ramifications, from shaping resource allocation to creating focal points for political campaigns. We argue that these domestic consequences of relations

with neighbors over territory are important for explaining cases of democratic reversals. Territorial threats exercise strong centralizing influence in the state, on popular opinion and the relative bargaining advantage of the executive vis-à-vis other government branches and the opposition. These forces translate into regime dynamics that encourage authoritarian forms of governance.

Centralization

One of these ramifications of threats to homeland territories is best described as the centralization of the domestic politics of the state, across multiple levels of society. Threats alter the bargaining positions among elite groups. As Schultz (2001) demonstrates, opposition parties are more likely to back the government during crises. Scholars have long argued and observed that there is a rally-round-the-flag effect in public opinion particularly when crises encompass territorial threats (Mueller 1973; Tir 2010; Tir and Singh 2013). Gibler (2010) takes this argument a step further and suggests that, during crisis times, leaders have incentives to use the newfound political support from rallies to eliminate checks on their power. Opposition movements who challenge the leader can be cast as traitorous to the regime, and this enables centralization of authority under the executive. It is also possible that general threats could be of such salience that the opposition and general public willingly lend their support to the leader in order to persevere in the conflict and defend the state. In these instances, immediate survival trumps political freedom and contestation.

This dynamic manifests in individual and mass attitudes. Gibler, Hutchison, and Miller (2012), Hutchison and Gibler (2007), and Tir and Singh (2015) point out that individual-level opinion in territorially-threatened states becomes both nationalistic and intolerant of minority groups and opinions. Representative governments aggregate these opinions and force out opposition to leader-initiated policies. The general public's support for leaders under high territorial threat adds another powerful force against organized political opposition in both types of political systems.

Militarization

The nature of territorial threats also changes the political environment in which domestic forces bargain and increases the influence of the military within the state. Unlike many other forms of threat, interstate disputes that focus on territory require the state to raise land-based militaries to take and hold state claims. A supportive population more willingly provides manpower to defend against these territorial threats. During territorial conflicts, citizens need to protect their life and property as well as the very idea of the homeland (see Tir 2005; 2010). This is why states respond to territorial threats by immediately raising large armies, even though it usually takes states five to six years to raise similarly-sized armies when the state is threatened by other types of issues (Gibler 2012, chapter 5). Militarization is therefore more likely in the presence of territorial threat, and the key strategic goal of the military is to occupy and hold land (Huth 1996).

A strong military adds another dimension to leader power. Opposition parties now must counter both popular support for defending the state *and* a strong military that can repress dissent. Challenges to leader policies are increasingly difficult when bargaining in the shadow of a strong, potentially repressive force. These potentially repressive forces ensconce the political power of the leader within the state and may help the leader remove institutional checks within the political system.

Territorial threat and other conditions for regime reversal

In sum, states under consistent territorial threat from neighbors are more likely to be institutionally centralized, to be dominated by nationalistic mass attitudes, and to experience an increase in power of strong, standing militaries. Centralized authority enables leaders to prey upon industries and extract resources for their own gain. Economically, territorial threats should be correlated with states that are poorer, regimes that provide few public goods, and societies that experience high income inequality. In Olson's (1993) terms, these are the regimes with stationary bandits that inhibit persistent democratization.

For our argument, the centralizing and militarizing effects of territorial threat imply that demo-

cratic institutions under conditions of high territorial threat are unlikely to last. Incumbent leaders in high-threat environments have incentives and opportunities to centralize authority and suspend democratic institutions. Aspiring leaders who do not hold elected offices, such as military generals or opposition politicians, may see opportunities to rise to power by circumventing the democratic process, citing extraordinary circumstances due to territorial threats to the homeland. Regular bargaining between elites and opposition movements—those forces that lead to democratic consolidation—is likely to be suspended or at least attenuated under high territorial threat. All else equal, we therefore argue that democracy is unlikely to consolidate and survive in states that face consistent threats to their territory. In turn, this argument leads to the core hypothesis of this study:

H1: High levels of territorial threat are associated with an increased likelihood of regime reversals in democratic states.

Before evaluating this hypothesis empirically, we describe the construction and utility of our latent indicator for the level of territorial threat that targets a country in any given year.

Estimating Latent Territorial Threat

Our argument emphasizes territorial threat as a background condition for domestic political processes that favor democratic reversals. This understanding of territorial threat corresponds to a conceptualization of threat as a latent variable that can range from low to high levels, rather than a binary condition. We take this latent, continuous nature of territorial threat as key motivation for developing a measure that aims to express the *possibility* of engaging in *armed conflict* with a *neighboring state* for control of all or a portion of a state's *homeland territory*. Militarized, armed conflict is the most direct manifestation of territorial threat. Neighboring countries are the most likely source of territorial threat: armed conflict with a neighbor is likely to either happen on a state's own territory or at least carries the potential of reaching home territory. While territorial threat can also emanate from non-neighboring opponent states, this threat may be considerably lower, depending on the opponent's ability and intention to project power further away and actu-

ally conquer territory. Disagreements over the control of homeland territory are also rare between non-contiguous states.

Accordingly, we identify a number of factors related to territory that scholars have associated with armed conflicts between neighboring states. These factors contribute to an empirical model of territorial threat that produces a *latent* measure of territorial threat while accounting for measurement uncertainty around this concept.

Data

Our empirical model of territorial threat begins with an indicator of the occurrence of fatal militarized disputes (MIDs) between neighboring states. The population of interest comprises all pairs of contiguous states. Our conceptualization of territorial threat and its consequences as they pertain to our argument requires a country to have at least one neighbor to experience a territorial threat to its homeland. We create this list from Version 3.1 of the Correlates of War Direct Contiguity data (Stinnett, Tir, Diehl, Schafer, and Gochman 2002) and include all dyad-years (1816-2012) of countries that are separated by no more than a land or river border.

Militarized hostilities that result in fatalities indicate an acute threat to a country's territory. Therefore, we treat the propensity of a fatal militarized dispute to occur as the latent indicator for territorial threat that we use to test the implications of our theory of democratic reversals. We estimate these propensities separately for each dyad-year in the data. Because the country-year is the unit of analysis for the investigation of democratic reversals, we aggregate different levels of territorial threat in cases where one country faces different threat levels from more than one neighboring country. Here, we assume that the highest territorial threat level is also the most salient threat level that influences the dynamics we outlined in the theoretical argument above.

Information about MIDs comes from version 4.01 of the Militarized Interstate Dispute data collection effort (Palmer, D'Orazio, Kenwick, and Lane 2015). The occurrence of a fatal militarized dispute between two contiguous states, recorded as a binary variable set to 1 in each year of the dispute, is the outcome variable for the predictive model we build below. In the data we use,

fatal MIDs occur in 757 out of 23147 contiguous dyad-years between 1816 and 2012.¹

The predictors of territorial threat in this model are selected based on previous work on interstate conflict. They include variables capturing past interstate relations over territory and conditions that affect the occurrence of militarized disputes. The occurrence of a militarized interstate dispute over territory, as well as counts of peaceful and violent territorial transfers within the dyad in the past all capture the past relationship between two states over territory. These variables are derived from version 4.01 of the Militarized Interstate Dispute data collection effort (Palmer et al. 2015) and from the Territorial Change data, version 4.01 (Tir, Schafer, Diehl, and Goertz 1998). The age of the border between two states is included as an indicator for the duration of dyadic territorial relations, addressing the idea that territorial conflicts may become less likely as states have had more time to settle such conflicts. The historical legacy of colonization, sometimes resulting in conflicts between states whose borders were drawn arbitrarily by colonizers, is captured by a binary indicator for dyads that once shared the same colonial power, based on the Issue Correlates of War Colonial History data set (Hensel 2014).

For neighborhood influences on the prevalence of militarized disputes, we add a binary variable for ongoing civil wars in any neighboring state to account for potential spillover effects, defensive responses, or diversionary conflict initiation. Civil war instances are based on the Correlates of War list version 4.0 (Sarkees and Wayman 2010). States might be more hesitant to engage in conflict in environments with more potential opponents; therefore, we include the larger count of neighbors of each dyad member. A binary indicator for dyads that have current defense pacts with all neighbors captures pacifying influences of security institutions. This variable is derived from the Correlates of War alliance data, version 4.1 (Gibler 2009). Conversely, a measure of militarization in the dyad addresses the level of military readiness of the dyad members, where higher values

¹Because the MID data end in 2010, we rely on the UCDP-PRIO armed conflict data (Themnér and Wallensteen 2015) as an additional reference for the years 2011 and 2012. These data contain one additional interstate dispute between contiguous states resulting in fatalities; we add this case (a conflict between South Sudan and Sudan in 2012) to the data.

presumably express a higher propensity to use the military. This variable is operationalized as the higher value of the share of military personnel in the total population and derived from version 4.0 of the Correlates of War National Material Capabilities data set (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972).² Lastly, we account for time dependence by including the count of years since the last militarized dispute between the dyad members and its squared and cubed terms.

Predictive model

The unit of analysis in this model is the dyad-year, as our conceptualization of territorial threat manifests itself through the occurrence of fatal MIDs between neighboring states. The purpose of this predictive model of territorial threat is to generate the best possible estimate of latent territorial threat that a state faced in given year. Therefore, causal identification is not a concern. Rather, our aim is to include the state of knowledge of territorial conflicts. Predictive accuracy is equally important for this model to be useful. We use two data exploration techniques, random forests (Breiman 2001) and Bayesian model averaging (Montgomery and Nyhan 2010), to briefly validate the inclusion of the variables we list above in the model. The aforementioned variables are all about equally important in classifying dyad-years by the presence and absence of fatal MIDs as indicated by both techniques; more detailed information on model fit is included in the appendix.

As with almost all latent concepts, researchers cannot measure territorial threat perfectly. Our discussion of variable selection illustrates this. To generate a latent measure that expresses uncertainty, we fit a Bayesian regression model with a logit link function to the data. Using a Bayesian setup allows us to generate a posterior distribution of the latent territorial threat measure; we later exploit the variance of that distribution to check the robustness of our analyses of democratic reversals to the uncertainty around the territorial threat estimate. More details on the specification and estimation of the Bayesian territorial threat model can be found in the supporting information, including Table A3 containing coefficient estimates. All Bayesian estimates were obtained using

²As the CINC data end with the year 2007, we extrapolate values from that year for the years 2008-2012, noting that the militarization variable changes slowly especially after 2000.

uniform prior distributions, assigning equal prior weights to all possible values of the estimated parameters. Given the goal of this model, these estimates are of secondary importance; but their values are in line with extant research on militarized interstate disputes.

We evaluate the predictive accuracy a receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve (Figure A2). Better predictive models generate larger areas under the ROC curve. This model yields a value of 0.89, which fares well in comparison with other studies predicting armed conflict (see, e.g., Ward, Greenhill, and Bakke 2010).

Because the purpose of this model is to generate a territorial threat measure at the country-level, we now use the highest territorial threat level of a country's dyads as the salient territorial threat level for that country. The resulting territorial threat levels are expressed on a continuous scale from a 0 (0% risk) to 1 (100% risk), indicating the risk of territorial threat with any neighboring country. For each country-year, our estimation yields a distribution of draws from the posterior estimates of territorial threat levels. This distribution can be summarized by the mean estimate of territorial threat in a given country-year; we use this estimate as the main predictor in our empirical models of democratic reversals below. However, we also take seriously the measurement uncertainty around the concept of territorial threat and use the variance from this distribution in both describing the cases of reversals below (Figure 1) and in a separate model accounting for measurement uncertainty. Doing so is consistent with other recent efforts in political science to account for measurement uncertainty in a more systematic manner (see, e.g., Treier and Jackman 2008; Fariss 2014; Hollyer, Rosendorff, and Vreeland 2014; Crabtree and Fariss 2015).

Testing the Effect of Territorial Threat on Democratic Reversals

The core of the following empirical section evaluates the hypothesis that higher levels of latent territorial threat increase the probability of democratic reversals. We then re-examine the observed cases of reversal to better understand the causal processes that led to democratization originally and then reversal. But we first turn to research design issues relating to the evaluation of our hypothesis.

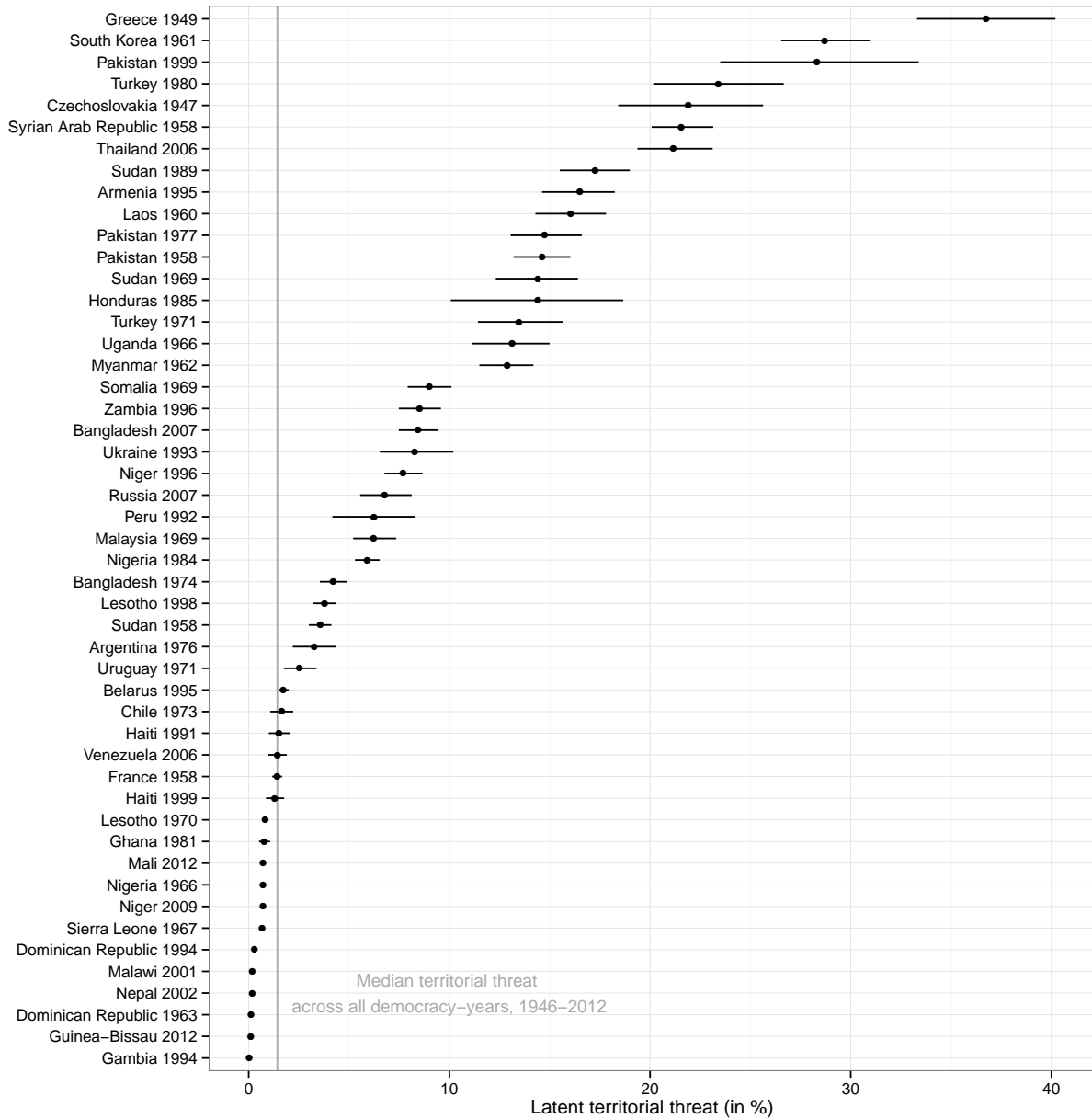


Figure 1: Latent territorial threat for all 49 democratic reversals in the analyses, 1946-2012. The values displayed are based on posterior estimates of latent territorial threat. Dots are the means of the posterior distribution of latent territorial threat and horizontal lines indicate the 10th and 90th percentiles of these posterior distributions. For details on the model used to estimate territorial threat, see Table A3 in the supporting information.

Unit of analysis and spatial-temporal domain

Our hypothesis refers to all countries that are at risk of democratic reversals. This makes the population of interest all countries that are commonly considered democratic. In line with extant research on democracies and the suggested classification of the creators of the Polity IV scale (Marshall and Jaggers 2009), we consider all countries ranked 6 or higher on the Polity IV scale from -10 to 10 as democratic. Because all covariates of interest are measured yearly, the unit of observation in this study is the country-year. The full sample including information on all covariates covers the years 1946 – 2012 and includes 2,568 country-years and 97 countries.

Outcome: Democratic reversal

We classify all country-years where a country's Polity IV score drops below 6 as incidents of democratic reversals. After 1945, 49 reversals occurred in 38 countries with contiguous neighbors, that is, countries that experienced any level of territorial threat. Figure 1 lists the cases and Tables 2 as well as A1 in the supporting information offers additional details on them.

Predictor: territorial threat

For the estimation of the latent territorial threat variable, we refer the reader to the previous section. The original latent variable based on our estimation ranges from 0 (0% risk of territorial conflict) to 1 (100% risk) in theory and 0 (0% risk) to 0.49 (49% risk) in our sample. In Figure 1, we illustrate the latent territorial threat levels of all 49 cases of democratic reversals in countries with contiguous neighbors. Over two-thirds of cases (35 out of 49) rank above the median of latent territorial threat of all democratic country-years during the period of interest.

Because of the highly right-skewed distribution of the latent territorial threat variable (most countries have very low levels of territorial threat), we use two transformations to facilitate estimation and interpretation. The first measure is a logarithmic transformation of latent territorial threat variable. The second measure cuts the original score into ten deciles, or bins, where a country-year receives a value from 1 to 10 based on its percentile position on the latent territorial threat mea-

sure. The first bin contains the bottom 10% of country years based on estimated territorial threat levels, and the last bin contains the 10 % of country years with the highest territorial threat levels. Each bin or decile contains several hundred observations. Another advantage of this measure is that it reduces the role of outliers with particularly high values of territorial threat, but very few observations, for the interpretation of results.

Control variables

Our empirical model of democratic reversals include control variables that capture the correlates of democratic reversals familiar from the literature referenced at the beginning of this study. The influence of international and regional dynamics and potential democracy diffusion is accounted for by a country's membership in highly-structured international governmental organizations (Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom 2004; Karreth and Tir 2013), the proportion of democratic neighbor states within 500 kilometers, the raw count of democratic neighbors, and the reversal rate in the country's region (expressed as the cumulative sum of reversals in the region up to the current year). Global democratization trends are captured by the percentage of democracies worldwide in a given year.³ The post-Cold War democratization wave and its potential impact on contemporaneous or subsequent reversals is measured as a binary variable set to 1 for all country-years after 1990 and 0 before. Reflecting extant research on the stabilizing impact of economic wealth (Przeworski et al. 2000), we include a one-year lag of countries' GDP per capita. The democratic history of countries is accounted for by the count of previous reversals and the count of years the country has been a democracy in a given year. If countries that rate higher on the Polity IV scale are less likely to revert to non-democratic institutions, a lagged indicator of the Polity IV score in the previous year captures this. Ethnic heterogeneity, measured via Fearon and Laitin (2003),

³We calculate all democracy-related variables using the same cutoff on the Polity IV scale (Marshall and Jaggers 2009) as in our outcome variable. For regions, we follow the Correlates of War project and use 9 regions: North America, South America, Western Europe, Central & Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, Far East Asia, Oceania.

enters as an additional country-level indicator measuring the viability of democratic institutions under potentially heightened contestation in multi-ethnic states.⁴

Estimation

We estimate two main logistic regression models of democratic reversals using Bayesian estimation. As in our model of territorial threat, Bayesian estimation offers several advantages, including a more appropriate handling of estimation uncertainty (Albert and Chib 1993) and the ability to relax the assumption of an asymptotically normal distribution of parameter estimates. In our case, the posterior distributions we obtain for all parameter estimates can be used to assess the probability of each estimate to be in a particular area of interest. This includes the probability of an estimate being positive or negative. In Table 1, we include this probability to indicate the degree to which the data indicate a positive or negative estimate. The supporting information describes the full posterior distribution of estimates for our main parameter of interest, the coefficient on territorial threat. All Bayesian estimates were again obtained using uniform prior distributions, assigning equal prior weights to all possible values of the estimated parameters.⁵ A separate robustness test

⁴Because reversals are so rare, we constructed these data with the goal of maintaining as many observations as possible. To this end, we added information on control variables from other, comparable sources where necessary. This includes using a number of indicators for GDP per capita (Gleditsch 2002*b*; Heston, Summers, and Aten 2012; Bolt and van Zanden 2014; Teorell, Dahlberg, Holmberg, Rothstein, Hartmann, and Svensson 2015) and ethnic fractionalization (Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, and Wacziarg 2003; Fearon and Laitin 2003). For the IGO variable, we interpolated values during the 1945-1965 time period for which the original source on IGO memberships, the Correlates of War project (Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke 2004) only contained information in 5-year intervals, and extrapolated values from 2005 for the years 2006-2012.

⁵Other recent examples of political science research using Bayesian estimation to assess hypotheses include Danneman and Ritter (2014), Chaudoin, Milner, and Pang (2015), and Beazer

accounts for measurement uncertainty.

Findings

We find that democratic countries facing higher territorial threat are substantially more likely to revert to non-democratic forms of governance. Using the logarithmic transformation of territorial threat as well as converting the measure into deciles yields estimates that are positive (i.e., indicate a positive correlation between territorial threat and reversal risk) with a probability exceeding 95% (Table 1).

Table 1: Posterior distribution of logit estimates: Territorial threat and democratic reversals, 1946-2012.

	TT logged			TT Deciles		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Pr(Estimate)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Pr(Estimate)
Territorial threat	0.166*	0.1	0.952	0.114*	0.062	0.963
HSIGO memberships	-0.041	0.055	0.769	-0.038	0.058	0.748
Perc. democratic within 500km	0.006	0.012	0.698	0.005	0.012	0.681
Democratic neighbors	0.149	0.123	0.882	0.15	0.122	0.893
Reversals in region	-2.158*	1.233	0.995	-2.207*	1.353	0.992
Perc. democratic (global)	-0.108*	0.047	0.992	-0.11*	0.045	0.991
Post-Cold War	1.263*	0.931	0.909	1.364*	0.931	0.933
GDPpc (t-1, logged)	-1.03*	0.233	1	-1.022	0.244	1
Polity (t-1)	-0.315*	0.147	0.981	-0.316*	0.152	0.983
Previous reversals	0.236	0.267	0.814	0.226	0.268	0.793
Years as democracy (logged)	-0.556*	0.209	0.997	-0.551*	0.209	0.998
Ethnic fractionalization	-0.405	0.737	0.707	-0.342	0.731	0.694
Intercept	12.657	2.571	1	11.326	2.789	1
Country-years	2568			2568		

* Probability of positive (negative) estimate > 0 (< 0) is at least 90%.

Outcome: Democratic reversal (drop below Polity 2 score of 6) in a given year.

Distributions based on 50,000 posterior draws after 25,000 draws discarded as burn-in period.

Standard tests indicate convergence for all parameters.

To illustrate the substantive dimension of this relationship, we calculate the predicted probability of democratic reversal for typical cases. These are shown in the left panel of Figure 2 and based on Model 1. While the small number of reversals overall (49 out of 2,568 observations) makes the yearly probability of reversal in a specific country seem small, the relative difference between countries with low and high territorial threat is substantial. For instance, a democracy facing a territorial threat of 20 percent is at two-thirds greater reversal risk compared to a democracy facing a territorial threat level of 1 percent.

and Woo (2015).

Our second indicator of territorial threat is based on a decile-ranking of observations, where a country-year receives a value from 1 to 10 based on its percentile position on the latent territorial threat measure. That is, observations in the bottom 10 percent receive a 1, observations in the second-to-lowest 10 percent receive a 2, and so on; the top 10 percent of country-years receive a 10. Using this relative measure of deciles, we again find substantial differences in reversal risk. For example, democracies in the top 10 percent of territorial threat face an average risk of reversal that is double of those with territorial threat levels between the 50th and 60th percentile and triple of those in the bottom 10 percent. The related predicted probabilities are shown in more detail in the right panel of Figure 2.

The control variables generally perform as prior research leads us to expect. The spread of democracy across the world is associated with a lower risk of reversal in individual countries. Reversals were, however, more likely after the Cold War—reflecting the fact that more than a third of reversals in the data occurred after 1991. Wealthier countries are less likely to revert, as the literature on democratic consolidation has long suggested. Democracies rated as more consistently democratic by the Polity project are also less likely to revert, as are countries that have remained democratic for a longer time. Lastly, reversals are less likely after a region has already experienced multiple reversals; we attribute this to the rarity of reversals in general.

Model fit and robustness

The models of democratic reversals classify observed reversals well. The supporting information contains separation and ROC plots (Figures A4 and A5) that suggest that our models perform well in this respect.

Because we treat territorial threat as a latent, unobserved measure, we also account for measurement uncertainty in an alternative to our main model, reflecting recent efforts in political science to account for measurement uncertainty in a more systematic manner (see, e.g., Treier and Jackman 2008; Fariss 2014; Hollyer, Rosendorff, and Vreeland 2014; Crabtree and Fariss 2015). To this end, we estimate a Bayesian model that now treats territorial threat as a normal distribution with

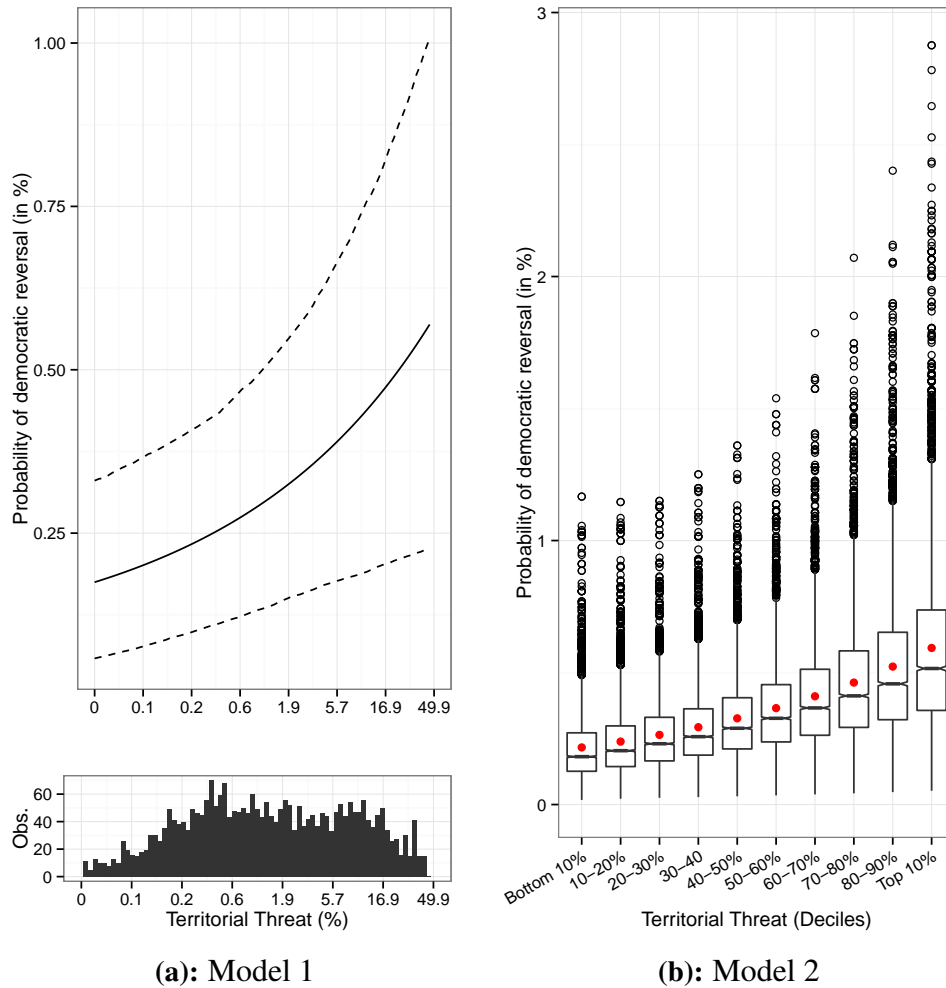


Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of democratic reversals, 1946-2012. Based on Models 1 and 2 (Table 1), we calculate the probability of reversal for typical cases at varying levels of territorial threat and use the posterior distributions of parameter estimates to indicate estimation uncertainty. The solid line in the left panel indicates the mean predicted probability; dashed lines mark the 90% credible intervals. The histogram depicts the distribution of latent territorial threat (ranging from 0% to 49%) in the data. The x-axis is transformed into logarithmic scale to reflect the logarithmic transformation of territorial threat in Model 1. The box plots on the right summarize the posterior distribution of predicted probabilities for each decile of the territorial threat measure. The horizontal line in the middle of the boxes is the median, and the red dot is the mean predicted probability. The upper and lower ends of the boxes are the 25th and 75th percentiles, respectively.

a mean and variance, rather than an observed variable. In each iteration of the estimation process, every country-year in the sample is assigned a value of territorial threat that is itself a draw from a distribution, based on the mean and variance of our predictive model of territorial threat. That is, a country with a very low value of territorial threat and a low variance around the estimate will also be assigned almost exclusively low values of territorial threat in the model of democratic reversals. On the other hand, a country-year with high territorial threat and much measurement uncertainty will be assigned a wider range of values for territorial threat in the reversal model. This process allows us to incorporate the measurement uncertainty around territorial threat. Doing so avoids making claims that treat territorial threat as observed while it truly is a latent, estimated measure.

Taking uncertainty into account yields the same conclusions as reported in our main findings: the relationship between territorial threat and a higher risk of democratic reversals persists. Table A5 in the supporting information contains more details.

Lastly, we return to our discussion of the mechanisms that link territorial threat to democratic reversals. Our argument emphasized two dynamics, centralization and militarization, as key consequences of high territorial threat. This suggests that territorial threat should be directly associated with political centralization as well as the militarization of society. In separate analyses that go beyond the scope of this paper, we find evidence for these relationships as well. Higher territorial threat levels increase the centralization of political power in one institution and ideological group. Territorial threat is also associated with a growing military, measured as the ratio of military personnel to a country's total population. Together, this evidence supports the logic behind our main argument.

Reviewing cases of democratization and reversal

We argue and find in a large-N analysis that high-threat environments preclude democratic consolidation and increase the rate of reversal. Our theoretical argument also suggested that while territorial threat poses challenges for democratization, there are good reasons to expect instances of democratization even in states facing substantial territorial threats. In these cases, however,

democratic institutions are typically short-lived. To probe this argument, we examine the 49 cases in our sample in which democratization was followed by reversal toward autocracy.⁶ This additional evidence serves the purpose of validating the logic of our argument. We find several patterns that explain why these states initially democratized, consistent with our argument above and despite high territorial threat. We group the cases into five types to facilitate this discussion and present them in Table 2.

Note that a plurality of our cases are states that came into existence as democracies. From Czechoslovakia in 1945 to the former Soviet states of Belarus and Armenia in 1991, almost one-third of the cases (15 of the 49 we analyze) entered or re-entered the state system as democratic governments. In most of these first group cases, democratic governments were placed into high-threat areas; 12 out of 15 (80 percent) of these cases had territorial threat levels exceeding the median value in the year prior to the reversal. In this environment, our argument suggests that liberal governments could not be sustained. Hence, nine of the fifteen cases ended in military-led coups d'état. Of the remaining six cases, many were replaced by right-wing governments with strong ties to the military. Most of these cases tend to support the argument that external territorial threat leads to centralization and non-democratic government.

In a second set of cases, democracy was externally supported or even imposed onto the state; 6 of the 9 (67 percent) of these cases existed in environments where territorial threat was above the median value. For example, the United States pressured the leader of South Korea, Syngman Rhee, to step down in 1960, and supported elections. However, that democracy lasted only one

⁶Four additional cases were not true regime reversals but instead were artifacts of the Polity IV coding schema; we exclude them from our analysis and this discussion. The cases are: Brazil in 1947 which moved from 7 to 5 due to changes in parliamentary elections; Turkey in 1954 when electoral changes moved the country from 7 to 4; Brazil in 1961 after a 1-point change in the score due to a change in executive constraints; and Ecuador that lowered 2 points in 2007 when the president and popular vote bypassed an intransigent congress. None of these cases are labeled reversals in datasets that focus on regime changes.

year. Similar US-backed interventions occurred in Haiti twice (1990, 1994), and in the Dominican Republic in 1978. Support for Haitian democracy led to one year of a liberal regime until a coup in 1991, and factional fighting continued throughout the democracy that emerged in 1994, culminating in President Préval's dismissal of the Chamber of Deputies and much of the Senate five years later. Dominican democracy was more successful, lasting sixteen years until an incumbent engaged in widespread electoral fraud to block a populist challenger. These are the cases of US-led support for democracy, but other external interventions were anti-democratic. In Laos (1960), in the Dominican Republic (1963), in Uruguay (1971), and in Chile (1973), the United States played a major role in fostering the reversal of democratic governments. Overall, these cases imply that a full model of democratization and democratic consolidation should incorporate external influences on both democratization and reversals to authoritarian institution.

We can group the third and fourth sets of reversals together as cases of factional fighting in states with strong militaries. Nevertheless, we differentiate between two types of reversals because of the relative power of the military compared to other factions in each case. In Group 3 of Table 2, 11 democracies emerged in which the military allowed democratization in response to popular calls for democratic government. 8 of the eventual 11 (73 percent) reversals took place in an environment exceeding the median territorial threat value. In 8 of the 11 cases, the military then over-ruled the democratic governments and replaced their rule through a military-led coup d'état. And in the other 3 cases, the militaries were strong in the wake of threats to the state, but the military also had a stake in society. This is why the military took control of the government and oversaw elections in the country. The military negotiated among factions in Honduras in 1985, helped Lesotho transition during an interregnum period in 1998, and helped Malawian protesters against government actions in 2001. Our argument predicts centralized government and a strong military, and these types of military-led transitions are entirely consistent with that argument.

Also consistent with our argument are the cases in Group 4 in which strong militaries engaged in factional fighting within the state; 5 of the 7 (71 percent) cases existed in an environment where the territorial threat was above the median. Each of these cases were relatively short-lived

democracies in which one or more factions were able to bring about a representative government. Nevertheless, each of these cases ended in coups led by the military. The only difference between these cases and the authoritarian states we predict with the general model is that these countries had other forces that the military had to bargain with or fight against. The military faction was not strong enough to dominate the state, even though it had enough power to stage coups.

The final set of cases can best be characterized as democratic governments that either do not perform well or do not withstand moves by authoritarian-bent elites within the state. The military in Turkey (1972), for example, imposed its own government following widespread unrest and economic crisis in the state. Similar crises occurred in Sudan (1989) and Zambia (1996), and each was followed by military coups. Last, we find three cases of creeping authoritarianism in Nepal (2002), Venezuela (2006), and Russia (2007). Each of these countries may have had well-positioned or strong militaries within the state, but the reversals occurred more slowly than in the other cases. Territorial threat and its consequences still weakened democratic governments and empowered authoritarian forces. 4 out of 7 (57 percent) — or, if we count the ties, 6 out of 7 (86 percent) — of these cases had territorial threat value above the median.

This section presented a brief account of why cases of reversals democratized in the first place and how they reverted back to authoritarian institutions. 71 percent (35/49) — or, if we count the two ties from the last group, 76 percent (37/49) — of the cases existed in territorial threat environments exceeding the median value. Overall, we find anecdotal support that is consistent with our argument. The reversals since 1946 almost all had strong militaries when territorial threats were high. Many reverted from democracy through coups d'état. Those that did not experience coups had militaries that effectively controlled the choice over the type of government or had liberal governments facing uphill battles against authoritarian forces, the latter empowered by territorial threat. This evidence suggests that a high territorial threat environment, through the empowerment of the military within the state and the weakening of liberal governments, heightens the risk of reversals to autocratic institutions.

Conclusion

Debates about the primacy of country-level economic, political, or cultural determinants of democratic consolidation have long been prominent in both academic and policy circles. Others have emphasized the importance of external and regional consolidation dynamics, pointing to the diffusion of democracy, regional clustering, and the influence of international organizations. Our argument and findings emphasize that external factors are indeed central to explaining why democracies fail, but we highlight that external threats to a country's territory are crucial for the consolidation and survival of democratic political institutions. We construct a latent, continuous measure of external territorial threat to test whether heightened threat indeed precludes democratic consolidation and increases the risk of reversals to autocratic institutions. Using this measure, we find a substantial impact of territorial threat on democratic survival. The latent danger of facing militarized conflict with neighbors gives rise to political dynamics that undermine democratic institutions. Our study presents robust evidence that democracy is more likely to fail in countries that face high levels of threats to their territory from neighbors. While democratic reversals are rare, countries that do revert to non-democratic forms of governance face high levels of territorial threat compared to those that endure.

For scholarship on democratization and democratic survival, our study implies that a complete account of the development of democratic institutions should emphasize that domestic factors alone fall short of explaining why democracies fail. Rather, some of the more important domestic predictors of democratic survival are themselves conditional on countries' external threat environment. Future research might investigate whether similar dynamics apply to some of the external factors commonly associated with democratic survival as well, foremost the role of international organizations. Based on the findings of this study, it is likely that precisely the formation, membership, and effectiveness of the organizations typically associated with democratic stabilization are themselves contingent on low levels of territorial threat. Domestic factors commonly associated with democratic reversals may also be contingent on territorial threat, rather than exogenous influ-

ences on reversal. For instance, economic growth, redistribution, and the institutionalized division of political power are all more likely under low levels or in the absence of territorial threat. Future research should explore in more detail how these factors evolve in relationship to territorial threat.

From a policy perspective, our findings suggest caution about democratization trends in environments where territorial threat levels persist. Of the reversals we identify in this study, most occur not only under high levels of territorial threat, but also in cases where democratic institutions emerged due to more or less direct involvement of external actors. In such scenarios, democratic institutions are considerably less likely to persist compared to regions where territorial threat is low or absent. For the efforts of third party states or international organizations, this trend implies that successfully mediating and resolving territorial tensions should take precedence over democracy promotion with a strong internal focus.

Table 2: Background information on democratic reversals, 1946-2012.

Group	Country	Reversal year	Latent territorial threat at reversal above median?	Years as democracy	Polity IV movement	Coup d'état by military?	Notes	
Group 1: States that entered the system as democracies	Czechoslovakia	1947	Yes	2	-1 then -7	year later		
	Greece	1949	Yes	5	8 to 4			
	Sudan	1958	Yes	2	8 to -7	Yes		
	Burma	1962	Yes	14	8 to -6	Yes		
	Nigeria	1966	No	6	7 to -7	Yes		
	Uganda	1966	Yes	4	7 to 0	Self-coup		
	Sierra Leone	1967	No	6	6 to -7	Yes		
	Somalia	1969	Yes	9	7 to -7	Yes		
	Malaysia	1969	Yes	12	10 to 1 to 4			
	Lesotho	1970	No	4	9 to -9			
	Bangladesh	1974	Yes	2	8 to -2	Yes		
	Ukraine	1993	Yes	2	6 to 5			
	Gambia	1994	No	29	8 to -7	Yes		
	Belarus	1995	Yes	4	7 to 0			
	Armenia	1995	Yes	4	7 to 3			
	Group 2: Externally driven democracy or reversal	Syrian Arab Republic	1958	Yes	4	7 to -99	Yes	Joined Nasser's Egypt in union
		Laos	1960	Yes	2	8 to -1	Yes	US-led efforts led elected, right-wing gov't overthrown by coup
		South Korea	1961	Yes	1	-4 to 8 to -7	Yes	US asked Rhee to step down, supported elections, replaced by coup
		Dominican Republic	1963	No	1	-3 to 8 to 0	Yes	US/CIA against elected government, riots/strikes led to elected junta
Uruguay		1971	Yes	19	8 to 3		US-led anti-left forces rigged election with Brazil; suspended gov't	
Chile		1973	Yes	9	6 to -7	Yes	US-aided coup	
Haiti		1991	Yes	1	7 to -7	Yes	Military ruler left country at urging of US	
Dominican Republic		1994	No	16	6 to 5		Strong support for democracy from US	
Haiti		1999	No	5	7 to 2		US forced out military ruler with threat of intl' force	
Group 3: "Caretaker militaries" where democracy is allowed and then revoked		Pakistan	1958	Yes	2	8 to -8	Yes	Military-led elections in 1956, followed by coup in 1958
	Turkey	1980	Yes	7	9 to -5	Yes	Military allowed elections then overthrown by military coup	
	Honduras	1985	Yes	3	6 to 5		Military negotiation of a coalition change	
	Peru	1992	Yes	12	7 to 8 to -3 to 1	Yes	Military leadership agreed to a Constituent Assembly	
	Niger	1996	Yes	4	8 to -6	Yes	Military-led transition to democracy	
	Lesotho	1998	Yes	5	8 to 0		Military-led transition to democracy during interregnum period	
	Malawi	2001	No	7	6 to 4		Military sided with demonstrators; food crisis and aftermath	
	Thailand	2006	Yes	14	9 to -5 to -1	Yes		
	Bangladesh	2007	Yes	16	6 to -6 back to 5	Partial		
	Niger	2009	No	5	6 to -3 to 3 to 6	Yes		
	Guinea-Bissau	2012	No	7	6 to 1	Yes	Coup in 2003 led to elections; 2012 coup replaced that gov't	
	Group 4: Strong militaries state's with factional fighting	Sudan	1969	Yes	4	7 to 2 to -2	Yes	Coup by military officers pre-empted pro-communist coup
Argentina		1976	Yes	3	6 to -9	Yes	Coup after violent repression, disappearances	
Pakistan		1977	Yes	4	8 to -7	Yes	Military coup	
Ghana		1981	No	2	6 to -7	Yes	Military coup that was signaled at start of democracy	
Nigeria		1984	Yes	5	7 to -7	Yes	Military coup; military strong during democracy	
Pakistan		1999	Yes	11	7 to -6	Yes	Military decapitated in plane crash, elections, then coup	
Mali		2012	No	20	7 to 0 to 5	Yes	Military sponsored democratic transition initially	
Group 5: Democratic governance failures	France	1958	At median	12	10 to 5	Partial	Unrest over Algeria campaign led to new gov't and constitution	
	Turkey	1971	Yes	11	8 to -2	Yes	Civil unrest led to military intervention	
	Sudan	1989	Yes	3	7 to -7	Yes	Military coup following civil war and political infighting	
	Zambia	1996	Yes	5	6 to 1	Yes	Military unable to quell protests	
	Nepal	2002	No	3	6 to -6		Maoist insurgency	
	Venezuela	2006	At median	48	6 to 5		Small initial move, with trend toward autocracy	
	Russia	2007	Yes	7	6 to 4		Small initial move, with trend toward autocracy	

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Supporting information

This supplementary document (to be made available online) contains supporting information on:

- All cases of democratic reversal contained in the analysis sample
- The model used to estimate latent territorial threat scores for country-years
 - Parameter estimates
 - Summary statistics
 - The ROC curve
- Details of Models 1 & 2 estimating the relationship between territorial threat and democratic reversals
 - Summary statistics
 - Separation plots and ROC curves
- Accounting for measurement uncertainty around territorial threat

Table A1: List of democratic reversals, 1946-2012.

Country	Year	Latent territorial threat at reversal (in %)	Polity score before reversal
Czechoslovakia	1947	21.9	10
Greece	1949	36.7	8
France	1958	1.4	10
Sudan	1958	3.6	8
Syrian Arab Republic	1958	21.6	7
Pakistan	1958	14.6	8
Laos	1960	16.0	8
South Korea	1961	28.7	8
Myanmar	1962	12.9	8
Dominican Republic	1963	0.1	8
Nigeria	1966	0.7	7
Uganda	1966	13.1	7
Sierra Leone	1967	0.7	6
Somalia	1969	9.0	7
Sudan	1969	14.4	7
Malaysia	1969	6.2	10
Lesotho	1970	0.8	9
Uruguay	1971	2.5	8
Turkey	1971	13.5	8
Chile	1973	1.6	6
Bangladesh	1974	4.2	8
Argentina	1976	3.3	6
Pakistan	1977	14.7	8
Turkey	1980	23.4	9
Ghana	1981	0.8	6
Nigeria	1984	5.9	7
Honduras	1985	14.4	6
Sudan	1989	17.3	7
Haiti	1991	1.5	7
Peru	1992	6.2	8
Ukraine	1993	8.3	6
Dominican Republic	1994	0.3	6
Gambia	1994	0.0	8
Belarus	1995	1.7	7
Armenia	1995	16.5	7
Niger	1996	7.7	8
Zambia	1996	8.5	6
Lesotho	1998	3.8	8
Haiti	1999	1.3	7
Pakistan	1999	28.3	7
Malawi	2001	0.2	6
Nepal	2002	0.2	6
Venezuela	2006	1.4	6
Thailand	2006	21.2	9
Russia	2007	6.8	6
Bangladesh	2007	8.4	6
Niger	2009	0.7	6
Guinea-Bissau	2012	0.1	6
Mali	2012	0.7	7

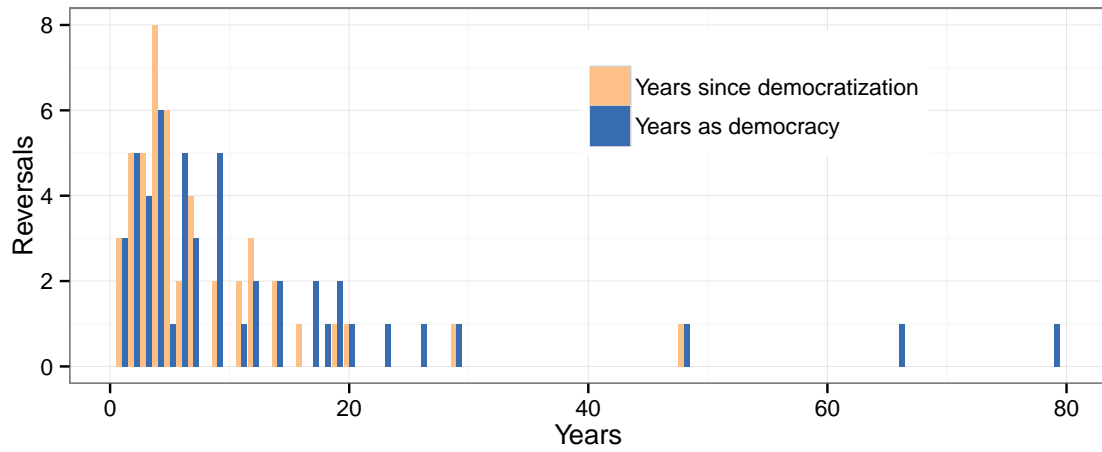


Figure A1: Time since democratization and as democracy (total) at each case of democratic reversal in the data examined in this study.

Table A2: Summary statistics for models of fatal territorial MIDs.

	Mean/Proportion	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N (dyad-years)
Fatal territorial MID in given year	0.03	0.18	0	1	23147
Border age (logged)	3.35	1.1	0	5.28	23147
Defense pact	0.12	0.32	0	1	23147
Territorial MID (last 5 years)	0.21	0.41	0	1	23147
Civil war (any neighbor)	0.16	0.37	0	1	23147
Max. militarization (logged)	-4.39	0.82	-8.57	-1.78	23147
Same colonizer	0.25	0.44	0	1	23147
Violent territorial transfer (past)	0.41	1.06	0	6	23147
Peaceful territorial transfer (past)	0.64	1.46	0	14	23147
Max. neighbors	6.36	2.69	1	20	23147
Peace years	20.19	24.99	0	196	23147

Table A3: Posterior distribution of logit estimates: Fatal MIDs, 1816-2012.

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Pr(Estimate)
Border age (logged)	0.124*	0.047	0.999
Defense pact	-1.361*	0.269	1
Territorial MID (last 5 years)	0.811*	0.161	1
Civil war (any neighbor)	0.358*	0.094	1
Max. militarization (logged)	0.602*	0.049	1
Same colonizer	0.227*	0.088	0.996
Violent territorial transfer (past)	0.107*	0.028	0.999
Peaceful territorial transfer (past)	-0.038*	0.025	0.932
Max. neighbors	-0.166*	0.017	1
Peace years	-0.361*	0.028	1
Peace years (sq.)	0.009*	0.001	1
Peace years (cu.)	-0.00007	0.000009	1
Intercept	0.46	0.274	0.948
Contiguous dyad-years		23147	

* Probability of positive (negative) estimate > 0 (< 0) is at least 90%.

Outcome: Fatal territorial MID between contiguous dyad in a given year.

Distributions based on 20,000 posterior draws,

after 10,000 draws discarded as burn-in period.

Standard tests indicate convergence for all parameters.

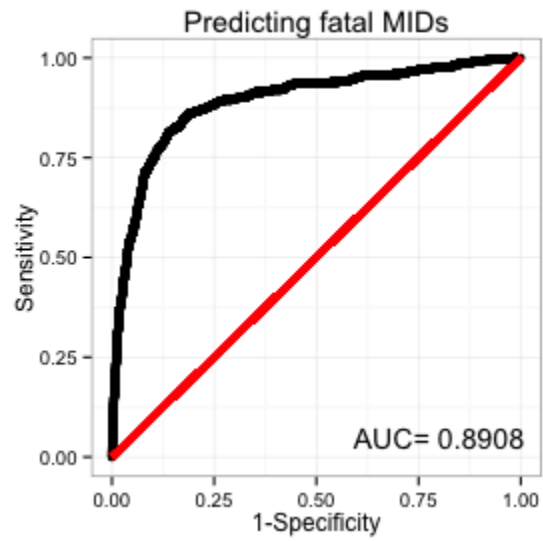


Figure A2: Receiver Operating Characteristic curves for the model estimating the latent territorial threat variable (A3). AUC= area under the curve.

Table A4: Summary statistics for models of democratic reversals.

	Mean/Proportion	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N (country-years)
Democratic reversals	0.02	0.14	0	1	2568
Territorial threat (logged)	-4.14	1.71	-8.29	-0.69	2568
Territorial threat (deciles)	4.88	2.69	1	10	2568
HSIGO memberships	18.12	5.24	3	32	2568
Perc. democratic within 500km	68.34	34.24	0	100	2568
Democratic neighbors	1.98	1.81	0	9	2568
Reversals in region	0.04	0.22	0	2	2568
Perc. democratic (global)	41.91	11.9	24.14	58.54	2568
Post-Cold War	0.56	0.5	0	1	2568
GDPpc (t-1, logged)	8.9	1.01	5.79	11.29	2568
Polity (t-1)	8.77	1.43	6	10	2568
Previous reversals	0.69	0.97	0	4	2568
Years as democracy (logged)	3.29	1.13	0	5.31	2568
Ethnic fractionalization	0.36	0.24	0	0.93	2568

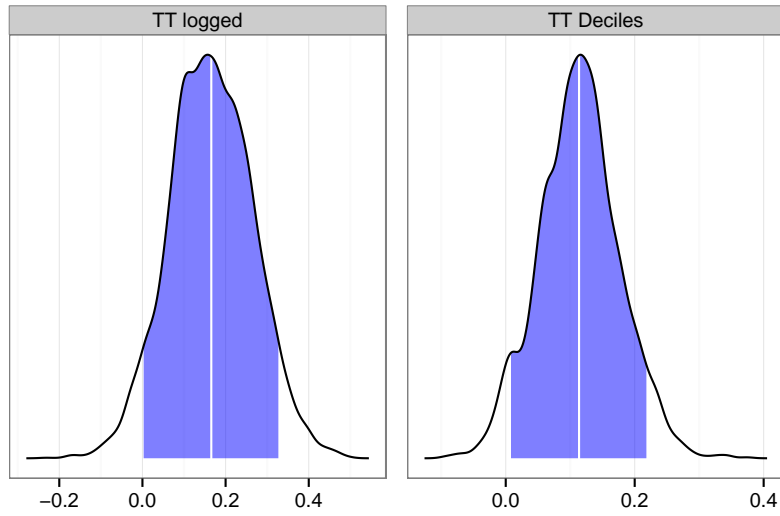


Figure A3: Posterior distribution of effect estimates for territorial threat, Models 1 and 2 in Table 1. The figure shows that the estimates for the territorial threat coefficient are highly likely to be positive. The white vertical line represents the mean of the posterior distribution, also reported in Table 1. The shaded area represents the 90% highest density area of the distribution.



Figure A4: Separation plots for Models 1 and 2 (Table 1). Each red line indicates one country-year with a democratic reversal. The observations are sorted by the predicted probability of a democratic reversal derived from the model. The more red lines are concentrated in the right of the figure (where the predicted probability of a reversal is high), the better the model classifies the data.

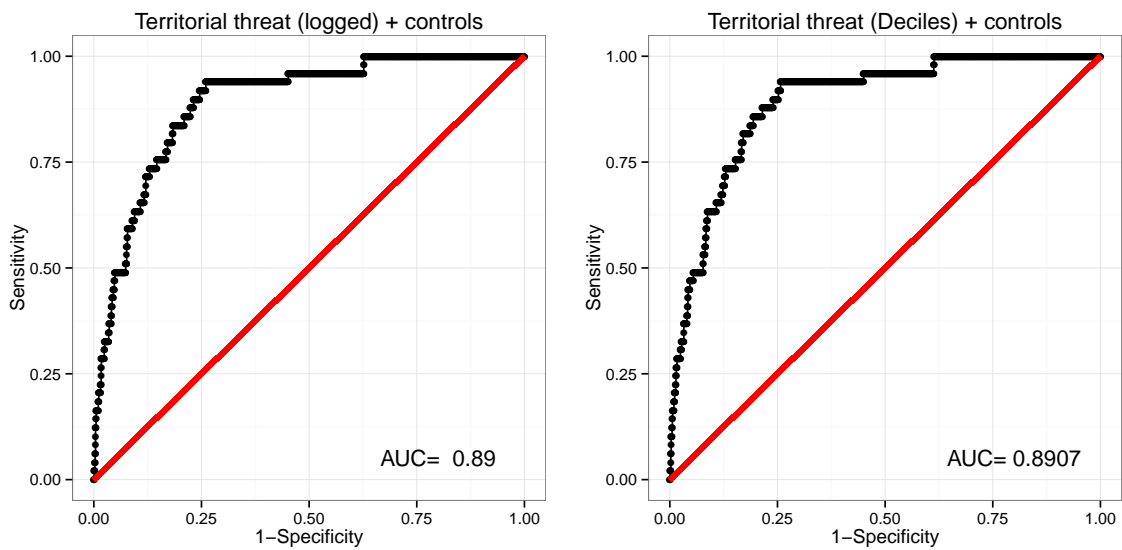


Figure A5: Receiver Operating Characteristic curves for Models 1 and 2 (Table 1). AUC= area under the curve.

Table A5: Posterior distribution of logit estimates: Territorial threat (including measurement uncertainty) and democratic reversals, 1946-2012.

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Pr(Estimate)
Territorial threat	0.293*	0.218	0.972
HSIGO memberships	-0.055	0.069	0.796
Perc. democratic within 500km	-0.008	0.014	0.703
Democratic neighbors	-0.036	0.13	0.592
Reversals in region	-0.811*	0.615	0.915
Perc. democratic (global)	0.022	0.04	0.712
Post-Cold War	-0.552	0.699	0.788
GDPpc (t-1, logged)	-0.235	0.203	0.88
Polity (t-1)	-0.152	0.171	0.829
Previous reversals	0.266	0.3	0.824
Years as democracy (logged)	-0.917*	0.326	1
Ethnic fractionalization	0.845	0.685	0.879
Intercept	1.618	0.954	0.943
Country-years		2568	

* Probability of positive (negative) estimate > 0 (< 0) is at least 90%.

Outcome: Democratic reversal (drop below Polity 2 score of 6) in a given year.

This model uses the mean and variance of the estimated latent territorial threat measure as a prior distribution for the territorial threat predictor.

Distributions based on 100,000 posterior draws (25,000 draws discarded).

Standard tests indicate convergence for all parameters.

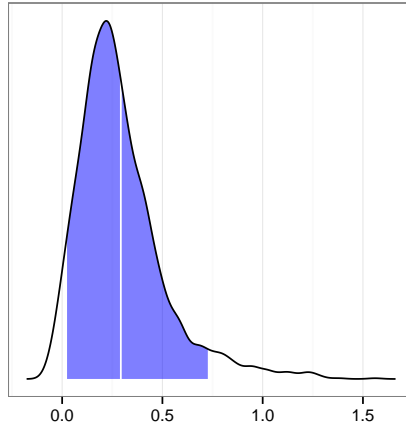


Figure A6: Posterior distribution of effect estimates for territorial threat in Table A5. The figure shows that the estimates for the territorial threat coefficient are slightly skewed to the right, and highly likely to be positive. The white vertical line represents the mean of the posterior distribution, also reported in Table A5. The shaded area represents the 90% highest density area of the distribution.