"The Political Economy of State Terror"

by

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Abstract

This paper analyzes factors contributing to terrorism, using its initial meaning from the French Revolution in which the state is the terrorist. The independent economic variables are mineral exports/GDP, military expenditures/GDP, real GDP growth, real per capita GDP, and population density, and the dependent variable is democide, the murder of people by government. Analysis of the data indicates that mineral exports and poor economic performance (both level and growth of income) increase the probability of democides. However, once regime type (democracy) is controlled for, only mineral exports remain statistically robust. Therefore, the control of rents seems to be a major factor contributing to democides.

Key words: democide, terror, rent seeking

1. Introduction

Existing research on terrorism focuses on the behaviour of non-state actors. The major research question of this literature is why non-state actors engage in terrorist activities. This research refers to terrorism as a premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetuated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence a powerful audience (Pillar 2001). This view of terrorism implies that an attack by a government's duly uniformed or other identifiable armed forces or state security is not terrorism. Falk (2002:11) deplores "the regressive narrowing of the concept of terrorism to apply only to violence by non-state movements and organizations, thereby exempting state violence against civilians from the prohibition on terrorism." In contrast to its contemporary usage, "terror" (*terreur*) was first used to describe the French Revolution's "reign of terror" in 1793-1794 as an instrument of governance by the revolutionary state. In fact, the Jacobins' reign of terror aimed to consolidate the new government by intimidating all dissidents perceived as "enemies of the people." The revolutionary leader, Maximilien Robespierre, strongly believed that virtue was the mainspring of a popular government at peace, but during the time of revolution it must be allied with terror in order for democracy to triumph (Hoffman 2006). To reinforce this claim, Robespierre announced to the National Convention on 8 Thermidor (26 July 1794) a new list of traitors against the revolution. Fearing that their own names might be on the Robespierre's list, extremists joined forces with moderates to repudiate both Robespierre and his "reign of terror." Robespierre and his closest followers were executed by guillotine and hence met with the same fate that had befallen some 40,000 others (Hoffman 2006).

The purpose of this paper is to explain this tragedy or the state as a terrorist. Rummel (1994: 36) calls it democide or the murder of any person or people by a government, including

genocide, politicide, and mass murder. Democides include acts perpetuated by governments (or their opponents in civil wars) or warlords that are "intended to destroy in whole or in part a communal, political, or politicized ethnic group" (Harff 2005). These acts of destruction include actions by allies of the state, such as the right-wing death squads in 1980-81 El Salvador, the Hutu militia groups, the *Interahamwe* and the *Impuzamugambi* in 1994 Rwanda, and the Janjaweed in 2005-06 Darfur. Democide is thus the state killing of unarmed civilians not involved in the conflict. However, state killing of *armed* opponents or resistors is not democide.

According to Rummel (1994), some 170 million people were killed by the state during the twentieth century, compared to about 30 million people in armed conflict. He lists the Soviet Union, Communist China, Nazi Germany, and 15 other instances in the twentieth century in which governments intentionally killed at least one million people.

Is democide a universal human phenomenon? Or is mass murder an aberration of the Holocaust? Väyrynen (1996) and Katz (1996, pp. 19-38) observe that the Holocaust is unique, killing 6 million people, two-thirds of European Jewry. However, Prunier (1995, pp. 264-65) contends that for a three month period from April to July 1994 the 800 thousand estimated deaths (11 per cent of the population) from genocide in Rwanda represented perhaps the highest non-natural casualty rate in history.[1] At the peak of the Sudanese famine, a crisis largely human-made, during nine weeks in June-August 1988, 7 per cent of the population of the camp in Meiram, southern Kordofan died each week (Keen 1994:76).[2] Le Billon and Bakker (2000: 53-54) estimate that as many as 1.8 million people in Cambodia died from torture or murder and associated hunger and disease between 1975 and early 1979 under the Khmer Rouge. Its class

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[1] After the massive slaughter of Hutu by Tutsi in Burundi in 1972, Kuper (1981:161) charged that the sovereign state claims the right to commit genocide, a right then not contravened by the UN.
[2] Even in 1995, Sudan had 450 thousand refugees and 1.7 million internally displaced people, while in the same year Afghanistan and Rwanda each had more than one million refugees (Väyrynen 2000a: 70).

and racist genocide was targeted at the educated and urban, the administration, the army, merchants, Vietnamese administrators, Chinese traders, and rural Muslim Cham.

This paper is organized as follows. The first section briefly reviews the literature and states our hypotheses. In the second section, we develop the research design and provide operational definitions of our dependent and independent variables. Statistical analysis and a brief conclusion follow.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

Many people believe that mass killings by the state, including the targeting of civilians, have increased in recent years. However, since the Cold War, according to the Human Security Center (2005:40), genocides and mass killings have declined. We identify 39 countries with democide from 1960 to 2002. We draw the line so that democides occur in countries with 1,000 or more people being killed as a result of killing by the state, warlords, or allied militias and political or ethnic groups during at least one year.[3] We contend that economic factors are the most important variables contributing to state terrorism. To account for this assertion, we also use regime type in our discussion because it has been hypothesized to lower the likelihood of state killing its own citizens.

2.1. Economic and Social Explanations of Democides

Regrettably the state killing of its own citizens is an important state instrument in many parts of the world, especially in less-developed countries (LDCs). Democides are more likely to

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[3] This list Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Burundi, Cambodia, Chad, Chile, China, Congo, Croatia, Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone,

occur in societies where the state is weak and venal, and thus subject to extensive rent-seeking, an omnipresent policy to obtain private benefit from public action and resources. A weakening or decaying state is one experiencing a decline in the basic functions of the state, such as possessing authority and legitimacy, making laws, preserving order, and providing basic social services (Holsti 2000:246-50; Zartman 1995:1-7).

Cause and effect between state failure and rent seeking are not always clear. State failure need not necessarily result from the incapacity of public institutions, but from the interests of rulers. While state failure can harm a great number of people, it can also benefit others, especially governing elites and their allies. Political leaders may gain more from extensive unproductive, profit-seeking activities in a violent political system they control than from long-term efforts to build a well-functioning state in which economic progress and democratic institutions flourish. These activities contributing to state decay tend to be pervasive in countries that have abundant mineral exports, such as Angola, Congo-Kinshasa, and Sudan, while predatory economic behavior has a lower pay-off in mineral-poor economies such as Tanzania. However, the relationship between rent-seeking or abundance of mineral resources is not linear. Thus, we speculate that as states rely on rents from mineral resources, they are less likely to destroy people who oppose their leadership up to a point where such increasing resources create domestic dissension. Our first hypothesis thus follows:

Hypothesis 1: Mineral resources are less likely to increase the likelihood of democides but over time the impact of mineral resources on democides should increase.

The impact of state failure may also be indirect. The most important factor is the military burden that causes state failure. There is a widespread concern that large defence expeditutes

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Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, and Uganda. Refer to Nafziger and Väyrynen (2002), Väyrynen (2000a), and Nafziger et al. (2 vols., 2000).

have a negative impact on citizens' well-being. Opportunity costs in terms of reduced expenditures elsewhere have often been cited as a mechanism through which defence spending reduces social programs. This tradeoff is particularly acute when it drains economic resources from existing domestic programs (Russett 1969). Hicks and Kubisch (1984) measured sectoral expenditure changes in response to overall expenditure reduction and found a high degree of vulnerability of social expenditures as compared to military expenditures. Using a 3SLS that allowed for a two-way causation between military spending and social welfare in his cross-section time series, Gyimah-Brempong (1989) found the existence of a tradeoff between defence budget share and social welfare in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. More striking was his finding that increasing shares in defence spending tend to have a negative effect on social welfare, not the other way round. Our second hypothesis thus follows:

Hypothesis 2: The military burden is likely to increase the chance of democide though its effect on state failure.

Economic performance provides another explanation of democides. In fact, sustained poor economic performance or economic decline usually puts pressure on ruling coalitions. Ruling elites can expand rent-seeking opportunities for existing political elites, contributing to further economic stagnation that can threaten the legitimacy of the regime and increase the probability of regime turnover. To forestall threats to the regime, political elites may use repression or killing to suppress discontent or capture a greater share of the majority's shrinking surplus. These repressive policies may entail acts of direct violence against or withholding food and other supplies from politically disobedient groups, as in Sudan in the 1980s (Keen 2000: 292-94). Since economic deceleration or collapse can disrupt ruling coalitions and exacerbate mass discontent, we should not be surprised that since 1980 Africa has been more vulnerable to

democides. This increase in democides in Africa in the last two decades of the twentieth century is linked to the continent's poor economic performance. In fact, unlike other continents, Africa has experienced negative per-capita growth in the 1970s and 1980s and virtual stagnation in the 1990s (Auvinen and Nafziger 1999: 267-90). If Africa's economic performance had been as high as that of non-African LDCs, Africa's incidence of conflict would have been similar to that of other developing regions (ibid.). Auvinen and Nafziger's (1999) finding is similar to Collier and Hoeffler's (1998).

Protracted stagnation is likely to weaken community sentiments of solidarity vis-à-vis weaker groups and hence redistribution in their favour. Protracted stagnation may also spur elites to expropriate the assets and resources of weaker social communities violently, particularly if political, ethnic, or class tensions already exist, as in Sudan in the 1980s and in the early years of the 21st century in Darfur. Therefore, poor economic performance seems to be a major factor in explaining democides. Absolute deprivation can contribute to a humanitarian emergency that increases the incidence of democide. During the economic struggle for bare survival under extreme distress shows, as in Rwanda in the late 1980s and early 1990s, economic Darwinism or a Malthusian trap tends to become dominant when food, resource, and employment scarcity becomes chronic. Under such circumstances, dog-eat-dog behaviour tends to prevail over the behaviour dictated by the legal rules and social conventions regulating access to resources, and over the moral and judicial condemnation of theft, robbery, and expropriation. A number of studies have in fact found that sustained economic performance is less likely to lower the probability of mass killings (Banaian 2001; Easterly, Gatti, and Kurlat 2005; Scully 1997).

Hypothesis 3: A sustained poor economic performance is likely to increase the chance of democides.

Another factor to spur democides tends to be associated with land distribution in highly polarized or ethnically fractionalized societies. Human Rights Watch (1995: viii) cites the Rwandan government in 1994 as an example of "a government's willingness to play on existing communal tensions to entrench its own power or advance a political agenda is a key factor in the transformation of those tensions into communal violence. . . . "

This ethnic animosity cross cuts with conflict over land, both intra- and inter-ethnic, in Rwanda. Land resource is also vital for human survival. For example, Rwanda, with only 5 per cent of its population living in urban areas, has a population density of 1,295 persons per square kilometer (Gaffney 1996:17). This is about the same as that of Italy (1298), which is 67 per cent urban, and exceeds population density in France (717), which is 74 per cent urban. While parts of Asia have also faced high agrarian population densities, more rapid economic growth, with its accompanying expansion of employment in industry and services, has generally reduced the political salience of these pressures.[4]

The economic struggle, including fears of economic redistribution from possible political change, fueled the increased tensions in Rwanda in the early 1990s. André and Platteau's in-depth study (1998:1-47) of a densely populated village in northwestern Rwanda in the late 1980s and early 1990s shows how increasing land inequality put severe strains on rural areas, intensifying the competition for land during a period of rapid population growth and sluggish non-agricultural opportunities. The rising inequalities in land distribution and rapid land dispossession through the illegal land market, although only one among several contributing factors, exacerbated the anger and violence that contributed to the Rwandan war and genocide in 1994.

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[4] Northern India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka are examples of exceptions within Asia.

Land disputes poisoned daily relationships, undermining social life and brutalizing family relations. Increasingly, women, youngest sons, and other marginalized persons lost their claims to land and faced a blighted future, while old people felt abandoned and forced by their children to lose income from land (André and Platteau 1998: 24-29, 34-37). Much of the killing in Rwanda in 1994 was directed at people with land and at times cows, whose assets became available to others. Land pressure and scarcity of the other forms of farm capital provided an incentive for violence by the poor and overpopulated. The rising poverty and growing land concentration from the commoditization of land contributed to reduced customary social protection, with people feeling exempt from customary rules and restraints (André and Platteau 1998: 2-3).

Hypothesis 4: The presence of land scarcity tends to increase the likelihood of democides.

2.2. Is the Political Regime Critical?

Our sole control variable is regime type or democracy. Thus, the role of economic factors in spurring democides should not discount regime type as a critical factor in explaining democides. In recent years, the liberal tradition assigns a great weight to the kinds of political institutions that states create to make policy decisions, and it predicts that the spread of free democratically ruled governments will promote peaceful interstate relations. As Immanuel Kant (1795) argued, when citizens are given basic human rights such as choosing their leaders through ballots as well as civil liberties such as free speech and a free press, these democracies would be far less likely to initiate wars than would countries ruled by dictators or kings. This is because a government accountable to the people would be constrained by public opinion from waging war. The growing recognition that ballots serve as a barrier against the use of bullets by one

democracy against another has gained importance even to explain domestic politics and the likelihood of democides. The argument is that not only do democracies not fight against each other, but they never kill their own citizens. In fact, empirical studies have shown that democracies have the least internal violence (Gurr and Lichbach 1979; Rummel 1997). Moreover, democratic institutions will presumably increase the likelihood that existing technology and organization are used for benevolent ends (Easterly Gatti, and Kurlat 2005, 4). Thus, democratic institutions place limits on the ability of chief executives to carry out mass killings of voters who brought them to office. One of the most famous hypotheses about democides is that "power kills; absolute power kills absolutely" (Rummel 1997). Therefore, democracies are less likely to murder their own citizens. The following hypothesis on regime type follows:

Hypotheis 5: The more democratic a regime is, the less likely there would be democides.

3. Research Design

3.1. Operational definitions of dependent & independent variables

To assess the impact of our variables on democides, the following empirical analysis draws upon a dataset from 1960 to 2002 covering 39 countries. The dependent variable is democide or a dummy variable coded 1 the year of killing of its own citizens by the state and 0 otherwise. Most data on democides are ranges of estimated victims. Data are from Stanton (2005).

Our independent variables include economic variables. The first describes rent-seeking activities and the operational definition of rent-seeking is mineral exports as a percentage of GDP. We square this variable to account for non-linear relation between democides and mineral

exports. The second is military burden defined as military expenditures as a percentage of GDP.

Economic performance includes real growth rates of GDP and natural logarithm of real per

capita GDP (1995=100). To account for land scarcity, we include population density. The data

on mineral exports are from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

(UNCTAD 1984, 1990; 2003). Other economic variables are from the World Bank (2004),

while military expenditures are from Correlates of War Project (2005).   We expect that

democides and economic performance (economic growth and GDP per capita) to be negatively

correlated, while democides and the other two variables (military burden and land scarcity) to be

positively correlated. The sole control variable is democracy from Polity IV (Jaggers and

Marshall. 2002). The argument indicates a negative relationship between democides and

democracy.

4. Statistical Analysis

4.1. A few methodological issues

Our analysis of pooled time cross sectional analysis raises several methodological issues. The

first concerns the structure of our dependent variables. *Democide* is a binary variable that may

be problematic when analyzing time-series cross-section data. Green, Kim, and Yoon (2001)

demonstrate that logit models of binary time series cross-sectional data may result in either

biased standard errors or omitted variable bias. They suggest that a fixed effects approach offers

a solution by controlling for unreported variables that are potentially unique to cross-sectional

units.   F-tests demonstrate that the slopes and the intercepts in our logit models are

heterogeneous, and Hausman tests indicate that intercepts are correlated with independent

variables.[5] Fixed-effects logits may thus be necessary to eliminate omitted variable bias in our models, although these models drop a large proportion of our observations and thus increase inefficiency. We ran fixed effects models as well random effects and population-averaged logit models to assess the robustness of each because several studies indicate that fixed effects models produce biased and inefficient results when numerous dummy and interaction variables are included in the analysis, as they are in our analysis (King and Zeng 2001).

The second methodological issue concerns simultaneity and weak exogeneity. We suspect that democide might explain some of our independent and control variables. To address these concerns and to be sure that our independent variables truly "cause" our dependent variables, we lag our independent variables and use them as instruments to account for potential weak exogeneity (Kennedy 1998; Kmenta 1997).

The final issue relates to time dependence in the rate at which events occur, contagion effects, and heterogeneity that tend to be major sources of autocorrelation in time series cross-sectional data. We employ the lagged dependent variable to account for autocorrelation. Although lagged democide has the potential to "soak up" the explanatory power of other independent variables, it is theoretically appropriate since previous studies, especially Rummel (1997), demonstrate that states that have killed their own people in the past are more likely than other states to do it again.

4.2. Analysis of the data

Table 1 presents our economic variables. It reports fixed-effects, random-effects, and robust population-averaged models. The three models fit the data well as chi squares are all

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[5] The slope homogeneity test F was 8.00, statistically significant and rejecting the null hypothesis. The Hausman chi-square was 128.14, statistically significant and rejecting the null hypothesis.

statistically significant at .01 level. The signs of our explanatory variables are as expected, except for GDP per capita whose sign is positive. The results indicate that democide tends to respond positively to past practices of democides. This result is consistent across all models. Fixed-effects and random-effects regression models support our hypothesis that sustained economic growth is likely to lower the chance of democides. Our regressions support our *hypothesis 1*. The coefficients of "Primary mineral exports" in the three models are highly significant and indicate a normal U-shaped curve as predicted. The export of mineral commodities as a share of GDP has slope zero at - $b_1/2b_2$ or - (-52.1681)/[2*(60.3196))], representing 43% of GDP in the fixed effect model. The random effect and population-average models provide 28.7% and 26% of GDP, respectively.

Although fixed-effects logits may be necessary to eliminate omitted variable bias in our models, they drop a large proportion of our observations from 939 in random effects and population average) to 790. The result is an increase in inefficiency. Thus, our interpretation of the statistical analysis relies on either random effects or population average models. When the export of primary commodities as a share of GDP reached 26% of GDP (population-average model), the chance of democides is at its lowest level. Thus, democides and exports of mineral commodities are negatively related before the threshold and positively related afterward. In other words, the probability of democides is likely when export of minerals as a share of GDP reaches a minimum of 26%, holding other factors constant.

[**Table 1 about here**]

The random effects and population-averaged models also support our hypothesis related to poor economic performance. The signs of economic growth and GDP per capita are both negative. In sum, economic performance is related to a decline of democides. Poor economic

performance is thus likely to increase the chance of democides. Military burden and population density are negative. The results thus reject our two hypotheses of positive correlation between democides and the explanatory variables. However, they are not statistically different from zero.

Table 2 accounts for regime type in explaining democides. The signs of mineral exports as a share of GDP and economic growth remain the same as expected. The fixed effects model shows that GDP per capita is positive as in Table 1, but it is now statistically significant. Although we rely on the other two models, the positive sign in fixed effects model needs some explanation. We believe that "economic development is potentially a two-edged sword for mass killings of civilians by a the state" (Easterly, Gatti, and Kurlat 2005, 4). On the one hand, economic development can lead to increased education and more tolerance of outgroups. One the other hand, economic development brings advances in technology and social organization that lower the costs of mass killings (Easterly, Gatti, and Kurlat 2005, 4).

However, economic growth and GDP per capita are no longer statistically significant after controlling for regime type in random effects and population-averaged models. One possible explanation is the fact that democracy and economic performance may be related. We ran vector inflation factor to assess multicollinearity and our result indicates a VIF of 8.5, which is below the threshold of 10. Moreover, the correlation between democracy and economic growth was .17 and not statistically significant at .10 level; correlation between democracy and GDP per capita was .14. Thus, democracy seems to be a major deterrent of democides. In sum, rent-seeking and democracy emerge as the most powerful factors to explain democides in our sample of 39 countries from 1960 to 2002.

5. Conclusion

This paper undertakes preliminary analysis to increase our understanding of state terrorism. Using lags, we find that rent-seeking is a major factor in explaining democides or the murder of people by the state. More specifically, leaders are likely to tolerate dissension up to a point; however, as rent-seeking activities or as exports of minerals reach a threshold of 26%, state terrorism tends to increase. On the other hand, past democides and economic growth of GDP reduce the incidence of democides, the murder of people by the state. These results provide empirical support for some of our hypotheses. We found no support of military burden and population pressures on land as explanations of democides. Although our findings indicate that democide has important economic sources, they also show that democratic institutions are critical to reduce the likelihood of democides.

Our preliminary results only call for further research on democides to provide a more complete explanation for the phenomenon. First, we need a regional analysis that further divides the globe into sub-regions, as explanations of democides may vary substantially across regions, given differential distributions of natural resources and regime types. Second, future research needs a better measurement of democides. Annual data on democides are scarce. Much can be gained by using a more elaborate interval data rather than a binary variable of democides.

The paper makes some theoretical and policy contributions, extending a growing literature on the adverse effect of poor economic performance. In addition, it highlights the importance of a policy to diversify the economy to reduce the probability of state terrorism. Moreover, contrary to Collier and Hoeffler (1998:568-569), our research indicates that it is mineral resources, not primary commodities generally, that increase the incidence of state violence. Finally, democracy seems to be an essential precondition to guarantee human rights

protection and thus to minimize state power because "power kills and absolute power kills absolutely" (Rummel 1997, 42).

Table 1 Political Economy Model of Democides$_t$ (State Terrorism) 1960 - 2002

Variables	Fixed Effects	Random Effects	Robust Population-Averaged
Intercept		-1.0074	-1.4269**
		(.9583)	(.8476)
Democides$_{t-1}$	4.6112***	5.6259***	5.9986***
	(.3142)	(.2947)	(.2906)
Mineral Exports$_{t-1}$	-52.1681***	-13.9409**	-12.0918**
	(17.0300)	(7.3449)	(6.3370)
Mineral Exports$^2{}_{t-1}$	60.3196***	24.2928*	23.1388**
	(25.1726)	(15.8575)	(13.6434)
Military Burden$_{t-1}$	-.8583	-.7972	-.8322
	(2.6045)	(1.9329)	(2.0189)
Economic Growth$_{t-1}$	-.0582***	-.0232*	-.0203
	(.0234)	(.0153)	(.0166)
Log GDP per Capita$_{t-1}$	.7587	-.2121*	-.1822*
	(.6564)	(.1397)	(.1209)
Population Density$_{t-1}$	-.0582	-.0002	-.0002
	(.0234)	(.0019)	(.0016)
Wald χ^2	494.60***	372.81***	441.28***
LL	-134.839	-193.20	
ρ		2.53E-07	
N	790	939	939

*, **, *** stand for p < .10, p < .05, and p <.01 one tailed test. Standard errors are in parentheses below the estimates.

Table 2. Political Economy Model of Democides$_t$ (State Terrorism) Controlled for Regime Type, 1960 - 2002

Variables	Fixed Effects	Random Effects	Robust Population-Averaged
Intercept		-1.9906**	-2.3566***
		(1.0060)	(.8922)
Democides$_{t-1}$	4.6312***	5.6893***	6.0710***
	(.3247)	(.3050)	(.2984)
Mineral Exports$_{t-1}$	-46.6730***	-14.0097**	-10.8738**
	(17.4845)	(7.8217)	(6.5153)
Mineral Exports$^2_{t-1}$	52.4020**	24.8216*	21.4389*
	(26.4092)	(16.5863)	(13.9198)
Military Burden$_{t-1}$	-.9450	-.9285	-1.1972
	(2.7401)	(2.1614)	(2.4004)
Economic Growth$_{t-1}$	-.0483**	-.0128	-.0092
	(.0232)	(.0173)	(.0188)
Log GDP per Capita$_{t-1}$	1.1531**	-.0869	-.0655
	(.6898)	(.1446)	(.1247)
Population Density$_{t-1}$	.0086	.0002	-.0002
	(.0078)	(.0020)	(.0017)
Democracy$_{t-1}$	-.0263***	-.0270***	-.0267***
	(.0076)	(.0068)	(.0070)
Wald χ^2	506.32***	358.96***	437.39***
LL	-128.979	-185.77	
ρ		2.53E-07	
N	790	939	939

*, **, *** stand for p < .10, p < .05, and p <.01 one tailed test. Standard errors are in parentheses below the estimates.

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