

# Migration Policy and Autocratic Power

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## Abstract

Throughout history, control over citizen movement has been central to autocratic power, yet modern autocracies vary considerably in how much they limit the freedom to emigrate. Although mass exit and foreign influence can threaten autocratic leaders, emigration can also stabilize regimes by expelling dissidents and encouraging remittances. We disentangle these effects by analyzing the interaction between migration flows, democratic change, and regimes' strategic choices of emigration policy, something that has been neglected in the literature. Using a half-century of bilateral migration data, we calculate the level and targets of expected emigration given exogenous geographic and socioeconomic characteristics. We find that when citizens are likely to emigrate to democracies, countries are more likely to democratize and autocrats restrict emigration freedom in response. In contrast, higher expected emigration, which captures its economic potential, predicts autocratic stability and greater emigration freedom. Our results have important implications for democratic diffusion, the study of autocracy, and the political sources of migration.

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## Introduction

Autocratic leaders have long used restrictions on emigration and internal movement to bolster their power. Under feudalism, autocratic rulers throughout Europe fixed peasants to the land to preserve the existing power structure. In the 20th century, Communist rulers strictly prevented the exit of most of their citizens. In recent history, emigration has been less free on average in autocracies compared to democracies, but there has also existed substantial variation. Autocratic regimes in Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Greece, and North Africa all promoted emigration by signing bilateral labor migration treaties (Peters 2013). Perhaps the most stark example is that of the two Koreas: North Korea tightly regulates both internal movement and emigration, whereas South Korea under its military dictatorship encouraged emigration. Why do some autocratic leaders restrict emigration while others promote it?

Emigration is a double-edged sword for autocratic rulers. On one hand, the threat of exit is a potent source of citizen pressure. As Hirschman (1970, 1978) argues, exit is the companion to voice and of particular utility in autocracies with limited opportunities for expression. By voting with their feet, emigrants can signal that the regime has failed to provide for them, either materially or politically. As graphically illustrated by East Germany, mass emigration can then trigger protest and regime breakdown. Emigration to democracies is especially problematic as migrants transmit democratic ideas back home and can return with tools to make democratization happen.

On the other hand, emigration can be a boon to autocratic leaders. Discontented citizens can leave or be expelled, making it less likely they will exercise their voice. Those who remain tend to be more loyal to the regime. Emigration also brings significant economic benefits. For instance, emigrants send back remittances, increasing the standard of living back home. Further, remittances increase during recessions (Yang 2008), tamping down opposition at a critical point of vulnerability.

We argue that autocratic leaders are strategic in their choice of emigration policy, restricting it when they believe it will threaten their survival and encouraging it otherwise. Specif-

ically, autocrats balance the economic returns of emigration against the dangers of allowing citizens an exit option and the threat of foreign influence. Further, we show that which effect dominates depends on both the expected level of migration and where citizens are likely to move.

In our empirical results, we first show that emigration freedom influences emigrant flows from autocracies, confirming that leaders can use policy to control migration. Using data on bilateral migrant flows, we then analyze the effect of emigration on regime stability and the choice of emigration policy in autocracies. To address endogeneity problems, the core of our empirical strategy is a prediction of bilateral migration based on exogenous geographic and socioeconomic variables. Using these predictions, we show that higher expected emigration (a proxy for its economic potential) stabilizes regimes, but emigration to democracies predicts democratization. We then show that autocrats' choices of emigration policy fit as a rational response to this threat, encouraging emigration if the economic returns will be high, but restricting it if emigrants are likely to go to democracies.

Our paper addresses a critical missing piece of the international migration puzzle: the politics of autocratic sending countries. We further show that emigration policy is a neglected component of how modern autocracies fight for survival. Determining the freedom of citizens to emigrate represents a critical tool of autocratic power and a policy choice of major economic and political significance. Lastly, we provide strong evidence of emigration as a mechanism of democratic diffusion. After reviewing the relevant literature, we discuss theoretically how emigration influences autocratic stability, followed by our empirical strategy and results. We conclude with how our results should influence immigration policy in developed democracies.

## **Past Work on Migration and Politics**

This article addresses lacunae in both the migration and autocracy literatures. Scholarship on migration has tended to focus on immigration policies in wealthy democracies (Massey 1999). When scholars have addressed emigration, they have focused on individual choices to emigrate and the resulting effects on local communities. Several single-country studies

investigate the local political consequences of international migration, based on surveys and electoral outcomes (Pfaff and Kim 2003; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010; Pfütze 2012; Mahmoud et al. 2014; Chauvet and Mercier forthcoming). However, they generally omit the strategic role of the state in encouraging or discouraging emigration to suit its needs.<sup>1</sup> Several other studies discuss the use of emigration policy for economic purposes (Kapur and McHale 2012) and some scholars have examined the effects of remittances on autocratic stability, but tend to underplay the specific role of emigration (Ahmed 2012; O'Mahony 2013; Escribà-Folch et al. 2014). Thus, the regime-level effects of emigration and the political sources of emigration policy have been neglected.

Although Hirschman (1978) theorizes that emigration can affect autocratic stability, the autocracy literature has largely ignored emigration as a source of threat. This is surprising given that scholars such as Boix (2003) have argued that *capital* mobility is a critical factor in democratization. Emigration and remittances can also reduce the need to redistribute wealth, further encouraging democratization (Boix 2003; Bearce and Hutnick 2011).

A few cross-national studies connect migration to democratic change. Spilimbergo (2009) shows that foreign-educated students promote democracy, but only if they are educated in democracies. Bearce and Hutnick (2011) demonstrate that higher net emigration is positive for democratization, which they argue accounts for the resource curse. Docquier et al. (2013) find that greater emigration flows to OECD countries predict increases in democracy and institutional quality. Alemán and Woods (2014) show that emigration freedom positively correlates with democracy levels.

There are several shortcomings with these and related studies. First, the richness of the data on migration varies considerably. Many analyze only total migration (Bearce and Hutnick 2011; Alemán and Woods 2014), and therefore overlook the critical dimension of *where* migrants move to. Others consider only emigration to OECD countries (Docquier et al. 2013;

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<sup>1</sup> Fitzgerald's (2006) study of Mexico, Iskander's (2010) study of Mexico and Morocco, and Moses's (2011) discussion of Mexico and Norway are exceptions. Also see McKenzie (2007) on passport costs and legal barriers to emigration.

Fitzgerald et al. 2014).<sup>2</sup> Studies of bilateral emigration often use cross-sectional data from a single point in time (Breunig et al. 2012).

Second, there is little consideration of regimes' responses to emigration, one of the many sources of endogeneity in connecting emigration to democracy. Like this paper, several studies instrument for migration using geography (e.g., Docquier et al. 2013; Ortega and Peri 2014). However, spurious results could still arise if countries react to the propensity for emigration. Some research considers the political sources of migration, but remains focused on receiving countries' immigration policies (Bertocchi and Strozzi 2008; Mayda 2010; Fitzgerald et al. 2014). Breunig et al. (2012) argue that democracy predicts more emigration and less immigration. Although they claim this results from the differing policies of democracies, they do not test this mechanism. We place the mediating effect of emigration freedom at the center of our empirical strategy.

Third, there is little analysis of how effects vary by regime. Clearly, different autocracies have taken different approaches to emigration, with fairly open policies in Mexico and Taiwan and highly restrictive ones in Cuba and North Korea. Specific regimes may also be more sensitive to the political effects of emigration.

These oversights are significant, as migration from autocracies has grown dramatically, especially to democracies. Figure 1 shows how migration has varied over time and by regime type. The lines indicate the fraction of emigrants from each regime type that travel to democracies.<sup>3</sup> Migrants disproportionately flow between similar regime types, but this has shifted over time. In 1972, at the beginning of democracy's Third Wave, only 36% of emigrants hailing from an autocracy moved to a democracy. In the 2000s, 59% did so. The circles are proportional to the total number of emigrants from each regime type, with the rise of autocratic emigrants clearly evident. Today, an estimated 58 million autocratic emigrants live abroad, roughly double the number in 1960.

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<sup>2</sup> Although the primary flow is from poor to wealthy countries, almost half of migrants currently move between countries in the developing world (Özden et al. 2011).

<sup>3</sup> This is based on emigrant stocks data from Özden et al. (2011). Democracy is defined using a threshold of 6 on *Polity*.

## **Migration and Autocratic Power**

Emigration is a double-edged sword for autocratic leaders. On one side, there is the threat of exit and exposure to democracies that may lead to mass protests and the overthrow of the regime. On the other side, emigration enables autocrats to get rid of potential challengers and attract economic benefits, including remittances. We expect autocratic leaders to balance the positives and negatives to determine migration policy and maximize their survival. In this section, we explore these different mechanisms and emphasize their persistent effects in autocracies throughout history.

### **Emigration as Threat of Exit**

The ability to emigrate is a powerful source of citizen pressure on autocratic regimes. The clearest expression of this idea comes from Hirschman (1970, 1978), who argues that citizens, customers, and other beneficiaries have two types of responses when dissatisfied with an organization: voice and exit. Because voice in autocracies is generally ineffective, exit is the dominant option. By reducing populations, tax bases, and legitimacy, large-scale emigration can exert serious harm and even regime collapse. Economists similarly argue that citizens “voting with their feet” (known as Tiebout sorting) exerts competitive pressure on governments to appeal to them (Tiebout 1956). This is typically applied to local governments since exit is highly feasible, but others extend the idea to the national level (Fleck and Hanssen 2005; Gehlbach 2006).

There is also an informational component to exit. In models of mass protest, such as Kuran (1991) and Lohmann (1994), successful protests occur when citizens believe that enough of their fellow citizens will join them. High levels of emigration can provide a crucial signal of mass opposition to citizens who remain at home. The exit of certain citizens, such as the highly educated, doctors, military experts, and the wealthy, may be especially threatening if they are highly visible or damaging to the economy and government services.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Known as “brain drain”, emigration of the highly educated has reached endemic proportions in some countries (Docquier and Rapoport 2012). According to the OECD (2008), the

Perhaps the most significant example of political pressure through exit is the mass exodus from East Germany when Hungary's border with Austria was briefly opened in 1989 (Hirschman 1993; Pfaff and Kim 2003; Gehlbach 2006). The exit of more than 30,000 East Germans forced the regime to close its borders with the Communist bloc on October 3, triggering rising protest as the level of opposition became clear (Major 2010: 240-41).<sup>5</sup> In an attempt to win back popular support, the visa requirement for travel was lifted again on November 1 (Pfaff 206: 232). This, however, caused another stream of refugees and protest: 23,000 East Germans left via Prague's embassy alone the following weekend, and 300,000 gathered in Leipzig on November 6 to demand visa-free travel ("*visafrei bis Hawaii*") and the end of Communist rule (Major 2010: 252). A day later, the entire cabinet was forced to resign. Another two days later, the Berlin Wall fell. The resulting mass exodus—133,400 in November and 43,200 in December—crippled the regime, as the emigration of skilled workers further deteriorated the economy and gave protesters more confidence to demand democratic reforms and German reunification (Major 2010: 256). Thus, allowing direct travel to West Germany proved incompatible with the survival of East Germany as a Communist regime.

Exit has been a recurrent problem throughout history. As Hirschman (1978: 104) argues, the very "existence of the state is incompatible with the virtually costless availability of exit."<sup>6</sup> While democracies typically allow low-cost exit, they decrease the desire to exit by providing their citizens with public services and a voice in the political process. Because citizens can exercise voice, exit becomes a less desirable option (Hirschman 1970; Gehlbach 2006). In contrast, autocracies do not grant their citizens voice and therefore are motivated to limit the power of exit through population control and migration policy. This power is especially press-

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share of citizens with college degrees who emigrate has reached 27% in Kenya, 67.5% in Haiti, and 71.5% in Guinea-Bissau. This brain drain often hits autocracies the hardest. For instance, half of Cuban doctors left Havana after Fidel Castro's accession to power in 1959 (Dowty 1987: 177). Between 1985 and 1987, about 87% of exit permit applications in East Germany came from skilled workers aged 40 and below (Grix 2000: 30).

<sup>5</sup> At the time, many citizens who remained at home condemned this emigration out of a feeling of abandonment. Only later did many recognize "what crucial political role [the emigrants] played in denying the GDR its legitimacy," according to German President Joachim Gauck (2014).

<sup>6</sup> Also see Herbst (1990) on how the gradual control of exit influenced state consolidation in Africa.

ing if citizens have more feasible options for exit, such as neighbors with a shared language and lax immigration policies.

The threat of exit has prompted a variety of reactions from states, with many repressing and constraining populations in response. Feudalism represents an extreme in the control of exit and movement, particularly in Eastern Europe. In the Early Middle Ages, Western European peasants had the threat of exit to towns, which necessitated tying them to the land. However, following the Black Death, Western European monarchs began to encourage peasant exit to weaken nobles (Anderson 1974; Fukuyama 2011: 376-77). In contrast, rulers in Eastern Europe strengthened feudalism to gain the support of the nobility (Anderson 1974; Peters 2014). At the nadir, Russian peasants were permitted to travel only one day per year and even this freedom was restricted through fees. In large part, this political restriction was borne from the ease of exit for Russian peasants, who faced few natural barriers and the lure of free Cossack communities across Russia's borders (Fukuyama 2011: 397).

The 20th century has also witnessed the use of travel and emigration restrictions by many autocracies. Iran under the Shah issued passports only to citizens deemed to have a "good reason" to leave the country (Dowty 1987: 113-14). Similarly, passports were issued under Spain's Franco only to his loyal supporters (Dowty 1987: 113-14). Travel restrictions often target skilled workers. In the 1970s, Ethiopia and Thailand imposed emigration restrictions on health workers (medical graduates were required to serve for two to three years at home before they could exit), while Haiti completely denied doctors, dentists, and other health workers the right to leave the country (Mejía et al. 1979: 184). Between 1961 and 1974, all Sri Lankan professional graduates were required to work in public service for five years (Dowty 1987: 155). After 1971, they had to remit up to 10% of their salaries received abroad (Mejía et al. 1979: 183-84).

Elsewhere, more democratic states have allowed higher wages and political concessions to entice workers to stay. In 19th century U.S. and Australia, the working class had high bargaining power due to labor scarcity and easy exit to the frontier (Hobsbawm 1975: 118-19), which encouraged early extensions of universal suffrage in frontier states like Wyoming, Utah, and

South Australia. The polar opposite effect was seen in early 20th century Argentina, where a massive immigrant population, including a majority of adult males in major cities, eliminated domestic labor's threat of exit. This freed elites to repress and even deport labor organizers and to defer the enfranchisement of the lower class (Waisman 1989: 80).

In sum, the threat of exit is a source of power for citizens, which left unchecked may promote instability and democratic change. As a result, states that cannot allow effective suffrage or voice, such as modern autocracies, will be motivated to legally restrict emigration.

### **Migration and Democratic Diffusion**

The danger to autocrats arises not just from the exit option, but the potential exposure to democratic norms and practices. Several studies demonstrate that the presence of democracies in a country's neighborhood or region predicts democratization (Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Gleditsch and Ward 2006), but have struggled to identify the supporting mechanisms (Lankina and Getachew 2006; Torfason and Ingram 2010). Levitsky and Way (2010) instead claim that democracies pressure electoral autocracies to liberalize not based on proximity, but their "linkage" through trade, cultural exchange, and travel. We adopt a similar perspective and argue that emigration to democracies should exert an especially strong effect.

Even brief periods living in well-functioning democracies can shift attitudes in favor of democracy (Camp 2003; Spilimbergo 2009; Kapur 2010, 2014). Migrants also have opportunities for political participation (such as protest and membership in civil society groups and unions) that can build critical political capacities and social capital. Over time, large migrant populations can then influence democratic attitudes and behavior back home. Based on a survey in Mexico, Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow (2010) find that international migrants transmit democratic norms both by returning home and communicating with their native country while abroad. Chauvet and Mercier (forthcoming) find that migrant returnees in Mali improve local electoral participation, including among non-migrants. Finally, Mahmoud et al. (2014) find that communities in Moldova with migrants traveling to Western Europe increased their support for democratic parties compared to those sending migrants to Russia.

Several historical cases further illustrate the political effects of emigration. Moses (2011: 93-114) claims that Norwegian emigration to the U.S. in the 19th century heavily influenced Norway's politics. In addition to creating a labor shortage, emigrants sent back reports of greater economic opportunities and freedoms in the U.S., causing increased labor agitation, higher wages, and ultimately suffrage reform. Emigration was a "political crowbar" used by Norway's labor movement for political and economic gains (Moses 2011: 111).

Portugal's high level of emigration to Western Europe also exerted strong pro-democratic pressure in the 1970s. Inflated by the risk of conscription for Portugal's unpopular colonial wars, hundreds of thousands left Portugal in the early 70s, with more than 150,000 emigrating within Europe in 1970 alone (Bermeo 2007: 392). Besides magnifying labor power due to the shortage of able-bodied men, this population flux helped to spread democratic norms (Brettell 1984; Bermeo 2007). As Bermeo (2007: 392) writes, "[C]itizens with experience abroad became a constituency for democracy." This proved pivotal for democratization after the 1974 military coup, when elections in 1975 and 1976 revealed overwhelming popular support for moderate pro-democratic parties.

A key question, however, is whether those who migrate to democratic countries had democratic leanings to begin with. For example, in the 1960s, migrants from North Africa could choose to migrate to several Western European countries under a bilateral labor migration treaty or to the Persian Gulf. Migrants who valued a more open society likely migrated to Europe while those who valued a more traditional society migrated to the Persian Gulf. The former may not have changed their attitudes about democracy, but may have gained tools to help challenge the autocrat. In contrast, other migrants go to a democracy simply because it is the easiest place to travel for work. Regardless of their feelings about democracy, Mexicans migrated to the U.S. because it was close and had high wages. For these migrants, their experience abroad may change their attitudes about democracy or make them more salient. Because of the risk of endogeneity in location choices, we instrument for emigration destinations using exogenous geographic variables.

## Motives for Encouraging Emigration

So far, we have highlighted two dangers of emigration for autocrats: the threat of exit and exposure to democracy. Left at this, we would expect autocrats to restrict emigration as much as possible. In reality, there is a great deal of variation, with many autocracies, such as Mexico and Taiwan, encouraging emigration and foreign study. To explain this, we highlight some of the positive effects of emigration for autocratic leaders. Taking account of the balance of motives can help to explain the variation in emigration freedom.

The flip side of the threat of exit is that autocracies may desire the exit of some citizens as a “safety valve.” In post-feudal Europe, states encouraged emigration to the colonies, only in part for economic development. Shifting some of the poor abroad helped to lessen poverty and social spending at home. In addition, emigration allowed states to expel political dissidents, including thousands of Irish activists deported by the U.K. to Australia.<sup>7</sup> In the early 20th century, Japan encouraged emigration of the outcast *Burakumin* social class from the most politically unstable regions (Endoh 2009). Similarly, under the mid-20th century Bracero Program, the Mexican government disproportionately allocated exit permits to regions with civil unrest and high opposition membership (Moses 2011: 129-30). Even the Soviet Union initially allowed free emigration to purge itself of political opponents, “judging that hostile elements should be removed from the polity, rather than left to undermine it from within” (Light 2012: 400). An estimated 1.5 to 2 million voluntarily emigrated between 1917 and 1922, in addition to 6 million forcibly expelled in the ensuing decades.

The practice of encouraging (or at least tolerating) the exit of selected populations continues today, with opposition voters, activists, and non-allied ethnic groups the most likely targets. Millions of politically disaffected citizens have left Zimbabwe and Russia in the past decade, thinning the ranks of the opposition (Kapur 2014: 483). Other recent examples include Idi Amin’s expulsion of 80,000 South Asians from Uganda in 1972, the Saudis’ expulsion of be-

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<sup>7</sup> Hirschman (1978) argues that these dual effects promoted liberalization in Europe, as they made the extension of suffrage less threatening.

tween 650,000 and a million Yemenis in 1990, and Serbia's expulsion of over 800,000 Kosovar Albanians in 1999 (Greenhill 2010).<sup>8</sup>

Further, a disproportionate number of migrants are unemployed or underemployed young men, the same group that most opposition and insurgent groups draw from. Moving these men out of the country and into jobs overseas should lead to less support for the most dangerous opposition movements. For example, after independence, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan actively encouraged emigration to reduce rising unemployment rates of up to 25% (Brand 2006). According to Brand (2006: 185), emigration was preferred to economic reforms in Jordan in order to avoid instabilities associated with socioeconomic change. Similarly, by signing conventions with France and Germany in 1963, Morocco facilitated the exit of its citizens from opposition strongholds and regions with little economic value (Brand 2006). As clear support for the safety valve effect, Barry et al. (2014) find that higher emigration freedom reduces anti-regime protest in modern autocracies, at least when there are economic opportunities abroad.

The final three factors concern economic incentives for emigration. First, remittances from foreign workers are a major source of citizen income and foreign currency in poor countries, reaching \$529 billion worldwide in 2012 and 25% or more of GDP in several countries (Kapur 2014: 490; Pfütze 2012). Although remittances go directly to citizens, unlike income from natural resources, they can be used to prop up patronage networks (Ahmed 2012). Remittances are also used by their recipients to provide private forms of public goods, such as wells instead of connections to public water systems (Adida and Girod 2010; Bhavnani and Peters 2014). Since autocrats do not have to provide public goods to these citizens, they can spend more money to neutralize other threats. Remittances also increase during economic recessions and after natural disasters (Yang 2008), softening their potential to undermine the regime. A sud-

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<sup>8</sup> These cases of *coercive engineered migration* were also used to achieve international policy goals, such as the lifting of sanctions, military deterrence, and increases in foreign aid (Greenhill 2010). However, there is a danger in facilitating the growth of a politically opposed diaspora beyond the reach of the government. These migrants can fund the opposition at home, expose regime atrocities to the wider world, and sometimes return to challenge the regime directly, as in Iran in 1979. Moses (2011: 213-18) finds that among 115 major revolutionary leaders, about two in three spent significant time abroad before their revolutionary activity.

den loss of these remittances can be highly destabilizing. For example, the mass expulsion of Yemenis from Saudi Arabia in 1990 led to a loss of \$3 billion annually in remittances, exacerbating an economic crisis that culminated in the 1994 civil war (Black 2013).

Second, trade and investment often flow along migrant networks. Migrant flows increase trade flows because migrants have a taste for home goods and provide information about opportunities for trade with their home country (Gould 1994). Migration is associated with foreign direct investment, as the diaspora invests at home and makes investors from the receiving country more comfortable investing in the home country (Leblang 2010). For instance, Chinese emigrés contribute more than half of the nearly \$100 billion in annual inflows of foreign direct investment to China, and have played a large role in encouraging economic reform (Min 2013). Additionally, migrants may return home with technical skills and networks developed in the receiving country. Emigration can also increase reciprocal flows of immigration, which provides cheap and politically powerless labor. Thus, migration can help grow the economy, leading to greater regime stability over time.

Third, emigration can also reduce the pressure for redistribution, as it shifts poorer citizens abroad (Hirschman 1978; Bearce and Hutnick 2011). For instance, O'Rourke and Williamson (1999) find that emigration helped to close the wage gap between the New World and Europe during the 19th century. As wages increase and unemployment decreases for those left behind, there may be less need for redistribution. Mass expulsions have also been engineered to redistribute income and reduce grievances. The expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972, for example, lowered economic inequality, as Asians had had average incomes 30 times larger than the rest of the population (Jamal 1976: 360).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Emigration is also used by dictators to rid themselves of citizens deemed “economically unuseful.” For instance, Greenhill (2010: 93) notes that Fidel Castro sent a disproportionate number of criminals, the mentally ill, and chronically infirm to the United States during the 1980 Mariel boatlift. East German pensioners and Hungarians over 55 also faced fewer travel restrictions than younger citizens (Dowty 1987: 121, 127).

## Predictions for Democratization and Emigration Policy

Now that we have outlined the various consequences of emigration, what are the implications for democratization and emigration policy? Allowing exit can empower citizens and increase their exposure to democratic and other foreign ideas. Regimes will tolerate this only if emigration carries sufficient economic benefits or can operate as a safety valve.

Which side dominates depends in large part on two factors: the expected level of emigration and emigrants' likely destinations. In turn, these are heavily determined by geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural characteristics. For instance, states surrounded by large, wealthy countries should expect emigration freedom to lead to a high level of emigration and a high economic return. The ideal scenario is where these same countries are also autocratic (e.g., the Persian Gulf). We take account of these emigration regularities to predict when greater emigration freedom will lead to democratization (and, in an extension, other regime breakdowns). We further argue that autocrats will adjust emigration freedom to maximize their survival in response to these effects.

Our strongest expectation is that emigration will be most destabilizing when citizens are likely to emigrate to democracies, where they will be exposed to democratic ideals and organizational tools. In turn, democracy-focused emigration will lead autocracies to strategically tighten emigration freedom. We further expect the reaction to be strongest in the most repressive states, which rely on narrow ideological appeals and informational control to maintain power.<sup>10</sup> Democratic influence can also be a threat in electoral autocracies if citizens develop higher standards for electoral conduct and acquire resources to agitate for liberalization. However, these regimes hold elections and present a democratic facade, providing them institutional structures to co-opt pro-democratic citizens (Magaloni 2006; Levitsky and Way 2010). Further, electoral autocracies are less threatened by democratization because they have ruling parties that can compete after transition, such as Mexico's PRI and Taiwan's KMT (Wright and Escribà-Folch 2012; Miller 2014). This leads to the following hypotheses:

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<sup>10</sup> At the extreme of worries about ideological diffusion, pre-Meiji Japan and pre-1850s China almost entirely eliminated interactions with the outside world. In 1650s China, the Emperor even burned all private boats and forced coastal residents to move at least 10 miles inland.

**Hypothesis 1:** *When emigrants are more likely to move to democracies, democratization becomes more likely.*

**Hypothesis 2:** *When emigrants are more likely to move to democracies, emigration freedom will be restricted in the most repressive autocracies.*

What are the implications of total expected emigration? We argue that this captures the economic potential of emigration freedom. With greater predicted emigration comes the promise of higher remittances, more trade, and more investment. The resulting economic growth and resources can then help to stabilize the regime. In contrast, when few citizens emigrate for economic reasons, emigration freedom promises increased citizen leverage at little return. Thus, emigration freedom will be destabilizing for autocracies when expected emigration is low. As a corollary, autocrats will choose freer emigration only when total expected emigration is sufficiently high. This is captured in the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3:** *When expected emigration is low, emigration freedom predicts democratization. When expected emigration is high, emigration freedom predicts autocratic stability.*

**Hypothesis 4:** *The higher the expected level of emigration, the freer emigration policy will be in autocracies.*

## **Empirical Approach and Data**

We now turn to testing the argument, which is pictured in Figure 2. Our empirical tests look at the interaction between emigration freedom, migration flows, and political stability. We first confirm that emigration freedom can be used to influence emigration flows, especially in autocracies with an effective rule of law. Using exogenous geographic variables, we demonstrate that democratic change is predicted by expected emigration levels and how democratic the likely emigration targets are. Emigration flows also provide economic returns, as the prior literature has covered extensively. Finally, we show that emigration freedom is strategically chosen in light of these effects.

## Sample and Main Variables

For predicting emigration flows, we use a directed dyadic panel, consisting of ordered pairs of countries in each year. For predicting emigration freedom and democratic change, we instead use a country-year panel. We focus on a sample of autocracies, which are defined as scoring below a threshold of 6 on the *Polity* democracy score (Marshall and Jaggers 2010). We also replicate the democratization results using Boix et al.'s (2013) dichotomous indicator of democracy.<sup>11</sup>

We measure *Emigration Freedom* using CIRI's three-point rating of the "freedom of foreign movement and travel," which is available for 1981 to 2010 (Cingranelli and Richards 2010). In this coding, 0 = "severely restricted," 1 = "somewhat restricted", and 2 = "unrestricted." For ease of interpretation, we recode this to take values of 0, 0.5, and 1. Besides blanket restrictions on exit, the measure tracks limitations on the duration and location of travel and rights of return for citizen refugees. The middle category is used for restrictions that are limited in nature or that target specific groups, such as ethnic minorities. The measure does not include the freedom of domestic movement, which has its own separate variable. *Emigration Freedom* averages 0.49 in autocracies and 0.89 in democracies.

For information on bilateral migration, we primarily rely on data from the World Bank (Özden et al. 2011), which provides migrant stocks for each pair of countries every 10 years from 1960 to 2000. We also use this to calculate migrant flows for each decade. Results are replicated or extended using two other bilateral migration data sets: Docquier and Marfouk (2005) provide migrant stocks for 1990 and 2000, distinguishing migrants by college education, and Abel and Sander (2014) provide the net change in migrant populations over each five-year period from 1990 to 2005.

## Identification Strategy

The core of our identification strategy is an estimation of directed bilateral migration from autocracies using exogenous geographic and socioeconomic variables. From this, we impute expected migration, and then calculate its effect on democratic change and emigration free-

<sup>11</sup> These two measures agree for 93.7% of our sample.

dom. The approach is similar to an instrumental variables setup, although we also use the imputed values to calculate the democratic nature of expected emigration targets.

We begin by estimating a regression of the following form:

$$\ln(Em_{ijt}) = \ln(Population_{it}) + \ln(Population_{jt}) + \ln(Distance_{ijt}) + \mathbf{X}_{ijt} + \mathbf{W}_{it} + \mathbf{Z}_{jt} + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (1)$$

where  $Em_{ijt}$  is the stock of migrants from country  $i$  to country  $j$  in year  $t$ . This is taken from the most recent value in Özden et al. (2011), up to 2010. The sample is limited to autocratic sending states, but all receiving states are included. Equation (1) is known as a *gravity model*, similar to those used in the trade literature, as it includes logs of distance and the respective country populations. These are logged so that their distributions are approximately normal.  $\mathbf{X}$ ,  $\mathbf{W}$ , and  $\mathbf{Z}$  are control variables that refer respectively to dyadic characteristics, the source country  $i$ , and the target  $j$ .  $\gamma_t$  is a linear control for the year.

Our included variables were chosen to be exogenous to both democracy and regime policy. For dyadic factors, we include logged capital distance, dummies for six categories of contiguity (which includes information on shared borders and separation by water), an indicator of colonial history, and a dummy for shared language. We control for each country's logged population and logged average income. Finally, we include interactions between the target country's population and distance, population and shared borders, and the same interactions for income. Large, wealthy neighbors may be especially attractive targets for emigration. Further details are included in the discussion of control variables.

This equation allows us to calculate imputed values  $\widehat{Em}_{ijt}$ . After logging, these are correlated with actual dyadic emigration at about 0.7. From this, we compute a country's expected total emigration as a share of its population:

$$\widehat{Em}_{it}(Pop. Share) = \frac{\sum_j \widehat{Em}_{ijt}}{Population_{it}}$$

We also calculate the average democratic rating of  $i$ 's expected emigration targets:

$$\widehat{Em}_{it}(Polity\ Average) = \frac{\sum_j \widehat{Em}_{ijt} \times Polity_{jt}}{\sum_j \widehat{Em}_{ijt}}$$

The above is calculated from *Polity*, which we re-scale to run from 0 to 1. As a robustness check, we replace this with the dichotomous coding from Boix et al. (2013).

Lastly, to test for a policy diffusion effect, we repeat the above calculation with the emigration freedom of receiving countries:

$$\widehat{Em}_{it}(EF\ Average) = \frac{\sum_j \widehat{Em}_{ijt} \times EF_{jt}}{\sum_j \widehat{Em}_{ijt}}$$

where *EF* stands for *Emigration Freedom*. For one test, we also calculate the average logged income level of expected emigration targets.

## Empirical Tests

We begin by showing that emigration freedom has an effect on actual emigration flows in autocracies. This is tested through an expanded version of Equation (1), using actual logged flows instead of stocks as the dependent variable (since we're interested in the near-term effect). We test this with the World Bank data (Özden et al. 2011) and separately for populations with and without college degrees (Docquier and Marfouk 2005). Our estimator is regression with robust standard errors clustered by country dyad.

We then test whether expected emigration totals and targets predict democratic change, using the imputed values from Equation (1). Our main dependent variable for testing this is the country's shift in *Polity* over the following five years.<sup>12</sup> Thus, we run regressions of the following form:

$$\Delta Polity_{it}(5\text{-year}) = \widehat{Em}_{it}(Pop.\ Share) + \widehat{Em}_{it}(Polity\ Average) + EF_{it} + \mathbf{X}_{it} + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{it}$$

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<sup>12</sup> The five-year structure follows Spilimbergo (2009) and Bearce and Hutnick (2011).

where  $\mathbf{X}_{it}$  is a set of control variables. Again, we re-scale *Polity* to lie between 0 and 1. We also run probits predicting democratization (within the following five years) using the dichotomous measure from Boix et al. (2013).

A similar model structure is then used to predict *EF* in autocracies, using an ordered probit:

$$EF_{it} = \widehat{Em}_{it}(Pop. Share) + \widehat{Em}_{it}(Polity Average) + \widehat{Em}_{it}(EF Average) + \mathbf{X}_{it} + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{it}$$

We also allow the expected emigration effects to vary by the country's *Polity* level.

### Control Variables

The first tests predict logged emigration flows. Our main variable of interest is *Emigration Freedom* in the sender. We also control for the sender's *Population* (logged, from Heston et al. 2011) and *GDP/capita* (logged, in real 2000 dollars, from Haber and Menaldo 2011; World Bank 2011), which are known to influence the size of migrant populations. We further control for *Urbanization* (as a percentage of population, from World Bank 2011) and a 10-point rating of *Domestic Violence* (tracking civil and ethnic violence, from Marshall 2010). The same variables are included for the receiving state, in addition to the receiver's *Polity* score.<sup>13</sup>

We further control for several dyadic variables. *Reciprocal Flow* is the logged flow of immigration, which captures a reciprocal effect and controls for omitted dyadic characteristics. We include the logged *Distance* between capital cities (in miles, from Gleditsch and Ward 2001)<sup>14</sup> and a dummy for a *Shared Border* (Correlates of War Project 2007) to capture critical geographic factors. *Colony* is a dummy variable for whether one country is a former colony of the other. *Shared Language* is a dummy variable indicating whether the countries share an official language (Melitz and Toubal 2012). *Imports* and *Exports* are trade measures (in billions of U.S. dollars, from Barbieri and Keshk 2012), which could confound our findings since these also fit a gravity-type relationship. *Alliance* indicates whether the two countries share

<sup>13</sup> We do not control for the sender's *Polity* score since it strongly correlates with *Emigration Freedom*, but results are similar in magnitude with its inclusion.

<sup>14</sup> This dataset lists the two Congos as having 0 distance apart, which skews the imputed emigration calculations since both countries are predicted to have extremely high bilateral migration. We changed this to the smallest value in the remaining data. Our results are also robust to removing the countries entirely or using the distance from Brazzaville to Kinshasa.

a formal military alliance (Correlates of War Project 2013) and *War* indicates involvement on opposing sides of an inter-state war (Sarkees and Wayman 2010).

For predicting democratic change, our variables of interest are expected emigration, the democratic character of emigration targets, and *Emigration Freedom*. As standard controls, we include the country's *Polity* score, population, average income, mean imports and exports, and *Economic Growth* (the average percentage change in *GDP/capita* over the past two years). We also include the country's number of neighbors, further capturing the feasibility of exit, and a measure of regime *Durability* (Marshall and Jaggers 2010).<sup>15</sup> All models control for the year as a linear term. In robustness checks, we control for other measures of democratic diffusion to isolate the migration effect.

For predicting *Emigration Freedom*, we include the same independent variables. We additionally control for  $\widehat{Em}(EF\ Average)$ ,  $\widehat{Em}(GDP/capita\ Average)$ , the surrounding region's *Polity* average, urbanization, and *Labor Force* (the percentage of adults in the workforce, from World Bank 2011).

## Empirical Results

### Emigration Flows

Table 1 displays results predicting logged dyadic emigration flows. Model 1 predicts total flows (from Özden et al. 2011) with a stripped-down model and Model 2 adds the full set of controls. Models 3 and 4 in turn predict flows of migrants without and with a college degree (Docquier and Marfouk 2005). Model 5 returns to total flows and adds a control for *Judicial Independence* (a three-valued 0-1 rating, from Cingranelli and Richards 2010), plus its interaction with *Emigration Freedom*. To be clear, these are not the same models used for Equation (1), which includes only exogenous geographic and socioeconomic variables. However, the results help to validate the variables included in Equation (1).

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<sup>15</sup> This is the number of years since the country experienced a three-point *Polity* change within three years or was categorized as transitional.

As expected, the sender's *Emigration Freedom* is significantly positive for emigration across all models. Model 1 implies that moving from 0 to 1 on *Emigration Freedom* increases yearly emigration by about 13%. According to Model 3, the effect is slightly larger for flows of the non-college-educated. Results are similar for the Abel and Sander (2014) data. Model 5 demonstrates that *Emigration Freedom* has a larger effect in autocracies with an independent judiciary. When *Judicial Independence* equals 0, *Emigration Freedom* is ineffectual. When it equals 1, moving from 0 to 1 on *Emigration Freedom* now increases yearly emigration by about 25%. The implication is that emigration freedom has a greater influence in regimes with an effective state and rule of law. Finally, *Emigration Freedom* in the receiver, which may correlate with freer immigration policies, is also significantly positive. In sum, the results support our assumption that *Emigration Freedom* is a tool for influencing migration from autocracies.

Most of the controls yield expected results. Both states' populations are positive. Average income in the receiver strongly predicts emigration as workers seek out economic opportunities. Income in the sender is also positive, but much smaller in magnitude, which is consistent with the poverty trap literature that argues that the poorest of the poor lack the human capital needed to seek jobs abroad (Clemens 2014). The receiver's urbanization rate is predictive, as industrialized cities (often with ethnic enclaves) can attract emigrants. A smaller distance, a shared border, and exports all predict emigration flows.

The results also clearly indicate the relevance of *political* variables for migration, whereas the field has overwhelmingly concentrated on economic and geographic variables. The receiver's *Polity* level is predictive, indicating the attraction of more democratic receiving states. Breunig et al. (2012) find the opposite, but this is partly explained by their lack of control for migration policy. *Domestic Violence* is positive for senders and negative for receivers, meaning that migrants move away from civil violence. *Reciprocal Flow* is positive, indicating that emigration and immigration co-vary. Military alliance, colonial history, and a shared language are all significantly and robustly predictive of emigration flows, pointing to the relevance of geopolitical and cultural factors.

## Democratic Change

Table 2 displays results predicting democratic change in autocracies. Models 1–3 predict  $\Delta Polity$  over the succeeding five years and Model 4 predicts democratization within five years (from Boix et al. 2013).

The *Polity* average of expected emigration targets,  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$ , is strongly positive for democratic change. Shifting  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  up its full range increases *Polity* by about 1/6 its range (Model 2) and roughly quadruples the likelihood of democratization, from 3.6% to 15.6% (Model 4). Thus, greater emigration to democracies predicts democratization, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Expected emigration as a share of the population,  $\widehat{Em}(Pop.\ Share)$ , which tracks the economic potential and safety valve effects of emigration, is negative for democratic change in each model and significantly so in Model 4. Holding other variables at their means, expecting an additional 10% of the population to emigrate lowers the five-year likelihood of democratization by 3.1% (about 1/3 proportionally). This is consistent with Hypothesis 3.

We should expect that both variables will have a larger effect when *Emigration Freedom* is high, since this increases actual flows and thereby magnifies the influence from abroad. Model 3 confirms this by interacting the two imputed variables with *Emigration Freedom*.<sup>16</sup> The interaction with  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  is strongly positive and the interaction with  $\widehat{Em}(Pop.\ Share)$  is strongly negative. Thus, at higher *Emigration Freedom*, democracy-focused emigration becomes more democratizing and higher potential emigration becomes more stabilizing.

Consistent with Alemán and Woods (2014), *Emigration Freedom* has a positive direct effect on democratic change when interactions are omitted. However, in Model 3, *Emigration Freedom* does not have a significant effect when expected emigrants are small in number and unlikely to move to democracies. Thus, *Emigration Freedom* does not appear to have an independent effect, but one that flows through the characteristics of emigration targets.

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<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot add these interactions to Model 4, as the probit estimator gets partial separation when it perfectly predicts several outcomes. Estimating this instead with OLS returns similar results as Model 3.

An important concern is that the effect of  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  may really be tracking some other form of democratic diffusion, such as contagion from democratic neighbors or through trade networks. Countries linked by migration could also be linked in other ways. To test this, Table 3 shows the results for  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  after controlling for other diffusion measures. The top panel extends Model 2 in Table 2 (predicting *Polity* change) and the bottom panel extends Model 4 in Table 2 (predicting democratization). For each set of checks, Model 1 controls for the region's *Polity* average (excluding the country itself).<sup>17</sup> Model 2 instead uses neighbors' *Polity* average, which has been shown to predict democratization (Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Gleditsch and Ward 2006). Model 3 controls for *Polity* weighted by bilateral trade with each other country (from Barbieri and Keshk 2012), which proxies for both economic interaction and leverage. Finally, Model 4 includes all three diffusion measures.

$\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  remains significantly positive in all eight models. None of the other diffusion measures are robustly positive, although *Neighbor Polity* predicts *Polity* change. *Regional Polity* does not approach significance and *Trade-Weighted Polity* surprisingly is negative in all models. Importantly, *Neighbor Polity* is strongly positive for  $\Delta Polity$  and democratization if  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  is removed, suggesting that previous findings on democratic contagion may in fact be driven by migration flows. This is consistent with Levitsky and Way's (2010) perspective that democratic diffusion is encouraged not by geographic proximity, but by substantive interaction and linkage with democracies.

Among the controls in Table 2, more populous and low-growth countries are more likely to democratize. For the democratization models, imports are positive and exports are negative, suggesting a need to repress labor and remain autocratic in export-oriented economies.

## **Emigration Freedom**

Table 4 displays ordered probit results predicting *Emigration Freedom* in autocracies, with the models successively adding controls. Model 1 includes the three main imputed variables, plus *Polity* and *Regional Polity*. Model 2 adds interactions between *Polity* and two of the im-

<sup>17</sup> The eight regions are Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East, Post-Communist, sub-Saharan Africa, Western Europe and the British settler colonies, East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia.

puted variables, and Model 3 adds the remaining controls. We predict that *Emigration Freedom* will be lower under conditions in which it predicts democratization.

The results clearly support this prediction.  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  is significantly negative for *Emigration Freedom* in Model 1. Thus, autocracies restrict emigration when their citizens are likely to move to democracies. Further, Models 2 and 3 find a significantly positive interaction with *Polity*, confirming Hypothesis 2. The base term, which is strongly negative, indicates the effect of  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  when *Polity* is at its minimum. For Model 2, shifting  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  up its full range in this case increases the likelihood that *Emigration Freedom* equals 0 by 41%. The positive interaction term indicates that this negative effect declines at higher sender *Polity* values. Figure 3 displays the marginal effect of  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  on *Emigration Freedom* for different values of the sender's *Polity* level. What we see is that the most repressive dictatorships sharply limit emigration (the marginal effect is less than zero) if citizens will move to democracies, but this effect is absent in liberalized autocracies. This helps to explain the freedom of emigration in autocratic Mexico and Taiwan. Both experienced heavy population exchange with the U.S., but did so as electoral autocracies that were not as threatened by democratic ideas and received substantial economic returns.

Expected emigration,  $\widehat{Em}(Pop.\ Share)$ , is significantly and positively predictive of *Emigration Freedom* in all models, although the effect size is modest. For Model 1, expecting an additional 10% of the population to emigrate decreases the likelihood that *Emigration Freedom* equals 0 by 6%. This supports Hypothesis 4. The interaction with *Polity* in Models 2 and 3 is positive, but only borderline significant.

Both of these effects—the positive of expected emigration and the negative of democratic receivers—are logically consistent with the findings on democratization. The same characteristics that predict democratization also lead autocrats to restrict emigration in response. Thus, autocrats recognize the danger of democratic influence, but are persuaded to open their borders by the economic and safety valve benefits of emigration.

Results for the controls in Model 3 further support economic motives for freer migration.  $\widehat{Em}(GDP/capita\ Average)$  is strongly positive, implying that autocratic leaders are more open to their citizens traveling to wealthier countries (controlling for their democracy level), presumably due to the economic returns.<sup>18</sup> Shifting the average income of expected receivers from \$1,000 to \$10,000 decreases the likelihood that *Emigration Freedom* equals 0 by 14%. Further, *Labor Force* is positive, indicating that surplus labor encourages freer emigration.

Among the other variables,  $\widehat{Em}(EF\ Average)$  is strongly positive, suggesting a diffusion effect or a deliberate coordination of migration policies. *Polity* is positive in Model 1, concurring with Breunig et al. (2012) that more democratic countries allow freer emigration. *Regional Polity* is positive in all models. Surprisingly, more populous countries have stricter emigration policies, even controlling for expected emigration. *Year* is negative, indicating a tightening over time in autocracies. Finally, trade and average income have no effect.

## Extensions

We now consider several alterations to the above tests.<sup>19</sup> First, what is the effect of *immigration* rather than emigration? Our focus has been on the latter given our interest in *Emigration Freedom* and theoretical expectations that the movements of citizens are of paramount importance. However, we extended our results by imputing immigration flows, again using the World Bank data. Since these are highly correlated with imputed emigration flows, they display similar results when tested alone—more democratic immigrants predict democratic change and less emigration freedom, while higher expected immigration predicts the opposite. However, when immigration and emigration are tested together, democracy-focused emigration has the larger effect. Multicollinearity produces generally null results for migration totals. We also look at the expected *difference* between emigration and immigration (as a share of population). Net emigration is significantly negative for *Emigration Freedom* and significantly positive for democratic change,<sup>20</sup> with the effect strongest for full democratization.

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<sup>18</sup> Average economic growth in expected emigration receivers is not predictive.

<sup>19</sup> Further details on these results will be provided in an online appendix.

<sup>20</sup> This is consistent with Bearce and Hutnick (2011), although they use actual, rather than imputed, values.

Second, what is the effect of *actual* emigration totals and the democratic character of emigration receivers? We replicated all of our measures using actual rather than imputed emigration. As we have emphasized, these are highly endogenous to emigration freedom, democracy, and the policies of receiving countries, and thus results must be interpreted carefully. In particular, predictions for *Emigration Freedom* are unsound due to reverse causation. However, results for democratic change are broadly supportive. Using either stocks or flows of emigration, average democracy in receiving states is significantly positive for democratization. Total emigration (as a share of population) is generally null.

Third, how does emigration relate to other types of regime change? Autocratic leaders worry about more than democratization. In fact, the large majority of regime breakdowns are initiated by other autocratic elites. We analyze this by predicting regime breakdowns within autocracy and irregular executive turnovers (mainly coups). We also run a multinomial logit model that simultaneously predicts democratization and within-autocracy regime change. Results are consistent across these models. We find that democratic-centered emigration has the same destabilizing effect, predicting both breakdowns and irregular turnovers. Expected emigration is positive for non-democratic regime change, although it does not predict irregular turnover and has no interactive effect with emigration freedom. Finally, in the multinomial model, freer emigration policy predicts both democratization and non-democratic regime change.

Fourth, do autocratic regime types matter? We test this by interacting several autocracy categories (military, single-party, and personalist) with the imputed emigration measures. For democratic change, we find that expected emigration has its largest stabilizing effect in personalist regimes. Democratic-focused emigration is positive in all regimes, with the strongest effect in military dictatorships. For emigration freedom, single-party regimes (especially Communist dictatorships) have the tightest policies and the strongest reactions to democracy-focused emigration.

Lastly, how do democracies differ? Using the same imputation strategy, expected emigration is strongly positive for democratic survival. Democratic-centered emigration is also posi-

tive, but only significantly so in the *Polity* tests. For *Emigration Freedom*, both higher emigration and democratic-centered emigration predict a freer policy. The latter effect implies that regimes generally prefer that their citizens are exposed to similar regime types. The results on democracies are consistent with our argument on the economic benefits of emigration. As democratic leaders are not threatened by their citizens' acquisition of democratic values or political capital, they can fully benefit from the increase in remittances, trade and investment that come with emigration.

## Conclusion

The number of international migrants has more than doubled from 92 million in 1960 to more than 200 million today (Özden et al. 2011), with 42 million emigrating between 2005 and 2010 alone (Abel and Sander 2014). Yet we have little understanding of the effect of this migration on politics in sending countries. Most migration scholarship examines immigration policies and the effects of immigration on receiving countries. Other scholars have examined how emigration affects local communities and the economy, but rarely politics at the regime level. This paper fills this gap by analyzing how autocrats determine emigration policy and providing one of the first tests of how emigration affects regime type.

Emigration is a double-edged sword for autocratic leaders. On one hand, even temporary citizen exit can signal a loss of legitimacy and give citizens a source of leverage over the regime. Emigration to democracies may be especially problematic as emigrants learn the benefits of democratic systems and gain the tools to make democratization happen. On the other hand, emigration returns a variety of economic benefits, including remittances, and can serve as a safety valve to expel potential dissidents. Autocratic leaders strategically determine the freedom of emigration given these varying motives.

We find that emigration policy is predictive of emigration flows, showing that autocrats have agency in influencing whether or not their people emigrate. We also find a clear connection between emigration and regime change. When total expected emigration is high, emigration freedom predicts autocratic stability. However, citizens emigrating to democratic coun-

tries robustly predicts democratization. Thus, general emigration may serve as a safety valve and economic boon, but emigration to democracies can empower citizens to fight for democracy at home. Among other implications, this elucidates a clear mechanism for the local diffusion of democracy.

Finally, we find that autocracies set emigration freedom in light of these dangers. Greater expected levels of emigration predict freer emigration policy and democracy-focused emigration predicts the opposite. Thus, autocrats fear that their citizens will be influenced by their time abroad and may bring back the tools to take down the regime. This highlights an institutional tool of autocratic resilience that has been overlooked in the autocracy literature.

As a concluding point, this article suggests that developed democracies have yet another reason to open their doors to immigration. Whereas domestic politics and globalization have led developed democracies to restrict immigration, both economics and a desire to spread democracy caution against this. Not only can greater immigration increase economic growth with relatively few distributional consequences, our results imply that it can effectively spread democratic norms and capacities. The implication is a more effective and much less expensive way to foment regime change than our current policies.

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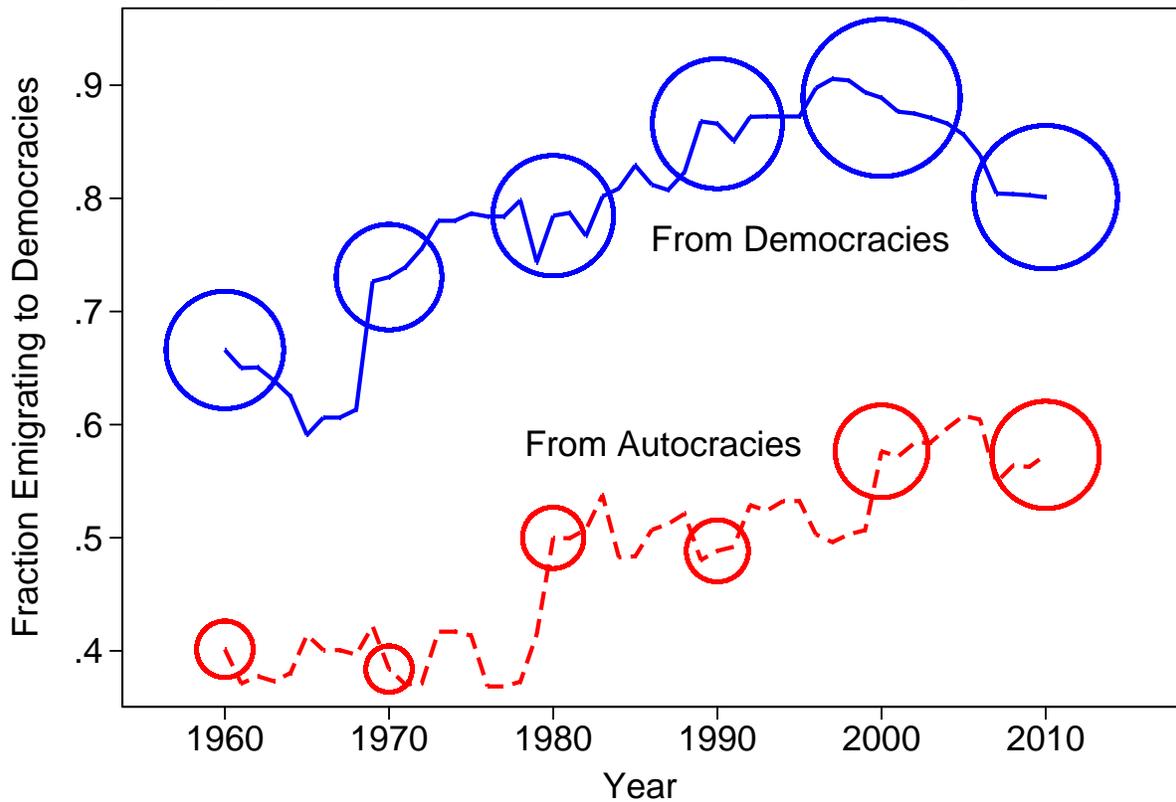
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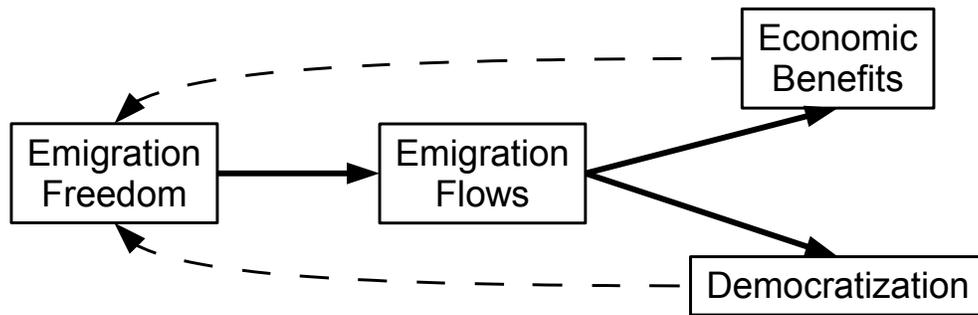
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## Emigrant Destinations by Sender Regime Type



**Fig. 1:** The figure shows the fraction of democratic and autocratic emigrants who move to democracies. Autocracies score below a threshold of 6 on the original *Polity* rating. The circles are proportional to the number of total emigrants from each regime type. There are an increasing number of autocratic emigrants and a rising fraction who emigrate to democracies.



**Fig. 2:** The figure depicts the theoretical argument of the paper. Emigration freedom influences emigration flows, which in turn affect economic consequences and the likelihood of democratization. Autocratic leaders anticipate this, leading to a strategic determination of emigration freedom to maximize survival.

**Table 1: Regressions Predicting Emigration Flows**

DV = <i>Emigration Flows</i> (ln)	Total		No College	College	Total
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<b>Sender Variables</b>					
<i>Emigration Freedom</i>	0.122*** (4.40)	0.073** (2.78)	0.117*** (4.40)	0.078*** (3.47)	-0.026 (-0.76)
<i>Judicial Independence</i>					-0.162*** (-3.68)
<i>Emigration Freedom</i> × <i>JI</i>					0.252*** (4.13)
<i>Domestic Violence</i>		0.020** (3.21)	0.020** (3.06)	0.016** (3.07)	0.019** (3.07)
<i>Urbanization</i>		0.001 (1.35)	0.000 (0.18)	0.001* (2.11)	0.001 (1.09)
<i>Population</i> (ln)	0.322*** (32.99)	0.253*** (27.31)	0.178*** (18.57)	0.171*** (22.47)	0.250*** (27.05)
<i>GDP/capita</i> (ln)	0.115*** (10.23)	0.025 (1.47)	0.016 (0.98)	0.012 (0.87)	0.032 (1.83)
<b>Receiver Variables</b>					
<i>Emigration Freedom</i>		0.288*** (9.49)	0.190*** (5.51)	0.155*** (5.69)	0.288*** (9.50)
<i>Polity</i>		0.444*** (12.34)	0.188*** (5.13)	0.176*** (5.96)	0.445*** (12.38)
<i>Domestic Violence</i>		-0.035*** (-6.25)	-0.012 (-1.85)	-0.019*** (-3.89)	-0.034*** (-6.24)
<i>Urbanization</i>		0.003*** (4.15)	0.003*** (4.81)	0.005*** (8.63)	0.003*** (4.17)
<i>Population</i> (ln)	0.256*** (27.62)	0.197*** (21.38)	0.134*** (14.99)	0.130*** (17.37)	0.197*** (21.38)
<i>GDP/capita</i> (ln)	0.509*** (39.60)	0.319*** (18.15)	0.260*** (16.46)	0.269*** (20.98)	0.319*** (18.16)
<b>Dyadic Variables</b>					
<i>Reciprocal Flow</i> (ln)		0.194*** (12.13)	0.198*** (9.92)	0.295*** (13.78)	0.196*** (12.19)
<i>Imports</i>		0.116 (1.76)	0.056 (1.25)	0.071 (1.59)	0.115 (1.76)
<i>Exports</i>		0.102* (2.15)	0.115** (2.93)	0.107** (3.11)	0.102* (2.16)
<i>Alliance</i>		0.502*** (5.23)	0.527*** (4.77)	0.398*** (5.29)	0.497*** (5.16)
<i>War</i>		1.136 (0.97)	1.549 (1.76)	1.194* (2.46)	1.143 (0.97)
<i>Distance</i> (ln)	-0.842*** (-33.01)	-0.669*** (-24.50)	-0.479*** (-19.00)	-0.301*** (-16.27)	-0.673*** (-24.51)
<i>Shared Border</i>	2.390*** (13.30)	1.767*** (8.75)	1.974*** (8.86)	0.775*** (5.67)	1.757*** (8.71)
<i>Colonial History</i>	2.725*** (9.09)	2.205*** (5.73)	3.022*** (10.13)	2.501*** (11.56)	2.196*** (5.71)
<i>Shared Language</i>	0.528*** (11.89)	0.297*** (6.95)	0.408*** (9.40)	0.434*** (11.72)	0.300*** (7.03)
<i>Year</i>	0.002 (1.64)	-0.009*** (-5.90)	-0.015*** (-13.43)	-0.013*** (-14.02)	-0.009*** (-5.94)
N	186,081	162,055	102,100	114,197	161,859
Sender Countries	104	104	103	103	104
Adj. $R^2$	0.391	0.409	0.388	0.427	0.409

Notes: The table shows regressions predicting yearly emigration flows from a sample of autocracies to each other country.  $t$  statistics (based on robust standard errors clustered by country dyad) are shown in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table 2: Models Predicting Democratization**

	$\Delta$ Polity (5-year)			Democratic Transition
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Emigration Freedom</i>	0.078*** (5.64)	0.088*** (6.08)	0.012 (0.42)	0.591*** (4.19)
$\widehat{Em}(\text{Polity Average})$	0.182*** (7.45)	0.152*** (5.94)	0.065 (1.85)	0.785*** (3.67)
$\widehat{Em}(\text{Pop. Share})$	-0.113 (-1.28)	-0.094 (-1.06)	0.544* (2.46)	-2.290* (-2.50)
$\widehat{Em}(\text{Polity Average}) \times \mathbf{EF}$			0.174** (3.17)	
$\widehat{Em}(\text{Pop. Share}) \times \mathbf{EF}$			-0.856** (-2.79)	
<i>Polity</i>	-0.235*** (-9.83)	-0.291*** (-11.15)	-0.310*** (-11.32)	1.080*** (5.07)
<i>Durability</i>		-0.001** (-3.25)	-0.001*** (-3.35)	-0.004 (-1.39)
<i>Population (ln)</i>		0.019*** (4.51)	0.021*** (4.97)	0.194*** (5.44)
<i>GDP/capita (ln)</i>		-0.006 (-1.26)	-0.008 (-1.61)	-0.044 (-0.85)
<i>Economic Growth</i>		-0.002** (-2.74)	-0.002** (-2.84)	-0.019** (-2.60)
<i>Neighbors</i>		-0.005 (-1.74)	-0.005 (-1.91)	-0.051* (-2.28)
<i>Mean Imports</i>		0.037 (0.69)	0.059 (1.09)	2.820** (3.04)
<i>Mean Exports</i>		-0.060 (-1.19)	-0.078 (-1.54)	-3.330** (-3.10)
<i>Year</i>	-0.003*** (-4.27)	-0.002* (-2.53)	-0.001* (-2.25)	-0.028*** (-4.89)
N	1,882	1,881	1,881	1,806
Countries	116	116	116	117
Adj./Pseudo $R^2$	0.088	0.106	0.118	0.153

*Notes:* The table displays regressions predicting the five-year change in *Polity* (Models 1-3) and a probit predicting democratization over five years (Model 4). All models use a sample of autocracies.  $t$  statistics (based on robust standard errors) are in parentheses. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table 3: Robustness Checks for Democratization Models**

	$\Delta$ Polity (5-year)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
$\widehat{Em}(\text{Polity Average})$	0.161*** (5.66)	0.098** (2.71)	0.164*** (6.22)	0.106** (2.87)
<i>Regional Polity</i>	-0.029 (-0.70)			-0.006 (-0.14)
<i>Neighbor Polity</i>		0.091* (2.32)		0.101* (2.52)
<i>Trade-Weighted Polity</i>			-0.108* (-2.09)	-0.129* (-2.51)
Other Controls?	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	1,881	1,807	1,875	1,801
Countries	116	112	112	112
Adj. $R^2$	0.106	0.109	0.111	0.115

*Notes:* The table displays robustness checks for the effect of democratic target countries on the five-year change in *Polity*. All models use a sample of autocracies. *t* statistics (based on robust standard errors) are in parentheses. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

	Democratic Transition (BMR)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
$\widehat{Em}(\text{Polity Average})$	0.870*** (3.73)	0.979*** (3.66)	1.129*** (4.99)	1.189*** (4.28)
<i>Regional Polity</i>	-0.284 (-0.96)			0.011 (0.03)
<i>Neighbor Polity</i>		-0.142 (-0.55)		0.037 (0.13)
<i>Trade-Weighted Polity</i>			-2.782*** (-6.76)	-2.712*** (-6.67)
Other Controls?	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	1,806	1,726	1,800	1,720
Countries	115	113	113	113
Pseudo $R^2$	0.154	0.161	0.195	0.202

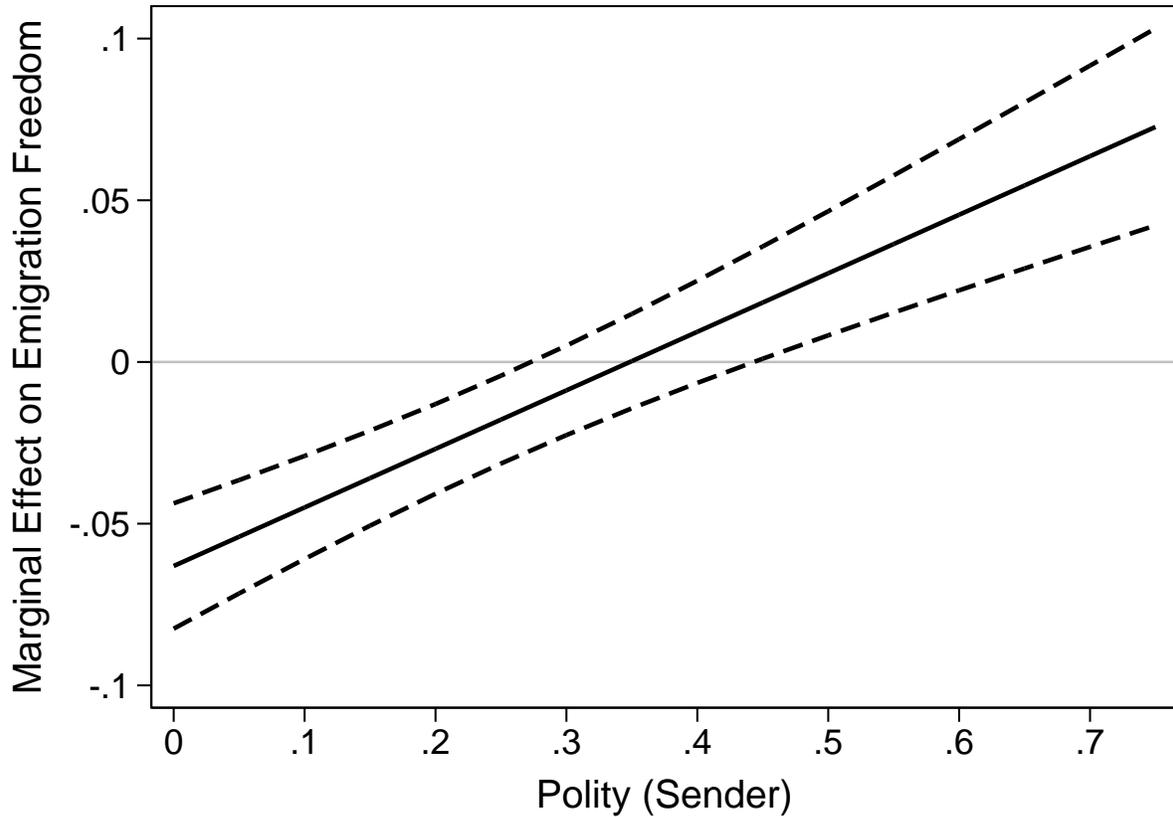
*Notes:* The table displays robustness checks for the effect of democratic target countries on democratic transition. All models use a sample of autocracies. *t* statistics (based on robust standard errors) are in parentheses. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table 4: Ordered Probits Predicting Emigration Freedom**

DV = <i>Emigration Freedom</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)
$\widehat{Em}(\textit{Polity Average})$	-0.355* (-2.56)	-1.262*** (-6.38)	-0.994*** (-4.60)
$\widehat{Em}(\textit{Pop. Share})$	1.600*** (5.75)	1.175*** (3.90)	1.049** (3.14)
$\widehat{Em}(\textit{Polity Average}) \times \textit{Polity}$		3.621*** (6.48)	3.718*** (6.46)
$\widehat{Em}(\textit{Pop. Share}) \times \textit{Polity}$		1.292 (1.58)	2.719* (2.34)
$\widehat{Em}(\textit{EF Average})$	1.375*** (10.60)	1.356*** (10.35)	1.085*** (8.15)
<i>Polity</i>	1.305*** (10.03)	-0.786* (-2.26)	-0.787* (-2.24)
<i>Regional Polity</i>	0.400** (2.75)	0.539*** (3.67)	0.906*** (4.50)
$\widehat{Em}(\textit{GDP/capita Average})$			0.190*** (4.05)
<i>Urbanization</i>			-0.011*** (-5.81)
<i>Labor Force</i>			0.013*** (4.44)
<i>Durability</i>			-0.005** (-3.04)
<i>Population (ln)</i>			-0.218*** (-9.60)
<i>GDP/capita (ln)</i>			-0.076 (-1.75)
<i>Economic Growth</i>			0.011** (2.66)
<i>Neighbors</i>			-0.027 (-1.89)
<i>Mean Imports</i>			0.365 (0.92)
<i>Mean Exports</i>			-0.157 (-0.47)
<i>Year</i>			-0.021*** (-4.74)
N	2,188	2,188	2,175
Countries	119	119	118
Pseudo $R^2$	0.080	0.090	0.171

Notes: The table displays ordered probits predicting *Emigration Freedom* in autocracies.  $t$  statistics (based on robust standard errors) are in parentheses. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

## Marginal Effect of Expected Polity Score in Emigration Receivers



**Fig. 3:** The figure shows the marginal effect of  $\widehat{Em}(Polity\ Average)$  on *Emigration Freedom* for different values of the sender's *Polity* (re-scaled to 0 to 1), calculated from Model 3 of Table 4. When likely emigration receivers are democratic, this causes autocracies to restrict emigration freedom, but only in the most repressive states.