

**WHY REGIONS OF THE WORLD ARE IMPORTANT:
REGIONAL SPECIFICITIES AND REGION-WIDE
DIFFUSION OF DEMOCRACY**

Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán

Working Paper #322 – October 2005

Scott Mainwaring is Eugene Conley Professor of Political Science and the Director of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. His books include *Christian Democracy in Latin America: Electoral Competition and Regime Games* (Stanford University Press, coedited, 2003); *Democratic Accountability in Latin America* (Oxford University Press, coedited, 2003); *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: The Case of Brazil* (Stanford University Press, 1999); *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, coedited, 1997); and *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford University Press, coedited, 1995).

Aníbal Pérez-Liñán is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Pittsburgh. He has published articles in *Electoral Studies* and *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, among other journals. He is currently finishing a book on presidential impeachment in Latin America.

ABSTRACT

In this paper we articulate two reasons why regions of the world are important in comparative politics: causal heterogeneity by region and intra-regional dissemination and diffusion. The first section of the paper argues that little work in comparative politics has shown that regions are sometimes important units of analysis. In sections two and three we illustrate causal heterogeneity, showing that the effects of per capita income on democracy have been different in Latin America than in other regions of the world. Sections four and five address intra-regional dissemination and diffusion of democratic and authoritarian regimes. For Latin America, intra-regional dissemination has been stronger than cross-regional dissemination, and we briefly explore the reasons for this phenomenon. We emphasize the need to avoid simplistic generalizations about regions as homogeneous entities while at the same time giving them a prominent role in some research questions. At a broad methodological level, regional specificities suggest the need for caution about universalistic generalizations and indicate the need to consider causal heterogeneity, domain restrictions, and bounded generalizations.

Valerie Bunce, Michael Coppedge, Frances Hagopian, Mala Htun, Wendy Hunter, Gerardo Munck, Susan Stokes, Kurt Weyland, and seminar participants at the Pompeu Fabra University gave us valuable criticisms on earlier drafts of this paper.

RESUMEN

En este texto exponemos dos razones por las que las regiones del mundo son importantes para la política comparada: la heterogeneidad causal entre regiones y la diseminación y difusión dentro de las regiones. La primera sección del artículo sostiene que poco del trabajo en política comparada ha mostrado que a veces las regiones son unidades de análisis importantes. En las secciones dos y tres ilustramos la heterogeneidad causal entre regiones, mostrando que los efectos del ingreso per cápita sobre la democracia han sido distintos en América Latina que en otras regiones del mundo. Las secciones cuatro y cinco tratan la diseminación y la difusión intra-regional de los regímenes democráticos y autoritarios. Para América Latina, la diseminación intra-regional ha sido más fuerte que la diseminación a través de las regiones; exploramos brevemente las razones de este fenómeno. Enfatizamos la necesidad de evitar las generalizaciones simplistas que consideran a las regiones como entidades homogéneas y de, simultáneamente, la necesidad de darles un rol prominente en algunas preguntas de investigación. En una escala metodológica amplia, las especificidades regionales sugieren la necesidad de ser cautos frente a las generalizaciones universalistas e indican la necesidad de tomar en cuenta la heterogeneidad causal, las restricciones de dominio y las generalizaciones limitadas.

Valerie Bunce, Michael Coppedge, Frances Hagopian, Mala Htun, Wendy Hunter, Gerardo Munck, Susan Stokes, Kurt Weyland, y los participantes en el Seminario en la Universitat Pompeu Fabra formularon valiosos comentarios críticos sobre versiones anteriores de este texto.

For decades, the subfield of comparative politics has primarily been organized around regions of the world. The job market is still structured primarily around regions, although less so today than was the case in the 1970s or 1980s. About 70 percent of the articles published in the top three comparative journals over the last fifteen years have dealt exclusively with one geographic region (Munck and Snyder 2005: 8–9).¹ Some respected political science journals are simply organized around regions.² Curiously, in light of the traditional organization of comparative politics along regional lines, there has been almost no explicit defense of why regions are important. Criticism of organizing comparative politics along regional lines has drawn more attention than defenses of why regions are important. For example, Robert Bates's (1996, 1997) criticisms of area studies could be taken as a critique of organizing comparative politics along regional lines.³

In this paper, we build an explicit defense of the importance of regions in comparative politics and world politics.⁴ We do not claim that regions should be the primary unit of analysis in comparative politics or that analysis of regions is superior to other research designs. We do assert that regions are substantively important and that the reasons for this importance have been under-articulated in political science. For some research objectives, it is substantively useful to examine regions.

We present two reasons to take regions of the world seriously in comparative politics. First, regions have particular dynamics and political processes that are specific to those regions. Social science generalizations that are based on large N, cross-regional, or worldwide units of analysis must be attentive to these regional specificities. Otherwise, social scientists will generalize where they should not. Of course, there are some exceptions (or outliers) to most generalizations. Our argument is not that generalizations should be avoided because of occasional exceptions, but rather that different regions may present distinctive and *systematic* causal patterns that an assumption of worldwide causal homogeneity would obscure. The effect is more substantial, and hence the need for caution greater when entire regions of the world, rather than simply a few countries, are exceptions to a generalization.

Second, as an emerging body of research demonstrates, there are powerful international mechanisms of political diffusion and learning (Brinks and Coppedge

forthcoming; Brown 2000; Gleditsch 2002; Gleditsch and Ward forthcoming; Huntington 1991: 72–106; Meseguer 2002; Pevehouse 2002a, 2002b, 2005; Pridham 1991; Starr 1991; Weyland 2004; Whitehead 1986, 1996). Many of these international mechanisms are especially important within regions. If we always treat countries as the unit of analysis and fail to pay attention to regional effects and dynamics, we will miss these regional effects and as a result will fail to understand causal processes. Both of these facts mean that regions should be important units of analysis in comparative politics. Yet little work in comparative politics has examined regional specificities and regional diffusion effects.

Empirically, we demonstrate the importance of regions through the literature on democratization. We argue that there are important regional specificities—in particular for Latin America and for the Middle East—in the causal impact of the level of development on democracy. Causal inferences based on a worldwide sample would lead to a misleading understanding of what factors promote democratization in these two regions. We also show that it is impossible to understand democratic transitions and breakdowns in Latin America without emphasizing region-wide factors. Analyses that failed to consider the regional influences would overstate the importance of domestic factors, conclude that regime changes and stability are highly idiosyncratic processes, or perhaps commit both mistakes.

While advocating the importance of regions in comparative politics, we argue for some approaches to studying regions and against others. We reject the assumption that regions are relatively homogeneous, and we reject gross generalizations about regions as a whole unless there is empirical evidence to support them. For example, although it might be useful for a few purposes to generalize about Latin America or Southeast Asia as a whole, more frequently such generalizations are misleading. Our approach looks at regional specificities and diffusion mechanisms, but it nevertheless treats the countries within the region as distinct. Equally important, the only way to verify whether a region has specific dynamics is to compare it with other regions or with some broader set of cases.

Before we get into details, we should briefly clarify what we mean by “region of the world.” We use this concept as it is understood in common parlance, to refer to

geographically bounded parts of the world that are commonly viewed as occupying the same large part of the world. In this understanding, Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia are regions of the world. This is not an exhaustive list nor a historically permanent one. Like “nations,” (Brubaker 1996), regions of the world are symbolic constructions, and there is some change over time in what is viewed as a region. However, more than is the case with nations, the symbolic construction of “regions” is not subject to constant changes; once created, a sense of “region” can endure for centuries. The idea that Latin America or Europe are regions, for example, has existed for centuries, even if the boundaries of what is considered Europe are contested and are undergoing change.

REGIONS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Almost no work in comparative politics has explicitly articulated reasons for undertaking region-based work. In contrast, several authors have advocated other research strategies in comparative politics and have articulated reasons for following them—for example, case studies, intermediate N, and large N quantitative work. There have been sophisticated justifications of case studies (Eckstein 1975; George 1979; George and Bennett 2005), large N analysis (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994), intra-country comparisons (Linz and de Miguel 1966; Putnam 1993; Snyder 2001a, 2001b), and cross-regional comparisons (Huber 2003). There is no comparably sophisticated argument for studying a region of the world. Thus there is a strange disjuncture between the traditional organization of comparative politics along regional lines and a near vacuum in theorizing about why regions are important (for an exception, see Gleditsch 2002).

Of the 30 books that were most widely used in PhD field seminars and reading lists for comprehensive exams in comparative politics according to one recent survey (España-Najera, Márquez, and Vasquez 2003), only one, Cardoso and Faletto (1979), looked at a region—Latin America—in a sustained manner that took into account regional specificities. Although it is common to include controls for colonial heritage or

peripheral world status in statistical models, a concern with regional specificities is rare even in the simple form of regional dummy variables.⁵

In recent years, the most prominent advocate of paying attention to regional specificities in comparative politics has been Bunce (1995, 1998, 2000), who argued that there are regional differences in democratization, comparing the post-communist and Latin American cases.⁶ Another exception—not in vogue in recent years—is work that focuses on regional specificities stemming from political culture—for example, Wiarda's work (2001) on Iberian Catholic political culture. Wiarda's work and most work in this genre suffers from flaws, including the inability to explain important cross-national differences within a given region.⁷ If Iberian Catholic political culture were the prime explanatory factor in politics, there would be no obvious reason why the Iberian countries, Spain and Portugal, should be less affected than Latin American countries. Yet it is fatuous today to claim that Spain, which has become an advanced industrial democracy, and Bolivia, Honduras, or Nicaragua, to take three poor Latin American countries, are similar in terms of political regimes, social outcomes, or level of economic development.

Some work in comparative politics has examined many countries within the same region of the world—for example, Collier and Collier (1991) on Latin America or Kitschelt (1994) on Western Europe. Yet these works do not reach any of our three standards of taking regions seriously. First, they do not examine regional specificities. For example, although Kitschelt included only Western European countries in his analysis of Social Democratic parties, he made no claim to regional specificities for Western Europe. Second, they did not analyze regional effects such as dissemination or diffusion. Third, they did not articulate any explicit reason for choosing a region of the world to demarcate the counties in their analysis.

These observations are not criticisms of these prominent works, but rather a means of clarifying the claim that regions have not been adequately theorized in comparative politics. If the reason for case selection is similarity in dependent or independent variables, then cases from outside a region could be added with no difficulty except that of learning about additional countries. The practical demands of turning a region-based study into a cross-regional study might be considerable, but there is no

methodological reason not to add such cases. Under these circumstances, there are justifications for delimiting the case selection to countries within a particular region, but these reasons (efficiency, prior knowledge, familiarity with languages, etc.) are not methodological or substantive.

The Impact of the Level of Development on Democracy: Is Latin America Different?

We begin our empirical analysis with an examination of the relationship between the level of development and democracy, a classic issue in political science and political sociology. Almost every large-N study on this issue has shown that the level of economic development, usually operationalized by per capita income, is a powerful predictor of democracy (Boix 2003; Boix and Stokes 2003; Bollen 1980; Bollen and Jackman 1985; Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Coppedge 1997; Dahl 1971: 62–80; Diamond 1992; Hadenius 1992; Huntington 1984; Jackman 1973; Lipset, Seong, and Torres 1993; Londregan and Poole 1996; Przeworski and Limongi 1997; Przeworski et al. 2000; Ross 2001).⁸ Most of this literature has assumed a regionally uniform impact of the level of development on democracy. In statistical terms, it has assumed causal homogeneity at the global level; the impact of the level of development on democracy is presumed to be roughly similar across regions (differences across regions should not be statistically different). A few scholars, however, have argued that the global finding may not apply to Latin America, which might have region-specific effects (Collier 1975; Landman 1999; O'Donnell 1973; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2003).

Whether there are region-specific effects in this relationship has important implications in comparative politics. Yet scholars have infrequently tested for region-specific effects in the relationship between the level of development and democracy and have only rarely made much of findings about regional specificity.⁹ If the level of development has a uniform impact on democracy across the globe, some claims for the virtues of focusing on regions would suffer.

To test for Latin American specificities in the impact of the level of development on democracy, we used regime information from the Polity VI dataset and per capita

GDP data from the World Development Indicators (WDI).¹⁰ The Polity dataset is the best one that covers such a wide range of countries for such an extended time period (see Gurr, Jagers, and Moore 1990 and Jagers and Gurr 1995 on the methodology of the Polity democracy scores). The democracy score ranges from -10 (highly autocratic) to 10 (highly democratic). Our dataset contains information on 158 countries between 1960 and 2002. It includes 19 Latin American countries;¹¹ we exclude Cuba due to the complete absence of WDI income data.¹² Each political regime in each year counts as one case.

Our research design proceeds in two steps. In the first stage, we analyze individual countries during particular years as units of analysis. We then build on the aggregate results of these 19 countries to analyze regional specificities. In the second stage, we show that causal patterns vary across regions and explore how these regional contexts in turn influence the individual countries.

Our first test, presented in Table 1, involves a simple modernization argument¹³ in which the level of democratization in a given year (t) depends on the level of development in the previous year ($t-1$) (Model 1.1). Because the impact of per capita income on democracy may not be linear (a \$1,000 increase in per capita GDP may have a significant effect for a poor country and only a marginal effect for a wealthy country) we replicated the analysis using the natural logarithm of per capita GDP (Model 1.6). Irrespective of the particular specification, countries with a higher per capita income were likely to be more democratic; the coefficient for GDP is positive and highly significant in both models. The fit of the linear model (1.1) is modest: countries' per capita income predicts only 21% of the variance in their democracy scores, and the standard error of the estimate was 6.8 (in the -10 to 10 Polity range). The fit of the curvilinear model (1.6) is only slightly better (the R-squared is .29).

Is there a difference in the impact of the level of development on democracy comparing Latin America and other regions?¹⁴ Models 1.2 and 1.7 represent the same OLS regressions using just Latin American cases. Whereas the linear model shows that modernization is highly favorable to democracy at the global level, for the Latin American cases included in this sizable sample, the level of development had no statistically significant impact on the level of democracy. In contrast, the nonlinear

effects of per capita income (models 1.6 and 1.7) were equivalent for the global sample and for Latin America.

TABLE 1

**Impact of Per Capita Income on the Level of Democracy, Linear Model
(158 Countries, 1961–2002)**

Predictors	All 158 Countries	Only Latin America	\$348–8,686 Non–Latin America	Oil-dependent countries	\$348–8,686 Non–Latin America and Non-oil-dependent
A. Linear	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5
Per capita GDP (t-1)	0.393** (0.049)	0.855 (0.531)	0.991* (0.376)	0.054* (0.016)	1.553** (0.298)
Constant	-1.013* (0.507)	0.005 (1.487)	-2.446** (0.828)	-9.840** (0.354)	-3.028** (0.770)
R ²	.21	.04	.07	.29	.15
B. Log of GDP	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.10
Per capita GDP (ln, t-1)	2.616** (0.242)	2.404* (1.021)	2.509** (0.712)	0.646* (0.162)	3.296** (0.625)
Constant	-0.287 (0.406)	0.546 (0.985)	-1.102 (0.619)	-10.590** (0.411)	-0.823 (0.606)
R ²	.29	.07	.10	.31	.16
N	4,934	775	2,210	164	2,138

Notes: GDP is measured in thousands of dollars. OLS coefficients (standard errors adjusted for clustering by country). Oil-dependent countries are defined by Przeworski et al. (2000: 77) as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates (Qatar is not in the WDI dataset). For these five countries, 72 (out of 164) observations correspond to the Latin American income range.

* Significant at .05 level; ** at .01 level

Because the Latin American cases generally fell in the middle-income group (2,339 1995 US dollars on average, with a range between \$348 and \$8,686 for these 19 countries over the 43-year period) we also considered the possibility that, irrespective of regional factors, the model would perform worse for middle-income countries (where the variance in levels of democracy is presumably greater) than for very poor or wealthy

countries. We expected this finding because on a global level, the countries with highest per capita incomes have been very likely to be democratic, while countries with very low per capita incomes have usually been authoritarian (Dahl 1971: 62–80; Przeworski et al. 2000).¹⁵ To address this problem, Models 1.3 and 1.8 include all observations within the Latin American income range outside of the Latin American region. In contrast to the situation for Latin American countries, the linear relationship between development and democracy remains statistically significant for countries in other regions within the same income zone.

This finding is notable because the subset of countries between \$348 and \$8,686 includes several Middle Eastern petroleum-exporting countries, which are known to have distinctive political dynamics (Karl 1997; Ross 2001). These oil exporters have relatively high levels of income per capita and low levels of democratization, presenting a challenge for modernization theory. Przeworski et al. (2000) identified Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates as the cases in which fuel exports represented more than 50% of the total exports in 1984–86. Because these oil-dependent exporters had idiosyncratic patterns of development, they dropped these cases from their study of 141 countries (Przeworski et al. 2000: 77). In contrast, Models 1.3 and 1.8 include these countries except for Qatar, which is not available in the World Bank dataset. The average income per capita in this group is high (\$13,238) and yet the average Polity score is -9.1, reflecting highly authoritarian regimes. Of the 164 observations (i.e., one year in a given country) corresponding to these five countries, 72 fall within the Latin American income range.

Models 1.4 and 1.9 present a test of the modernization argument for this subset of five oil-dependent countries. Within this group, the relationship between development and democracy is positive and significant. But the “point of departure” (i.e., the constant in both models) and the size of the coefficients are much lower than their equivalents for the global sample. While we would expect a random country with an income per capita of \$10,000 to have a Polity score of +2.9 based on Model 1.1 (all 158 countries), Model 1.4 predicts a score of only -9.3 based on the five countries that are heavily dependent on oil exports. This suggests that the size of the coefficients in Models 1.1 and 1.3 (or 1.6 and 1.8) would be much larger without the petro-states. To verify this insight, we replicated

Models 1.3 and 1.8 (middle-income, non-Latin American cases) excluding the five oil-dependent countries. For the linear model, the coefficient rose from .99 to 1.55 (meaning that each \$1000 increment in per capita income produces an expected increase of 1.55 points on the Polity score, nearly twice as great as the .86 expected increase in the Polity score for a random Latin American country in a random year), and the R^2 grew from .07 to .15. A similar effect is visible for the nonlinear specification. With the exclusion of these five oil-dependent countries, the contrast between the Latin American cases and other countries in the same income range is more pronounced.

Because comparing models across samples can be deceiving, we analyzed the residuals of Models 1.1 and 1.6. We regressed the absolute size of the residuals against a regional dummy (coded one for all Latin American cases, zero otherwise), an income range dummy (\$348 to \$8,686), and an oil-dependence dummy for the five Middle Eastern countries mentioned above. The results are presented in Table 2 (Models 2.1 and 2.3). In general, the fit of the modernization model tends to be better for countries with greater income. The analysis produces larger errors for middle-income cases (residuals are on average 0.9 Polity points greater in the linear model and 2.1 points greater in the log model) and substantially larger errors for the oil-dependent countries (8.1 Polity points larger in the linear model and 10.6 points larger in the log model). The Latin American countries have significantly larger residuals than other countries at a similar income range in the linear and nonlinear specifications (0.9 and 2.2 points respectively, on average).

However, if we analyze the *direction* of the errors, the results are different (Models 2.2 and 2.4). The linear modernization model typically underpredicts the performance of Latin American cases by about 2.7 points once we account for the effects of the region and the income range. This finding is consistent with Przeworski et al.'s conclusion that democracy is more likely in Latin America than in other regions with similar income levels or institutional designs (Przeworski et al. 2000: 87, 129). In contrast, the nonlinear model tends to slightly overpredict democratic performance in the region (by about 0.6 Polity points). But the Middle Eastern oil-dependent countries are on average a whopping 14 points below the predicted Polity score (16 points in the log model).

TABLE 2

**Tests for Fit of the Modernization Models
(158 Countries, 1961–2002)**

	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4
	Linear (Model 1.1)		Log (Model 1.6)	
	Absolute residuals	Residuals	Absolute residuals	Residuals
Per cap. GDP (t-1)				
Linear (Model 1.1)	-0.067** (0.005)	0.079** (0.012)		
Log (Model 1.6)			-0.312** (0.026)	0.258** (0.054)
Latin America	0.938** (0.113)	2.686** (0.286)	2.234** (0.118)	-0.628* (0.245)
\$348 to \$8,686 range	0.901** (0.089)	0.787** (0.224)	2.113** (0.088)	-1.553** (0.183)
Oil dependent	8.139** (0.200)	-13.951** (0.505)	10.643** (0.225)	-15.856** (0.467)
Constant	5.679** (0.077)	-0.763** (0.194)	3.919 (0.068)	1.171** (0.140)
R ²	.30	.15	.37	.20

Dependent variable is the residual for models 1.1 and 1.6. N= 4,934.

* Significant at .05 level; ** .01 level

In sum, there are important regional effects of the level of development on democracy. In Latin America, the structural effects of modernization have had a weak linear impact on the prospects for democracy. Moreover, the lower impact of per capita income on regime type in Latin America is only partially explained by the region's stage of development in the second half of the twentieth century. In Latin America and in the oil-dependent countries, distinctive regional political dynamics have mediated the impact of the level of development on democracy. This finding is notable because in the quantitative work on modernization and democracy, except for the oil-rich countries little attention has been given to distinctive regional effects. The fact that there are distinctive regional effects means that it is important for comparative political scientists to take seriously regional specificities.

Level of Development and Democracy: The N Curve in Latin America

Elsewhere we demonstrated that the relation between development and democracy in Latin America is not linear, but rather N-shaped. At a very low level of development and at a high level of income (within Latin America), greater per capita income is associated with higher democracy scores. In contrast, at an intermediate level of income and for a quite expansive range in the level of development, a higher level of development was associated with lower democracy scores (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2003).

We test for the presence of an N-shaped relationship between income and democracy at the global level using data for 135 countries between 1951 and 1990. Income per capita is measured at 1985 Purchasing Power Parities (PPP) based on Przeworski et al. (2000). Democracy is measured in two ways: as a continuous variable, using the Polity scale, and as a dichotomous variable, using the Przeworski et al. classification. Our first model predicts the level of democracy (Polity) of countries in a given year as a function of per capita GDP, plus transformations of this GDP term to the second, third, and fourth powers.¹⁶ The equation is

$$Y_{i,t} = a + b_1(\text{PPP}_{i,t}) + b_2(\text{PPP}_{i,t}^2) + b_3(\text{PPP}_{i,t}^3) + b_4(\text{PPP}_{i,t}^4);$$

where Y is the predicted Polity score for country i at time t , and PPP is income per capita. The exponential terms allow for a non-linear relationship between level of development and democracy—an increase in expected democracy scores at a low level of development, followed by a decrease at an intermediate level of development and another increase. Given our previous findings, we expected $b_1 > 0$, $b_2 < 0$ (marking the decreasing expected democracy scores at an intermediate level of development), $b_3 > 0$ (for the new stage at which higher per capita income is expected to produce higher democracy scores), and $b_4 < 0$ (at the point of stabilization). The results are presented in Table 3.

The results of Model 3.1 do not indicate a statistically significant N-shaped pattern at the global level. In contrast, they suggest an N-shape for Latin America (Model 3.2) and for other countries in a similar income range—between \$834 and \$8233 in 1985 PPPs (Model 3.4). To illustrate the substantive implications of this model, Figure 1 simulates the expected Polity score for the whole sample, the Latin American countries,

and the non–Latin American countries in the same income range according to the models displayed above. The relationship between development and democracy is curvilinear but not N-shaped for the global sample. In contrast, the N-curve exists for the Latin American cases and, in attenuated form, for other countries at similar levels of development.

TABLE 3

Impact of Per Capita Income on the Level of Democracy, Nonlinear Model (125 Countries, 1951–1990)

Predictors	3.1 Worldwide sample	3.2 Latin America	3.3 All cases excluding Latin America	3.4 Non–Latin America (\$834 to \$8,233)
Income per capita	2.436* (0.368)	24.484* (4.484)	1.425* (0.399)	7.809* (2.665)
Income per capita ²	-0.163 (0.103)	-8.390* (1.983)	0.145 (0.111)	-3.207* (1.181)
Income per capita ³	0.011 (0.010)	1.119* (0.347)	-0.019 (0.011)	0.586* (0.203)
Income per capita ⁴	0.000 (0.000)	-0.048* (0.021)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.034* (0.012)
Constant	-6.248* (0.340)	-22.891* (3.334)	-5.766* (0.351)	-8.737* (1.866)
N	3,891	722	3,169	1,934
R ²	.379	.145	.433	.204

OLS coefficients (standard errors). Dependent variable is Polity IV.

* Significant at .05 level

Although the results in Table 1 indicate that regional specificities deserve serious consideration, some caution is in order. First, given the size of the standard error of the estimate for the worldwide sample, the 95% confidence interval of the prediction contains all specifications. Second, causal heterogeneity may result from time-specific factors. An analysis of this pattern for the period 1960–2002 (using the dataset described in the previous section; not shown due to reasons of space) resulted in a similar functional shape but lower levels of significance. Third, we have argued elsewhere that

the regional specificities described above do not result from a modal region-wide pattern in the impact of the level of development on democracy (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2003). However, the regional specificity of Latin America is not a product of a small set of outliers. Rather, the region-wide distribution of probabilities that a country would be democratic at a given income level is distinctive.

FIGURE 1

Predictions of Models 3.1, 3.2, and 3.4

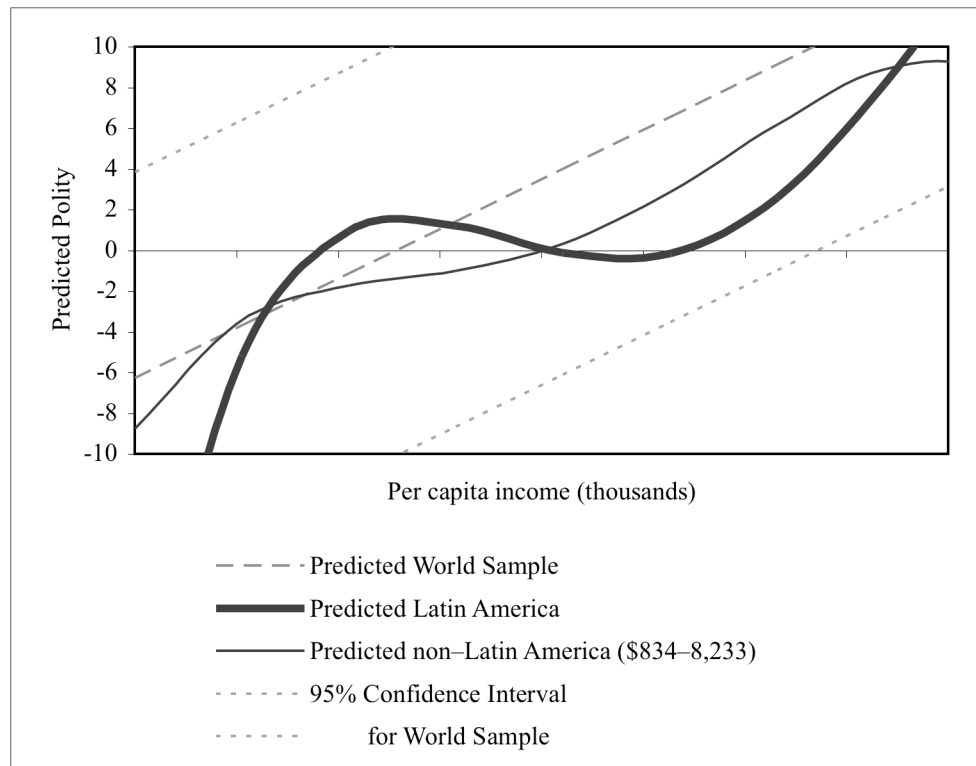


Table 4 provides an alternative test of this argument using a categorical measure of democracy. The dependent variable in this case is Przeworski et al.'s (2000) classification of political regimes between 1951 and 1990. They measured income per capita in 1985 Purchasing Power Parity. Because Przeworski et al. used a dichotomous regime classification (democracy versus non-democracy), we employed logistic regression to assess the impact of per capita income on the likelihood of democracy. To model the nonlinear effects, we allowed for two bends in the logistic function by

including a quadratic and a cubic term in the model.¹⁷ The first equation (Model 4.1) was estimated for all 135 countries in the sample. The second model included only Latin America (again excluding Cuba). Model 4.3 includes all countries outside Latin America, and Model 4.4 covers all non-Latin American countries with a comparable income range (between \$834 and \$8,233).

TABLE 4

**The Nonlinear Effect of Per Capita Income on Democracy
(135 Countries, 1951–1990)**

	4.1 Global sample	4.2 Latin America	4.3 All cases excluding Latin America	4.4 Non-Latin America between \$834 and \$8,233
Income per capita	1.387* (0.156)	5.467* (0.778)	0.773* (0.154)	0.512 (0.359)
Income per capita ²	-0.216* (0.040)	-1.511* (0.232)	-0.048 (0.036)	-0.033 (0.100)
Income per capita ³	0.015* (0.003)	0.126* (0.021)	0.003 (0.002)	0.005 (0.008)
Constant	-2.964* (0.162)	-5.732* (0.764)	-2.756* (0.166)	-2.222* (0.351)
% Correct				
Authoritarian	87.6	59.6	92.0	90.8
Democratic	62.3	60.6	69.1	49.3
Pseudo R ²	.46	.14	.56	.30
N	4,126	749	3,377	2,107

Note: Logistic regression coefficients (standard errors). Dependent variable is the dichotomous classification of democracy by Przeworski et al. (2000).

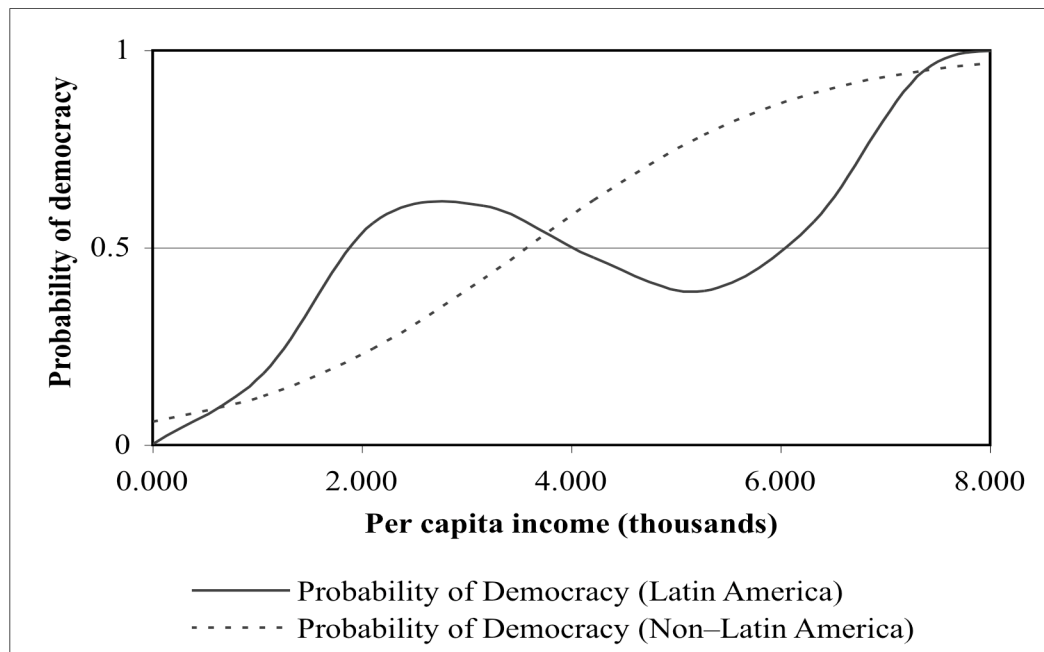
* Significant at .005 level.

Source: Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2003).

The results again indicate a clear N-shaped pattern for the global sample when Latin America is included, but a more conventional monotonic relation between development and democracy when Latin America is removed from the pool.¹⁸ Figure 2 plots the predicted probability of democracy at different levels of development (in 1985 PPPs) for Latin American and non-Latin American countries, according to Models 4.2 and 4.3.

FIGURE 2

Predictions of Models 4.2 and 4.3



The nonlinearity found in Figure 2 is fully expected (and indeed almost inevitable) because with complete linearity, above a certain income level, the expected likelihood of democracy in a given country would be greater than 100%—a nonsensical result. For this reason, Dahl (1971), Diamond (1992), Huntington (1984, 1991), Jackman (1973), and Przeworski and Limongi (1997) had previously argued that above a certain per capita income, the likelihood of democracy would not substantially increase. But for Latin America, an additional reason for nonlinearity is the expected decrease in the level of democracy at intermediate levels of per capita income and not only, as is the case with the broader sample, the leveling off at a higher per capita income. The empirical result is consistent with arguments of Muller (1988, 1995) and O'Donnell (1973), both of whom posited a decreasing likelihood of democracy at certain stages of development.

In sum, Latin America may have two important regional specificities in the relationship between the level of development and democracy compared to both a global sample and to a sample of other countries in the same income range. First, the level of

development has a distinctively weak impact on democracy in this region. Second, the relationship between level of development and democracy is N-shaped, whereas the global pattern is not (see Figures 1 and 2 above).¹⁹

THINKING ABOUT REGIONAL SPECIFICITIES

Many political scientists believe that regional specificities and other contextual factors are not important. In a provocative universalizing claim, King (1996: 160) argued that “the professional goal of all scientists should be to attempt to demonstrate that context makes no difference whatsoever.”²⁰ We disagree with this assertion; our position is that context is sometimes very important and that political scientists should try to understand in what ways it matters. To return to the example of political regimes in Latin America, the point is not merely that this region of the world is different from others in terms of the values on some independent variables (for example, high income inequalities). Rather, and this is the point that is problematic for King’s argument, causal processes may be different in Latin America than elsewhere.

We agree with King that it is desirable to understand what specific factors account for causal heterogeneity according to context. In this sense, we share with King the viewpoint that it would be desirable to statistically eliminate the significance of contextual variables such as region and replace them with variables with a clearer substantive content. However, explaining *why* context matters diverges from King’s claim that it does *not* matter.

King posits the example of two “conservative, poor white men who identify with the Republican Party, prefer more defense spending, and insist that the federal government balance the budget immediately. They are each afraid that someone will take their guns away, hope to end welfare as anyone knows it, and think Rush Limbaugh should be president.” In King’s example, given these attributes of two voters, it does not matter whether they live in a liberal bastion or a conservative stronghold; both will vote in the same way. But his assertion misses the point that where two voters with similar demographic characteristics (for example, poor white men) live could affect their social and political values (in King’s example, the likelihood that they would be conservative,

identify with the Republican Party, prefer more defense spending, etc.), which in turn influence their vote. In this way, context has a large impact on voting and other political behavior. The control variables for political opinions that are affected by context help explain *why* context is important; they should not be taken as an indication that context does not make a difference in politics.

As social scientists, we would like to know not only that there are regional specificities that challenge assumptions of universality and of causal homogeneity, but also what causes such regional specificities. In this sense, this paper opens up an important new research question that we cannot resolve here, namely, why Latin America is distinctive. As King (1996) argues, if it were possible to quantify all explanatory variables in a valid and reliable manner, the ultimate goal should be to eliminate statistically significant differences across regions (see also Przeworski and Teune 1970).²¹ Then we could fully explain what produces Latin American specificities in the relationship between the level of development and democracy or for any other research question. In this paper, we do not explain what specific factors make Latin America different;²² our contribution here is rather taking stock of this specificity and indicating the need for further research on why different regions have different dynamics. Even if we cannot fully explain regional specificities, identifying them is important.

A great deal of attention in political science has been given to the impossibility of generalizing from very small samples (King et al. 1994: 208–230). Less attention has been given to the need for caution in moving from generalizations based on global samples to even fairly large samples (e.g., nineteen countries, fifty-six years) drawn from the global population, as in the example used here. Such caution is sometimes in order. This cautionary note is not a call for endlessly smaller units of analysis or for avoiding all generalizations. These positions are at odds with our understanding of the social scientific enterprise. Yet contextual specificity (Adock and Collier 2001), causal heterogeneity (Ragin 1987, 2000) and, “bounded generalizations” (Bunce 2000), or domain restrictions are important parts of the toolkit of social science methodology.

An emphasis on the importance of regions does not entail a position against large-N generalizations in social science research. We adopt an intermediate position: generalizations are important, but there are few truly universal findings in the social

sciences.²³ Most generalizations in social science are bounded by geographic or historical contexts.²⁴ Regional specificities are not the only way to bound generalizations in social science, but because regions are large parts of the world with distinctive dynamics and intra-regional influences, delimiting some generalizations by regions is useful.

A claim that a region has specific dynamics inevitably entails comparison with other regions or with the rest of the world. It is neither a call for the kind of cross-regional work that is most common in comparative politics (comparing one or a few countries in one region with one or a few in another, e.g., Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Marx 1998), nor a call for intra-regional comparison. Without comparing across regions, it is impossible to establish regional distinctiveness (Karl and Schmitter 1995). Examining regional specificities therefore does not imply focusing exclusively on one area of the world. To the contrary, good work on regional specificities must compare across regions and take broader theoretical issues and literatures into account. The domain restriction becomes clear only by comparing the Latin American cases to broader sets of countries.

DISSEMINATION AND DIFFUSION OF DEMOCRACY

Our second argument on behalf of the importance of regions of the world focuses on regional demonstration and diffusion effects, once again related to democracy. As many scholars have argued in recent years, political developments in neighboring countries can have a strong impact on political regimes in other countries in the same region (Brinks and Coppedge forthcoming; Brown 2000; Gleditsch 2002; Gleditsch and Ward forthcoming; Huntington 1991: 100–106; Kopstein and Reilly 2000; Levitsky and Way forthcoming; Lowenthal 1991; O’Laughlin et al. 1998; Pevehouse 2002a, 2002b, 2005; Pridham 1991; Pridham, Herring, and Sanford 1994; Starr 1991; Starr and Lindborg 2003; Whitehead 1986, 1991, 1996).²⁵ A favorable regional environment can enhance chances for democracy, while an unpropitious regional political environment might work against it.

To explore the impact of the regional political environment on democracy, we undertake an analysis of regime changes to and from democracy in 19 Latin American

countries (the ones previously listed in note 11) for 1946–99.²⁶ The dependent variable for all authoritarian regimes is whether the regime changes to a democracy or semi-democracy in a given year. The dependent variable for all democratic and semi-democratic regimes is whether it breaks down into authoritarianism in a given year. We use a trichotomous scale of democracy developed by Mainwaring, Brinks, and Pérez-Liñán (2001). This measure classifies regimes as democratic, semi-democratic, or authoritarian for the period from 1945 until 2003. We combine the democratic and semi-democratic cases into one category of competitively elected regimes and analyze what factors help explain transitions from authoritarianism to competitively elected regimes and what factors help explain breakdowns of competitively elected regimes.

We use two independent variables to examine regional effects in regime changes. One variable (“region”) assesses the impact of Latin America’s regional political context on the likelihood of regime durability and change. We measured the regional political environment through the number of strictly democratic countries in the region every year, excluding the country in question if it was democratic. The coding for this independent variable was based on our trichotomous measure of democracy. The value of this variable theoretically ranges from zero, if none of the other 19 countries in the region (including Cuba) were democratic in a given year, to 19 if all 20 countries were democratic in that year. We exclude the country in question to avoid problems of endogeneity. We expected a more democratic regional environment to encourage democracy.

The other regional variable is US foreign policy. As a hegemonic power in the Americas, the US can affect the likelihood of transitions to competitive regimes and of regime breakdowns. We code a 0 for years in which US foreign policy subordinated democracy to other issues (1945–76, 1981–84) and 1 for years in which democracy was a priority.

As control variables, we use the level of economic development, class structure, economic performance, party system fragmentation, and party system polarization. We measure the level of development using per capita GDP (gross domestic product) in 1995 US dollars, following the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2001). We use the percentage of labor force in manufacturing as a gross indicator of the numerical leverage of the working class. Two variables measure a regime’s economic performance: change

in per capita income (i.e., the rate of economic growth) and the consumer price index (inflation). For both growth and inflation, we use a short-term measure (the previous year) and a medium-term measure (average growth or inflation of a given regime since its inception, for up to ten years).²⁷ To assess whether presidential regimes with fragmented party systems are more prone to breakdown, we created a dichotomous variable coded as 1 if the effective number of parties in the lower (or only) chamber was equal or greater than 3.0 in a given year. The effective number of parties (ENP) is a mathematical calculation that weights parties according to their size and indicates the level of party system fragmentation; an effective number of 3.0 or more parties clearly indicates multipartism.²⁸ We employ a dichotomous indicator for theoretical reasons and because of missing information on the precise number of parties for Ecuador in the 1950s and Peru in the mid-1940s.²⁹ To measure party system polarization for democratic and semi-democratic regimes, we used Coppedge's (1998: 556–57) index of party systems in 11 countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela). His index adopts values between 0 (when all votes in an election are located at the center of the political spectrum) and 100 (when all the votes are equally split between extreme left and extreme right parties). Unfortunately, scores for the remaining eight countries in our sample are not available.³⁰

Our dataset covers a total of 19 countries over 54 years (1946–99), providing data for 1,026 country-years. We model regime change using rare event logistic regression (RELogit), a statistical technique designed for dependent variables in which the distribution of the dichotomous outcome is very uneven. This is the situation with regime changes. In our data set with 1,026 regime-years, there are 53 regime changes (32 transitions to democracy or semi-democracy and 21 breakdowns).

Notwithstanding burgeoning interest in international diffusion and dissemination effects on democracy, our work on this issue has two distinctive features. This is one of the first papers to examine regional diffusion and dissemination effects in terms of the conventional regions of the world (see also Teorell and Hadenius 2004). Brinks and Coppedge (forthcoming) and Gleditsch (2002) looked at regional effects, but they measured region in terms of the geographic proximity of one country to the next. This is a reasonable proxy for measuring region, but our approach, looking at regions as more

conventionally (though less precisely) understood, is also worthwhile. Second, most of this recent work has focused on the diffusion and dissemination of democracy (for an exception, see Sanchez 2003); we do this but also look at the diffusion and dissemination of authoritarianism.

Transitions to Democracy and Semi-Democracy

Between 1946 and 1999, 32 transitions from authoritarianism took place in the region. Table 5 presents two statistical models based on rare events logistic regression of transitions from authoritarian rule to democracy or semi-democracy for 1946–99. Years are coded 1 if a transition took place, 0 otherwise. The first model includes structural and macroeconomic predictors of democracy and the regional political variable. The region variable is highly significant and has the expected positive coefficient; a larger number of democracies in the region in a given year enhanced the likelihood that any particular authoritarian regime would undergo a transition. It is the only statistically significant variable; other independent variables that other scholars have found to be important in explaining regime transitions, such as regime economic performance, had no effect. Model 5.2 treats US foreign policy separately from other regional environmental effects. The results are very similar to those obtained in Model 5.1; region remains the only significant variable.

Regional effects thus help explain the wave of democratization that spread throughout Latin America from the late 1970s until the early 1990s. Based on the results presented in Model 5.1, we estimated the expected probability of a transition from authoritarian rule in two historical periods: 1946–77 and 1978–99. Assuming that all independent variables except for the regional context stayed at their historical means (i.e., for 1946–99), the expected probability of facing a transition for the typical authoritarian regime would be of 4.5% in 1946–77 (when the average number of democracies surrounding authoritarian enclaves was 4.4) and would rise to 8.7% in 1978–99 (when the average number of democracies was 7.1).

TABLE 5

**Predictors of Democratic Transitions in Latin America
1946–99**

Model	5.1	5.2
Variable		
Per capita GDP (t-1)	-0.052 (0.214)	-0.047 (0.216)
Labor force in industry (%)	0.104 (0.068)	0.104 (0.068)
Growth (t-1)	0.052 (0.057)	0.049 (0.057)
Inflation (ln, t-1)	0.025 (0.206)	0.010 (0.211)
Growth (last 10 years)	-0.169 (0.097)	-0.177 (0.097)
Inflation (ln, last 10 years)	-0.075 (0.277)	-0.096 (0.289)
Region	0.255*** (0.079)	0.198** (0.098)
US Policy		0.438 (0.503)
Constant	-5.603*** (1.080)	-5.314*** (1.124)
N	452	452
Pseudo R ²	0.0913	0.0944

Entries are RELogit coefficients (robust standard errors adjusted for clustering by country). Pseudo R² corresponds to standard logistic model with equivalent specification.

* Significant at .1 level

** Significant at .05 level

*** Significant at .01 level

More than any other variable we quantified, a more favorable regional political environment helped boost the rate of transitions to competitive regimes after 1977. International factors only occasionally are the driving force behind a transition to democracy; in our large data set, Panama in 1990, with the US invasion that deposed an authoritarian regime and installed a democratically elected president, was the only unequivocal example. But international factors can significantly alter the odds for or

against transitions. This finding is consistent with Brinks and Coppedge's (forthcoming) and Gleditsch's (2002) conclusions based on larger samples of countries.

Because of our interest in regional specificities in this paper, it is notable that many previous analyses have argued that economic performance affects regime durability (Diamond 1999: 77–93; Diamond and Linz 1989: 44–46; Gasiorowski 1995; Geddes 1999; Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Lipset et al. 1993; Przeworski et al. 2000). We find no such effect for the durability of authoritarian regimes in Latin America. Thus, on this issue, too, it appears that Latin America has distinctive political dynamics.

Democratic Breakdowns and Durability

We are also interested in the impact of the regional political environment on regime change in the opposite direction, from democracy to authoritarianism. Our data set contains 525 regime-years of democracy and semi-democracy between 1946 and 1999. We have information covering all the independent variables discussed above for 517 cases (344 cases if we include the index of party system polarization, which is available for only 11 countries). During these 517 regime-years of democracy and semi-democracy, there were 21 regime breakdowns.

Table 6 shows the results of a rare events logistic regression predicting a change from democracy or semi-democracy to authoritarianism in any particular regime-year for the entire 1946–99 period. In Model 6.1, as anticipated, a more democratic regional environment reduces the chances of breakdown ($p < .001$). Model 6.2 includes Coppedge's (1998) index of ideological polarization (available for 11 countries). The regional political environment remains important in explaining the likelihood of democratic breakdowns. Model 6.3 distinguishes US foreign policy from other effects of the regional political environment. Whereas the region variable was significant for explaining transitions even when US foreign policy is treated separately, for breakdowns, the US policy variable is more important, a result consistent with Sanchez (2003).

Changes in the regional context help explain the vastly greater stability of democratic and semi-democratic regimes after 1978. The regional context changed from an average of 4.2 democracies surrounding competitive regimes in 1946–77 to 9.2 in 1978–99. Taking Model 6.2 as the reference, and assuming that all other variables

remained at their 1946–99 means while the region variable shifted from 4.2 to 9.2, the predicted probability that a given democracy or semi-democracy would break down in a particular year would have plummeted from 5.6% to 0.4%. No other variable has an impact that is nearly as great in explaining the increased stability of democratic regimes after 1978.

TABLE 6

Predictors of Democratic Breakdown, Latin America, 1946–99

Model	6.1	6.2	6.3
Variable			
Per capita GDP (t-1)	0.317** (0.136)	0.394** (0.158)	0.298** (0.142)
Labor force industry (%)	-0.075 (0.051)	-0.103* (0.053)	-0.087* (0.050)
Growth (t-1)	0.051 (0.043)	-0.002 (0.061)	0.045 (0.042)
Inflation (ln, t-1)	0.118 (0.212)	-0.221 (0.170)	0.209 (0.291)
Growth (last 10 years)	-0.121** (0.055)	-0.137* (0.076)	-0.091* (0.052)
Inflation (ln, last 10 ys.)	0.349 (0.229)	0.559*** (0.143)	0.466* (0.278)
Region	-0.601*** (0.109)	-0.561*** (0.161)	-0.233 (0.220)
Multipartism	1.210*** (0.434)	1.721*** (0.617)	1.082** (0.439)
Semi-Democracy	2.546*** (0.382)	3.105*** (0.546)	2.161*** (0.374)
IP (Polarization Index)		0.014 (0.009)	
US Policy			-2.861** (1.449)
Constant	-1.884*** (0.723)	-1.966** (0.860)	-3.312*** (0.933)
N	517	344	517
Pseudo R ²	0.3028	0.3256	0.3277

RELogit coefficients (standard errors adjusted for clustering by country). Pseudo R² corresponds to standard logistic model with equivalent specification.

* Significant at .1 level; ** at .05 level; *** at .01 level

A more favorable regional political environment (measured through either the region or the US policy variables) is a key to understanding the sharp post-1978 reduction in the breakdown rate. Changes in the levels of the other independent variables did not have much effect on the predicted probability of a democratic breakdown. Once again, the regional political environment stands out as a central explanatory variable. One implication is that domestic and international influences jointly shape regime outcomes; comparative political scientists who work on regimes must take the regional political context into consideration.

Table 6 also indicates a regional specificity. Przeworski et al. (2000) showed that at a global level, democratic governments are more likely to endure at a higher per capita income level. Their finding was consistent with a much larger literature that argued that more developed countries were more likely to be democracies. A higher level of development, however, had no immunizing impact for democracy in Latin America. Democratic and semi-democratic regimes were vulnerable to breakdown at even fairly high levels of development. This finding is consistent with O'Donnell's argument (1973) that the more developed countries of South America were especially prone to bureaucratic authoritarianism in the 1960s and 1970s and also with our finding (see above) that in a wide income band, Latin American countries with a higher level of development were less likely to be democratic (see also Landman 1999).

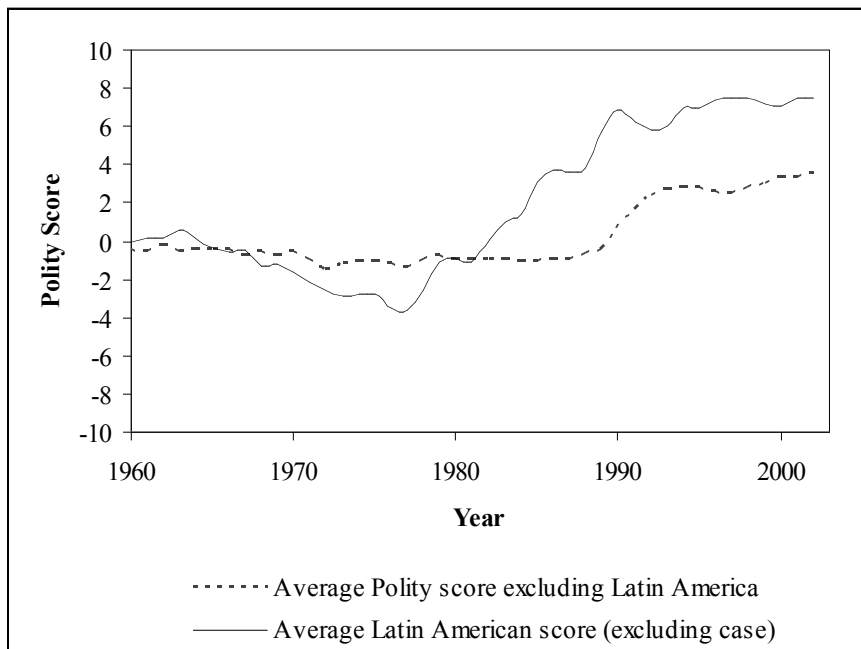
Testing Regional Versus Global Dissemination of Democracy

Our next step in the empirical analysis is to assess whether the effects on political regimes that we have examined are regional (as Gleditsch 2002 showed for a global sample) rather than worldwide. To disentangle the role of worldwide and intra-regional influences, we developed a dataset with Polity scores and per capita income data (in thousand 1995 dollars) for all Latin American countries excluding Cuba between 1960 and 2002. For each case, we estimated the impact of two independent variables on a given country's Polity score in a given year. The first one is the average Polity score for all countries outside Latin America during the year previous to the observation. This variable reflects the international climate with regards to democracy. The second

independent variable measures the average Polity score for all Latin American countries, excluding the country in question, during the previous year. This variable captures the regional political environment. Not surprisingly, the two variables are related; yearly averages for 1960–2002 show a correlation of .86 (Figure 3). In the 1970s Latin America underperformed, while in the 1980s and the 1990s it overperformed compared to the rest of the world (although this overperformance is exaggerated by the exclusion of Cuba from the analysis).

FIGURE 3

Average Polity Score for Latin American and Non-Latin American Cases, 1960–2002



The assumption driving the analysis is that if intra- or extra-regional influences take place, countries in Latin America will respond to those trends. The level of democratization of any Latin American country at time t should be influenced by the overall regional or international context at time $t-1$.

We ran a simple regression model that predicts the level of democracy of a given country in a given year as a product of its per capita GDP, the international context, and the regional context. The results, presented in Table 7, indicate that despite the high

correlation between regional and global levels of democratization, regional factors have had a distinct impact on Latin American political regimes. The substantive effect of the regional political variable is large. For every additional Polity point that the region has democratized, the typical Latin American country increased its level of democratization by .71 points, even after controlling for the effects of the extra-regional level of democracy. Surprisingly, the international political environment as measured by the global Polity average had no statistical impact on the level of democracy in a given Latin American country in a given year for Latin America. The decisive dissemination effects are region-wide, not global. This finding is consistent with work of Gleditsch (2002), Gleditsch and Ward (forthcoming), and Pevehouse (2002a, 2002b, 2005).

TABLE 7

**Effects of Regional and International Dissemination
(19 Latin American Countries, 1961–2002)**

	7.1	7.2
Polity (t-1)		0.918** (0.019)
Global Polity average (t-1)	0.516 (0.414)	-0.216** (0.063)
Regional Polity average (t-1)	0.707** (0.221)	0.173** (0.048)
Per capita GDP (ln, t-1)	2.051 (1.083)	0.175* (0.068)
Constant	-0.605 (1.117)	-0.085 (0.116)
R ²	.32	.90
N=763		

Note: Numbers in cells are OLS coefficients (standard errors clustered by country). The dependent variable in both models is a given country's Polity score in a given year. Models with linear effects of GDP generated virtually identical results.

*Significant at .05 level.

**Significant at .01 level.

Because dissemination effects may drive year-to-year *changes* in the level of democracy, in addition to the absolute *levels* of democracy in a country, we also modeled the impact of the regional and global Polity scores controlling for the lagged dependent

variable (Model 7.2). The assumption behind Model 7.2 is that the level of democracy of any Latin American country in a given year results from: a) its level of democracy during the previous year; b) the level of democracy in the region during the previous year; c) the level of democracy outside of the region in the previous year, and d) a GDP control variable (the use of a linear or nonlinear specification made little difference for the results). The regional political environment preserves a consistent positive and significant impact; a more democratic environment in Latin America as a whole is favorable to a change toward democracy in a given Latin American country in a given year. The estimated impact of extra-regional influences was significantly altered with this lagged term in the equation. Contrary to expectations, the estimated impact of extra-regional influences changes its direction when we analyze change in a given Latin American country's Polity score from one year to the next (Model 7.2). A higher worldwide Polity average produces an estimated change in a more authoritarian direction in a given Latin American country in a given year. At this time, we cannot explain this result, which is counterintuitive and contrary to other related findings (e.g., Brinks and Coppedge forthcoming). This finding again underscores the decisive importance of the regional (and not a broader international) political environment.

WHY ARE THERE REGIONAL DISSEMINATION AND DIFFUSION EFFECTS?

A growing body of literature is recognizing the importance of dissemination and diffusion effects on political regimes (Gleditsch 2002; Gleditsch and Ward forthcoming) and of regional political influences in policymaking (Meseguer 2002; Weyland 2004). But what are the mechanisms through which regional dissemination and diffusion occurs? The statistical analysis above does not answer this question. Meseguer (2002) and Weyland (2004) have addressed this issue in relation to economic policy ideas, Pevehouse (2002a, 2002b, 2005) has examined how membership in regional organizations shapes diffusion of democracy; and Gleditsch (2002) and Gleditsch and Ward (forthcoming) have analyzed regional influences on democratization. Here we briefly mention three regional causal mechanisms in relation to waves of democracy and authoritarianism in Latin America.

First, the dissemination of norms and ideas affects the way domestic actors perceive their political interests and can thereby affect their regime preference and their political behavior. For example, the region-wide dissemination of anti-communist ideologies during the Cold War reinforced the willingness of some actors to support military coups. The broad dissemination of pro-democratic norms in recent decades has raised the costs of coups. The cross-national dissemination of norms has also inspired human rights activists to fight for restoring democracy where it does not exist. (Htun 2003; Keck and Sikkink 1998). This dissemination of norms and ideas frames the way political actors perceive political regimes and their own interests and political preferences. The dissemination of norms can legitimize and empower some domestic groups at the expense of others.

Many channels of international dissemination and communication about politics are more powerful within than across regions. Some actors that have an important effect on political regimes (e.g., the Organization of American States, or OAS) function mainly or exclusively in a given region (Pevehouse 2002a, 2002b, 2005). In a region such as Latin America, a language common to most countries facilitates cross-national communication and helps explain why regional communication and dissemination of ideas is powerful, independently of cross-regional communication and dissemination.

A second mechanism through which diffusion occurs is that some international actors operate in many or all countries in the same region. Although these organizations have different impacts in different countries, their change in orientation over time can affect political regimes in different countries. For example, in Latin America, changes in the Catholic Church in many countries positively affected the regional political environment for democracy. The Church has traditionally been an actor of political import in most Latin American countries, and until the 1960s, it frequently sided with authoritarians. Since the 1970s, the Catholic Church has usually supported democratization (Huntington 1991: 74–85). Under the sway of the Second Vatican Council of 1962–65, the Church came to accept and promote democracy in most of the region.³¹ In Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Peru, and Nicaragua, the Church strengthened the coalition of forces that worked for a transition to democracy. Change in the Catholic Church affected prospects for democracy in other regions, but Latin America is the only

overwhelmingly Catholic region of the world, hence change in the Church affected Latin America more than other regions.³² Moreover, although the Catholic Church is global in scope, it has regional specificities that stem from a combination of responding to some regionally specific opportunities and challenges, a regional leadership organization (the Latin American Bishops' Conference), and regional communication among theologians, priests, religious, and bishops.

A third mechanism of diffusion is that external actors such as the US can affect the likelihood of coups and democratic transitions in a range of ways: 1) moral suasion that changes the attitudes and behavior of domestic actors; 2) symbolic statements that embolden some actors, strengthen their position, and weaken other actors; 3) sanctions against governments; 4) conspiracies against governments; 5) military actions that overthrow the regime and install a new one. In the first three kinds of influence, external actors shape regime change by influencing domestic actors; in the final one, external actors directly determine regime change. This final possibility has been the rare exception in Latin America, but external actors, especially the US government and since 1990, the Organization of American States, have frequently shaped the logic, costs, and benefits of domestic actors through the first three kinds of influence. By doing so, the US and OAS have significantly affected the regional political environment.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the US supported several coups and helped create an ideological environment in which conservative actors in Latin America believed that the US would not object if they fostered coups (Robinson 1996; Sanchez 2003). During most of the post-1977 period, the US has supported transitions to competitive regimes and has opposed breakdowns of such regimes. Its positions have raised the costs of coups to potential coup players. Under such circumstances, some players that would otherwise have probably supported coups have not done so. The threat of sanctions by the US and the OAS makes the expected benefit-cost ratio of supporting a coup unfavorable. The US exerts much more influence in Latin America than in other regions of the world; its influence in Latin America is another reason for the existence of important regional influences in democratization.

Multilateral organizations such as the Organization of American States can also exert a region-wide influence on political regimes (Pevehouse 2002a, 2002b, 2005). Of

course, this does not mean that their influence is homogeneous across all countries of the region.

Since 1991, the OAS has significantly influenced several political regime outcomes in Latin America. In 1991, the OAS passed Resolution 1080, which called for a meeting of the foreign ministers of the western hemisphere countries within the first few days of a democratic breakdown and legitimated OAS intervention in such cases. Resolution 1080 prompted OAS interventions in Haiti (1991), Peru (1992), Guatemala (1993), and Paraguay (1996). In the aftermath of approving Resolution 1080, in December 1992, the OAS approved the Washington Protocol, which enables the OAS General Assembly to approve suspending the membership of any member country that experiences a coup (Burrell and Shifter 2000; Perina 2000). Resolution 1080 raised the costs of a coup and in several crisis moments altered the calculations and behavior of domestic political actors. In Latin America, the threat of international sanctions against coup players was clear when coup mongers in Paraguay (1996) and Guatemala (1993) backed off when confronted with the likelihood of sanctions, and when Fujimori (Peru, 1992) responded to international pressures by restoring elections (Pevehouse 2005).

Democratic governments in Latin America have supported efforts to encourage democracy and to impose sanctions against authoritarian regimes. Collectively, NGOs, multilateral agencies, and the governments of Latin America, Western Europe, and North America have created a norm of disapproval of authoritarianism and support—ideological, if not material—for democracy. These norms are coupled with sanctions that can hurt coup players' interests.

Other subregional organizations also help to explain why diffusion occurs. In July 1996, the presidents of the Mercosur countries—Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Chile—signed an agreement stating that any member nation would be expelled if democracy broke down. Pressure from neighboring Mercosur nations helped avert a coup in Paraguay in April 1996. In an age of growing international economic integration, authoritarian governments now faced the possibility of economic sanctions such as those that crippled the economies of Panama under Noriega and Haiti after the military deposed Aristide. Together, the US, OAS, and Mercosur have raised the costs of coups and of retaining authoritarian rule.

CONCLUSION: REGIONS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Notwithstanding the traditional organization of comparative politics along regional lines, very little work has built a case for why regions are substantively important. In an excellent recent book, Gleditsch (2002) made the case that regions are important in understanding world politics, especially international relations. We have extended this argument to comparative politics. Regions of the world are important in understanding such important political phenomena as the level of democracy and changes in political regimes.

Empirically, we have made this argument by looking at two different kinds of evidence. First, regional specificities are important in understanding political processes across regions (see also Bunce 1995, 1998, 2000). The impact of the level of development on democracy is different in Latin America and in petroleum rich countries of the Middle East than in the world as a whole, or than in other countries within the same income zone. In the oil exporting countries of the Middle East, autocracies rule despite high levels of per capita income. In Latin America, per capita income has no statistically discernible impact on the likelihood of democracy in a linear OLS model, and it has a distinctive N shaped impact on the level of democracy in a model based on a hypothesis of curvilinear relationship.

Second, regional dynamics are important in shaping prospects for transitions to democracy and democratic breakdowns in Latin America (Gleditsch 2002 shows that this is true more broadly). Hence, it is impossible to understand regime change by focusing only on individual countries or only on global trends. Political regimes were traditionally a subject matter for comparative political scientists who focused on domestic processes, but regime dynamics are not exclusively domestically driven. Both because of regional specificities and because of regional influences, social scientists and historians must be attentive to the importance of regions in politics.

Methodologically, our work on regional specificities lies between two extreme positions in political science. On the one hand, our emphasis on regional specificities removes us from universalizing approaches to political science that deny the importance of context. Generalizations are important, but political scientists also should be attentive

to causal heterogeneity (Hall 2003; Ragin 2000: 88–119) and contextual differences (Adock and Collier 2001; Bunce 1998, 2000).³³ Some universalistic approaches to social science claim to be more scientific than other approaches (e.g., Bates 1997; Ferejohn and Satz 1995), but an awareness of causal heterogeneity is fully consistent with rigor and can be superior to universalistic claims in advancing understanding of key issues (Luke 2004). If a casual mechanism holds in some circumstances but not others, social scientists best be aware of this fact.

On the other hand, an examination of regions also separates us from individualizing approaches, which pursue a detailed understanding of every case. By treating (through the quantitative analysis) each country in a given year as having different attributes, in one respect we share with individualizing approaches an awareness of the importance of national differences. But our interest in trends beyond a single country and in cross-regional differences signals a profound departure from individualizing social science research.³⁴

Social science should be built on a diversity of research strategies, some stressing generalization above specificities (though such work must also be attentive to some specificities), others paying greater attention to specificities while working within an understanding of broader comparative and theoretical conceptions (Fishman forthcoming). Different units of analysis in social science contribute to the larger picture of how politics and society function. Just as large N global analysis helps understand this larger picture, so, for some research questions, does a focus on regions. Indeed, it is impossible to grasp some important political dynamics without awareness of regional specificities and influences.

Within this conception of social science, one of the least developed strategies in studies on political regimes (and in other fields as well) is an intermediate N strategy. Region-wide studies of democratization that are sensitive to intra-regional differences are uncommon (for an exception, see Bratton and van de Walle 1997).³⁵ Both the intermediate N strategy and the regional research design, which in principle are discrete but in our case are combined, are useful compliments to the large N and small N studies that overwhelmingly dominate democratization studies.

The fact that regions have specificities and diffusion effects does not mean that the countries within a region can be treated as homogeneous. We treated each country differently by virtue of assigning each one a different score for every independent and dependent variable. For a region as heterogeneous as Latin America, an assumption of homogeneity hinders understanding. It is possible (though in social science research it has been uncommon) to acknowledge profound heterogeneity within a region of the world and to simultaneously treat regions as important.

ENDNOTES

¹ Munck and Snyder coded all articles published in *Comparative Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, and *World Politics* between 1989 and 2004 (N=319). Western Europe received the greatest attention (22 percent of the articles), followed by Latin America (16 percent). Three quarters of the articles dealt with five countries or less (Munck and Snyder 2005, Tables 5 and 12).

² For example, the *European Journal of Political Research*, *Latin American Politics and Society*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, and *West European Politics*.

³ We agree with Bates that traditional area studies work that focuses on one country or region without addressing broader theories and literatures has serious limitations.

⁴ This paper is part of an ongoing project on regional trends in democracy and authoritarianism in Latin America since 1945. In this paper, we ask an important methodological question germane to the project as a whole: Why focus on a region of the world?

⁵ In the large-N literature cited in this paper, only Coppedge (1997), Gasiorowski and Power (1998), and Ross (2001) used regional dummies in their analysis.

⁶ For arguments similar to Bunce's, see Howard (2003); Kwon (2004); Linz and Stepan (1996); McFaul (2002). Notwithstanding important convergences between Bunce's arguments and ours, there are differences in our approaches. Whereas Bunce made her argument on the basis of qualitative cross-regional comparisons, we make ours on the basis of quantitative data. It is possible through either quantitative or qualitative approaches to come to the central argument of this paper: that regions are important in politics. Also, whereas Bunce primarily compared the post-communist cases to Latin America, we primarily compare Latin America with most countries in the world and with most countries in the world in the same income zone. Finally and most important, Bunce looks mainly at the regime legacies of post-communist rule and only secondarily at regional influences and specificities in a geographic sense; we focus on region as a geographic construct. If the type of authoritarian regime that existed prior to a democratic transition is the key independent variable that explains different outcomes, then region is merely a proxy for this antecedent regime type. That is, the effect of regions would be spurious.

⁷ For a different cultural approach to regional specificities, see Inglehart and Carballo (1997), who are much more attuned to intra-regional differences than many culturalists.

⁸ A partial exception to this consensus is Acemoglu et al. (forthcoming), who used fixed effects models. Controlling for unspecified country-specific factors, the level of development did not help account for changes in the level of democracy.

⁹ Landman (1999) and Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2003) tested for and found regional specificities for Latin America. Ross (2001) argued that there are regional specificities for the Middle East. Coppedge (1997) tested for regional specificities and argued that they do not exist.

¹⁰ We used the Polity dataset as updated and modified by Gleditsch (2003).

¹¹ Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

¹² We treated all "transition" values (-88, -66) in the Polity index as missing values.

¹³ By a simple or conventional modernization argument, we mean that a higher level of development should produce a higher probability that a country is democratic or a higher level of democracy.

¹⁴ Ragin (2000) claims that quantitative analyses are usually oblivious to causal heterogeneity, that is, to the idea that a causal factor could have one impact in one setting but a different impact elsewhere. He is right that many quantitative analyses are not sufficiently attentive to such differences, but through the use of interaction terms, nonlinear terms, and other statistical techniques, quantitative methods can test for causal heterogeneity more precisely and clearly than qualitative methods. See Bartels (1996) for a discussion of how quantitative social science can pursue awareness of causal heterogeneity.

¹⁵ Technically, this is a heteroskedastic pattern related to income levels rather than to geographic location.

¹⁶ This sample includes 125 countries for which the Alvarez-Cheibub-Limongi-Przeworski and the Polity datasets contained information. It excludes oil-dependent countries, not contained in Przeworski's PPP database.

¹⁷ The PPP⁴ term is unnecessary with the dichotomous dependent variable because the interpretation of the logistic function involves an upper limit (since the probability of democracy cannot be greater than 1).

¹⁸ The lack of significance for the PPP term for middle-income countries excluding Latin America is a product of collinearity. For this subsample, PPP² is correlated at .97 with PPP, and PPP³ is correlated at .92 with PPP. If we drop PPP² and PPP³, the coefficient for PPP becomes significant at the .001 level.

¹⁹ More extensive testing for regional specificities would involve alternative model specification with more independent variables than we have used here. However, this does not obviate our two central arguments, namely, that a) at least for some time periods, there appears to be regional specificity in the relationship between the level of development and democracy; and b) it is important to be aware of the possibility of regional specificities.

²⁰ Along similar lines, Bates (1997: 166) argued that “social scientists seek to identify lawful regularities, which ... must not be context bound.” Another prominent example of a sweeping universalizing claim at odds with the importance of contextual specificity (or causal heterogeneity) is King, Keohane, and Verba (1994: 93): “The notion of unit homogeneity (or the less demanding assumption of constant causal effects) lies at the base of all scientific research.” Contrary to their assertion, considerable quantitative research, by using interaction terms and exponential terms, demonstrates that scientific research does *not* depend on unit homogeneity or on constant causal effects. For a fourth prominent claim that social science should rest on universal arguments, see Ferejohn and Satz (1995).

²¹ This is an ideal, but not one that can be easily achieved. Even if ideally we might be able to identify all sources of regional specificity and treat them as nomothetic variables, in practice, the factors that make Latin America different from other regions are too path-dependent to fully disentangle. See Hall (2003) for a discussion of how path dependence challenges conventional assumptions of causality.

²² One obvious reason for Latin American specificities is the impact of the United States on the region. Latin America has other specificities that could help account for the distinctive dynamics underscored in this paper, including greater inequalities than any other region of the world.

²³ Universal findings hold for most representative samples of the same population (that is, the relevant set of cases). But the definition of the population is itself an analytical task (Ragin 2000: 43-63). For instance, “universal” may simply mean all US voters in the second half of the 20th century.

²⁴ For a good example of how presumably universal findings may be historically bounded, see Boix and Stokes (2003).

²⁵ The literature on dissemination and diffusion is more developed than the scant literature on regional specificities. International (Boix and Stokes 2003; Gasiorowski and Power 1998; Przeworski et al. 2000) as well as regional (Bernhard, Reenock, and Nordstrom 2003; Gasiorowski 1995; Gasiorowski and Power 1998; Pevehouse 2002a; Starr 1991) diffusion effects are increasingly included as control variables in democratization models.

²⁶ For more details, see Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2005).

²⁷ The impact of inflation on regime changes should be nonlinear, given the existence of many episodes of three and four digit inflation rates in our Latin American sample (Gasiorowski 1995, 1998). For this reason, we used the natural logarithm of the inflation rate. The actual formula employed was $\ln[1+i(t-1)]$ for any case of $i \geq 0$ and $-\ln[1+|i(t-1)|]$ for $i < 0$ (i.e., deflation), where i is the annual percent change in the consumer price index (Gasiorowski 2000: 326).

²⁸ The formula for the effective number of parties is $1/\sum(p^2)$, where p is the proportion of seats obtained by each party (Laakso and Taagepera 1979).

²⁹ A threshold of 3.0 is a stronger indicator of multipartism than a lower number, but a 2.5 threshold did not alter the overall results.

³⁰ For operational reasons, we assumed that ideological polarization could change at each election but remained constant between elections.

³¹ There were some ignominious exceptions to this generalization. For example, the Church in Argentina and Guatemala supported repressive authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and early 1980s.

³² If the Catholic Church were the only such actor that had an impact across several Latin American countries and if it had an equal impact in countries outside Latin America, it would be more appropriate to think of this as a Church rather than a regional impact. In reality, several important actors had a cross-national impact within Latin America.

³³ The search for universal theory can sometimes hinder understanding in the social sciences (Green and Shapiro 1994). Downs (1957) implicitly presented his theory of party motivation (winning votes) and behavior (adopting ideological positions that enhance the capacity to win votes) in a universalistic way.

Subsequent innovations improved on his work in countless ways but most subsequent work in spatial modeling of party competition retained the idea that all parties focus on winning votes or seats; they maximize their utility in an electoral game. However, in contexts of unstable democracy where some actors might prefer authoritarian rule, parties might sacrifice votes and seats so as to maximize their preferred outcome in a regime game—either to preserve democracy or to thwart it. In these contexts, it is impossible to understand parties' objectives and behavior through analysis focused exclusively on electoral competition (Mainwaring 2003). The original universalistic theory could conceivably be revised in a more comprehensive manner, but it would have to be a more context-dependent universalistic theory.

³⁴ Case studies can make valuable contributions to social science. For arguments about contextual specificity and how to balance it with some generalization, see Adcock and Collier (2001: 534–536); Verba (1967). Fishman (2005) persuasively argues that at the core of Max Weber's approach to social science was a balance between the effort to build general theories and a keen awareness of the specificities of different cases—a position we fully endorse.

³⁵ Many works focus on differences across a few cases in a given region, but few simultaneously take a region as a whole and evince a strong interest in intra-regional differences.

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