



Remittances and Democratization

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Do remittances stabilize autocracies? Remittances—money sent by foreign workers to individuals in their home country—differ from other sources of external non-tax revenue, such as foreign aid, because they accrue directly to individuals and thus raise the incomes of households. We argue that remittances increase the likelihood of democratic transition by undermining electoral support for autocratic incumbents in party-based regimes. Remittances therefore make voters less dependent on state transfers. As a result, autocracies that rely heavily on the broad-based distribution of spoils for their survival, namely party-based regimes, should prove especially vulnerable to increases in remittances. Evidence consistent with this argument suggests that remittances promote democratization in some dictatorships.

An immense, but inconclusive, body of research exists on the economic consequences of immigration for receiving countries.¹ Some scholars examine the political consequences of immigration in advanced countries. They explore, for example, the circumstances under which immigration leads to conflict (Dancygier 2010); the challenges to democracies of ascendant anti-immigrant groups (Messina 2007); and the risks of cultural backlash (Huntington 2004; Collier 2013). Furthermore, the economic impact of remittances—the transfer of funds associated with out-migration—has also been the subject of enormous attention from economists and policymakers (Kapur and McHale 2005, 2012; World Bank 2006b). However, the other side of this phenomenon, the political consequences of out-migration for sending countries, remains largely understudied (Meseguer and Burgess 2014). Only recently have political scientists started to ask questions about how out-migration influences political change, and in particular democratization (Kapur 2010; Moses 2011; Pfütze 2012). Our paper addresses this second side of migration. It examines the macropolitical

consequences of remittance income for the survival of autocratic regimes, focusing on the prospects of democratic transition.

We show that remittances can advance democracy in some autocratic contexts. Worker remittances erode electoral support for autocratic incumbents in party-based regimes by undermining their capacity to mobilize and buy support through the delivery of goods and services to individuals. The democratizing effect of remittances should therefore prove most consequential in regimes that rely primarily on the broad-based delivery of patronage and public goods to retain electoral support from a large coalition—namely dominant-party-regimes.

The size of remittance flows and the fact that this income comes from outside the receiving country lead some scholars to compare remittances with other revenue windfalls, such as foreign aid and oil. Numerous studies find that foreign aid and oil rents may make autocracies more resilient by providing rulers with non-tax revenues that reduce the need for taxation and that generate revenue for purchasing political support or repressing dissent.² Some studies similarly suggest that remittances negatively influence democracy via the same mechanisms, such as patronage or rentierism, through which oil rents and aid harm democratic development.³ Recent research also argues that governments use remittances to divert resources that they then use to finance patronage. Consistent with this claim, Abdih, Chami, Dagher, and

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¹ See, for example, the review by Orrenius and Zavodny (2012).

² On the negative effect of non-tax revenue, oil, and aid on democracy and authoritarian survival see, among many others, Ross (2001); Smith (2004); Ulfelder (2007); Djankov, Montalvo, and Reynal-Querol (2008); Smith (2008); Kono and Montinola (2009); Morrison (2009); Omgba (2009); and Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2010).

³ Recent research, however, has begun to question the empirical foundations of the political aid curse, finding that aid is associated with a higher likelihood of democratic transition during the post-Cold War period (Dunning 2004; Wright 2009; Bermeo 2011). Further, studies that account for country-specific factors question the empirical link between oil and democratization (Haber and Menaldo 2011; Wright, Frantz, and Geddes 2014).

Montiel (2012) find that remittances lead to lower institutional quality and worsen corruption, while Ahmed (2012) finds that aid and remittances stabilize autocratic governments.⁴

Yet, remittances differ from aid and oil in ways which, we argue, make them distinct from other sources of foreign revenue. First, remittances are private transfers sent by individuals living and working abroad; migrants, not foreign governments or companies, are therefore the main source of remittances. Further, remittance transfers, unlike natural-resource revenue or fungible aid, do not accrue to governments but instead flow directly to individuals, households, and organizations within a country. We build on the implications of these differences to explain how remittances influence political change in recipient countries.

We show that in some contexts, remittances advance political development by fostering democratization. Worker remittances undermine the capacity of autocratic regimes to mobilize electoral support through the delivery of goods and services to voters. The democratizing effect of remittances should therefore prove strongest in dominant-party-regimes that rely primarily on the broad-based delivery of patronage and public goods to retain electoral support from a large coalition. Although other dictatorships also use patronage, we expect remittances to have a weaker influence on political change in these regimes because they generally depend on smaller support coalitions and thus rely less on the long-term transfer of state resources to large groups within society. Further, many non-party-based regimes do not allow organized opposition parties to directly challenge the regime by competing for power in regular elections. Using data on 137 autocratic regimes from 1975 to 2009, we find that remittances increase the likelihood of a democratic transition in dominant-party-regimes. To explore the mechanism linking remittances to autocratic regime survival, we examine how remittances influence electoral behavior in autocracies. We find evidence that remittances are associated with lower electoral support for incumbent regimes.

The Political Consequences of Remittances

Remittance flows to developing countries amounted to \$325 billion in 2010, according to the World Bank, and continue to grow.⁵ Foreign remittances have exceeded official aid flows and non-FDI private capital inflows to low- and middle-income countries since the late 1990s (Chami, Barajas, Cosimano, Fullenkamp, Gapen, and Montiel 2008:12). We see the same patterns in autocratic regimes. Further, remittance inflows are on average less volatile than other non-tax resources—such as oil rents and foreign aid.⁶ Figure 1 shows that average oil income in autocracies remained steady through the 1990s and increased in the past decade as oil prices rose. While remittances also rose with oil prices in the 2000s, foreign aid to autocracies has not evidenced the same spike. The rise of remittances in the past two decades means that some countries' economies have become increasingly

dependent on these flows. In countries as diverse as Albania, Lesotho, Haiti, and Jordan, remittances constitute more than 15 percent of GDP. Do these flows have political consequences for receiving countries?

Relying on previous sociological and anthropological work, political scientists now explore how patterns of transnational engagement influence political attitudes and behaviors in home countries as well as how emigrants exert "voice" after "exit" (Hirschman 1978; Goodman and Hiskey 2008; Iskander 2010; Careja and Emmenegger 2012; Mesequer and Burgess 2014). Abundant case studies show that emigrants engage in the politics of their home countries (Levitt 1998; Kapur 2010). Yet, we know little about the macropolitical consequences of this transnational engagement for sending countries, as most studies focus on one country—mainly Mexico—or use individual-level data.

One group of studies uses survey data that asks respondents about their migratory experience—including receiving remittances—and political behavior. Other research examines how remittances affect electoral outcomes, such as voting for incumbent parties. Whereas the first set of work finds that emigration has a demobilizing effect, the second shows that remittances generally reduce electoral support for incumbent parties and thus may further political change. Extant research therefore associates remittances with both decreased political mobilization and increased political change at the same time. In this section, we review the mechanisms for these two opposing effects and then, in the next section, discuss how these mechanisms influence the prospects of democratization in different autocratic contexts.

Using a variety of surveys based on Mexican respondents, Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow (2010), Goodman and Hiskey (2008), and Germano (2013) find that emigration experience reduces certain types of political behavior, such as voting, talking about politics, punishing incumbent parties in elections, and seeking political information. Two mechanisms may explain these findings. First, Goodman and Hiskey (2008:170) posit that having relatives abroad and receiving remittances reorient individuals toward transnational political activities as they rely more on families and less on the state to satisfy their needs. Second, and more importantly, remittances may insulate recipient households from domestic economic conditions and thus reduce economic grievances. Remittances usually accrue to households in countercyclical patterns, which help to smooth domestic economic shocks and consumption volatility. This might reduce dissatisfaction with the incumbent regime and preclude political change, perhaps by lowering the risk of civil war (Regan and Frank 2014:5–8).

In contrast, other studies contend that remittances foster political change, and even democratization, via three main mechanisms: an income effect, contentious mobilization, and social learning. First, remittances increase recipient households' income, which in turn augment resources necessary for political participation, such as time and money. One version of this argument posits that additional non-labor income in the form of remittances makes individuals less dependent on the state's clientelistic spending, prompting individuals to reduce their electoral support for incumbent parties or to engage in other forms of participation such as protests. For example, using municipal election data in Mexico, Pfütze (2012, 2014) tests the social learning and the income mechanism but only finds support for the latter: Remittances reduce turnout for the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in municipalities

⁴ However, Tyburski (2012) reports a negative association between remittances and corruption in Mexican states.

⁵ This figure only includes transfers made through formal channels. See the World Bank's "Outlook for Remittance Flows 2011–2013."

⁶ Since 1970, for example, the average standard deviation of remittances within autocratic countries is \$15 per capita. This figure is \$25 per capita for aid and more than \$500 per capita for oil income.

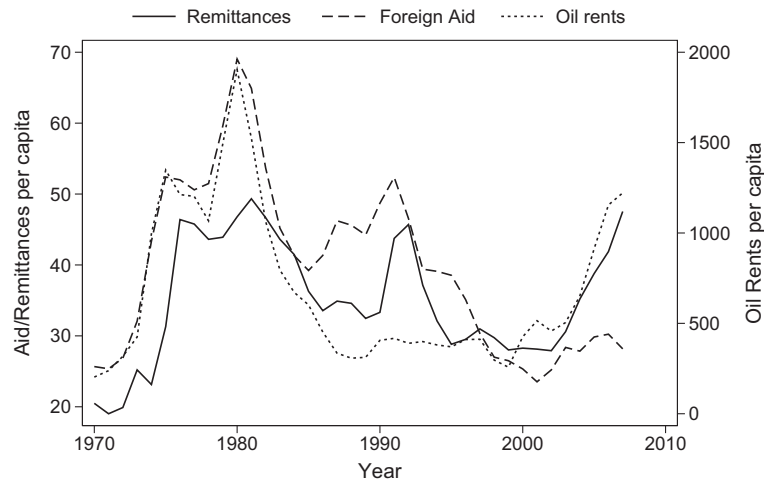


Fig. 1. Foreign Income in Autocracies. Average per capita level of foreign income across all autocracies in Geddes et al. (2014b). Figures depict the two-year moving average of constant US dollars. Aid and remittances data from World Bank (2010) and oil rents data from Ross (2008).

where the PRI was entrenched. Similarly, Diaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Weingast (2003) show that a higher percentage of a municipal population living in the United States—a proxy for remittances—is associated with municipality defection from the PRI and voting for the opposition.

Second, remittances may support particular candidates and parties in receiving countries or finance protest activities back home.⁷ Remittances thus influence domestic politics in sending countries when they directly fund opposition political groups. Migrant diasporas, for example, are a key source of financing for some domestic rebel groups, which increases the feasibility of an armed uprising and, as a result, raises the likelihood of civil conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 2004: 565, 568). Using survey data from sub-Saharan Africa, Dionne, Inman, and Montinola (2014) show that individuals who report receiving remittances are more likely to participate in protests but less likely to vote than those who report receiving no remittances. In more institutionalized polities, remittances finance legal opposition parties and thus increase their capacity to challenge the incumbents in elections.⁸ Others find that emigrant remittances increase the resources available for collective challenges to the state, increasing the risk of civil war (Miller and Ritter 2014).

Third, remittances may involve the transfer of “social remittances,” which consist of the flow of new ideas, values, and behaviors from migrants to their sending countries (Levitt 1998). The transfer of social remittances occurs through long-distance cross-border interactions, face-to-face cross-border interactions, and migration information networks (Levitt 1998; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010; Pérez-Armendáriz 2014). Thus, contact with emigrant relatives may increase participation and dissent through a process of social learning via the spillover of civic and democratic values, which alter the distribution of political preferences and behaviors in sending communities (Pfütze 2012, 2014; Pérez-Armendáriz 2014). For

example, Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow (2010) find that knowing migrants—whether friends or relatives—increases political participation as well as dissatisfaction with incumbents in Mexico.

Most current research focuses on how remittances influence politics in new democracies and specifically Mexico (Goodman and Hiskey 2008; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010; Tyburski 2012; Germano 2013; Pérez-Armendáriz 2014; Pfütze 2014).⁹ However, research on the political influence of remittances need not be restricted to democratic settings (Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2003; Pfütze 2012). The only paper that examines remittances and macropolitical change using a broad sample of autocracies is Ahmed (2012), which examines two types of foreign income together: aid and remittances.¹⁰ This study posits that autocracies use aid to finance patronage (an income effect) and that as remittances increase private consumption, governments divert expenditures from the provision of welfare to private spending (a substitution effect). Both mechanisms result in extra resources for regimes to fund patronage. However, as noted above, inflows of aid—if fungible—accrue directly to the state while individual remittances accrue largely to households. Hence, these two income flows may have distinct (even opposite) effects on democratization. Moreover, by focusing on how autocracies differ from democracies, this research ignores the question of how regimes in different autocratic contexts benefit from or are harmed by remittance flows. The next section discusses the proposed mechanisms linking remittances to the prospects of democratic change in different autocratic regimes and advances a theory to explain why remittances further democracy in party-based dictatorships.

Remittances and Autocratic Regime Survival

Are some regimes more vulnerable to workers’ remittances? Autocratic regimes differ along many dimensions, such as the size of their support coalition (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, and Morrow 2003), the group from which elite supporters are selected (Geddes 1999), and

⁷ See Burgess (2014) for a study of the determinants of migrants’ political engagement in their home countries’ politics.

⁸ Indeed, recent cross-national research demonstrates that emigrants send more money home at election time in developing countries, especially during multiparty contests (O’Mahony 2013; Nyblade and O’Mahony 2014). However, these studies do not clarify whether the funds go to finance the incumbents, the legal opposition, or other types of groups.

⁹ See Meseguer and Burgess (2014) for a review.

¹⁰ See Bearce and Laks Hutnick (2011) for a discussion of the impact of immigration on democratization.

the extent to which they co-opt potential opponents with policy concessions (Gandhi 2008). These characteristics influence a regime's durability and its vulnerability to domestic and foreign shocks. We argue that foreign remittances reduce citizens' dependence on government transfers and public goods and thus destabilize autocracies. By giving individuals and households an exit option from the regime's patronage network, remittances sever the clientelistic link between voters and incumbent dictators causing defections from their support coalition. Further, by increasing the resources of opposition parties and groups, remittances may increase the capacity of these parties to challenge the regime in autocratic elections.

These mechanisms, we argue, are more likely to occur in dictatorships that hold multiparty elections regularly and rely primarily on broad-based distribution of goods to purchase the loyalty of large coalitions and deter investment in the opposition. Concretely, remittances should reduce voters' dependency on state-delivered goods and thus undermine dominant-party-regimes' capacity to mobilize political support.

Dominant-party-regimes are dictatorships in which "a party organization exercises some power over the leader at least part of the time, controls the career paths of officials, organizes the distribution of benefits to supporters, and mobilizes citizens to vote and show support for party leaders in other ways" (Geddes 1999:124). The latter two features help us understand how remittances weaken these regimes. Dominant-party dictatorships tend to have broader and deeper support coalitions than other regimes. Their survival therefore depends not only on institutionalized power-sharing agreements and the provision of private goods to top party officials and other elites (patronage), but also on the delivery of (often local) public goods to large segments of the population (clientelism) aimed at mobilizing mass support (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003:87; Magaloni and Kricheli 2010; Malesky, Abrami, and Zheng 2011). Thus, parties not only serve to channel elites' demands and credibly share power with significant groups, but also work as large clientelistic machines through which benefits are distributed in an effort to mobilize supporters (Magaloni 2006:15, 65–66; Greene 2007:40, 2010; Pepinsky 2007:143; Levitsky and Way 2010:66–67).¹¹ The party's ability to politicize public resources, transforming them into patronage goods, enhances its capacity to organize the distribution of benefits to supporters (Greene 2010:808). This usually results in party-regimes having large public sectors (Desai, Olofgard, and Yousef 2009:111; Greene 2010).

The party monopoly over state resources makes it possible for the regime to control access to public housing, social services, property, fertilizers, subsidies, scholarships, jobs, and even food. And, most importantly, it allows the incumbent to make this access conditional on support for the regime party. This ensures that important segments of society depend on the regime economically (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). Benefits to citizens also take the form of private goods. For example, the People's Action Party's (PAP) public housing programs in Singapore are a key source of support and votes for the regime since 1960. During elections in Malaysia, workers from the ruling party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), visit rural households to dispense cash payments to

supporters and deter opponent mobilization (Pepinsky 2007:144). But most commonly, the benefits delivered from dominant parties take the form of targeted public goods and services. In Malaysia, federal politicians distributed grants for rural development to local clients to reward support for UMNO (Pepinsky 2007:146). Blaydes (2011:74) shows that during Mubarak's rule in Egypt, areas that voted for the opposition saw little improvement in sewerage and water coverage between the mid-1980s and 1990s. The PRI in Mexico systematically directed PRONASOL funds, mainly consisting of public works targeting municipalities, to ensure voters' loyalty in contested municipalities and withdrawn from those supporting the opposition (Magaloni 2006:68, Chapter 4).

Individuals receive targeted benefits and public goods and services in exchange for supporting the regime. This support may entail tacit acquiescence or party membership, but also often involves endorsing the ruling party in elections. Elections are not uncommon in dictatorships; indeed, a majority of dictatorships held multiparty elections in the past decade (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Hyde and Marinov 2012). Almost all dominant-party-regimes hold regular national elections, and these regimes hold elections more frequently than other types of autocracies (Geddes 2003). Autocrats use elections to deal with different kinds of threats and intend to win them (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). Consequently, among other strategies such as voter intimidation and restrictions on opposition parties, party-regimes exploit their resource advantage to fund clientelistic practices—where ruling parties exchange votes for material benefits and services—and to enjoy a privileged economic and media position during electoral campaigns (Dixit and Londegran 1996; Magaloni 2006; Greene 2010).

The previous section identified three mechanisms through which remittances may foster political change: severing clientelistic links between citizens and the ruling party; increasing funding for opposition parties and groups; and social remittances, or the spillover of civic and democratic values. Our hypothesis suggests that remittances should undermine autocratic survival in dominant-party-regimes principally through the income effect of remittances and possibly through an increase in resources available to opposition parties. We argue that remittances weaken party-regimes by reducing citizens' dependence on clientelistic transfers and thus increase their economic autonomy, namely their "ability to earn a living independent of the state" (McMann 2006:28). By increasing private income, remittances reduce the marginal utility of state-provided targeted benefits as well as local public goods and services.

This argument builds on the stylized fact that remittances increase household consumption to acquire goods and thus represent a substitute for goods provided by the regime. Existing research shows that recipient households use remittance income to finance private consumption but also as investments in education, health, agriculture, and business (World Bank 2006a,b; Fajnzylber and López 2007:23–33; Chami et al. 2008). Additionally, remittances enable citizens to obtain local public goods that substitute for government welfare and infrastructure expenditures. For example, Adida and Girod (2011:17) find that Mexican households use remittances to purchase access to public services, such as sanitation and clean water, undermining the state monopoly on the provision of these goods. In Yemen, during the 1970s, local cooperatives used remittances to invest in road construction,

¹¹ As Magaloni and Kricheli (2010:124) and Levitsky and Way (2010:62) note, both functions are interwoven: Mobilization of mass support is essential to deter defections from within the elite.

schools, clinics, and farming projects (Chaudhry 1989:133–134). In Senegal, migrant associations (*dahiras*) use remittances to fund projects and social services in their communities of origin “without having to rely on state intervention” (Diedhiou 2011:6). These examples suggest that remittances provide households and individuals with an “exit” from the regime’s clientelistic network (Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2003; Ahmed 2011; Pfutze 2012).

Two requisite conditions underpin the logic of the income effect: (1) Remittance recipients care about ideological preferences, and (2) the regime cannot substantially expand its budget by extracting revenue from remittances, which they then use to buy political support from remittance households. The first condition is a standard assumption in models of clientelism, where voter utility is a positive function of income and a negative function of support for the regime/incumbent party as captured by the distance between their own ideological position and that of the party they support. Hence, clientelistic transfers decrease (to zero at the limit) as an individual’s support for the regime increases or as the voter’s ideology moves closer to the incumbent party’s position. Transfers, in these models, are the price the regime pays to alter the individuals’ political behavior.¹² As Magaloni and Kricheli (2010:128) argue, “[c]itizens with alternative sources of income can better afford to make ‘ideological investments’ in democratization and oppose the regime.” Likewise, McMann (2006:28) posits that “economic autonomy” explains citizens’ willingness to challenge local authorities instead of self-censoring their preferences. Further, clientelistic networks easily trap poorer voters, as lower incomes reduce the price the regime must pay in exchange for support. Substantial evidence suggests that remittances benefit the poor and help reduce poverty.¹³ By increasing income and thus the monetary value of transfers needed to buy support, remittances weaken state clientelism, lowering the marginal utility of such transfers and increasing the importance of ideological preferences in voting and other political decisions.

The second condition is that the regime does not substantially augment its resources by capturing remittances, which are then used to offset the increase in the price of continued support. Numerous studies agree that remittances are largely nontaxable (Chaudhry 1989; Abdih et al. 2012; Ahmed 2012; Pfutze 2012, 2014). The World Bank (2006a:93), for example, notes that “[m]ost remittance-receiving countries today do not impose taxes on incoming remittances.” In practice, governments rarely tax remittances directly because they are highly elastic to the tax rate as remitters can easily evade formal controls (Eckstein 2010). Thus, directly taxing remit-

tances is likely to result in fewer remittances sent through formal channels (Freund and Spatafora 2008). For this reason, we follow the extant research in suggesting that remittances are generally not taxable and do not substantially increase nondemocratic governments’ revenues.¹⁴

Empirical tests of this argument in Mexico show that remittances decrease votes cast for the incumbent and benefit the opposition by weakening of clientelistic ties (Pfutze 2012, 2014). Dahou and Foucher (2009:17) concur, noting that “[t]he shift of the Senegalese economy from groundnuts to migration and its increasing dependence on resources generated abroad could be seen as the final stage in the process of ending the hegemony once enjoyed by the state over Senegalese society.” Senegal transitioned to democracy in 2000 when the incumbent Socialist Party lost the presidential election. However, we lack systematic tests of this argument for a large number of autocracies.

Thus, we expect remittances to *increase the likelihood of democratic transition*. We should find the strongest support for this expectation in dominant-party dictatorships as opposed to other autocracies because the former typically (i) have organized opportunities for collective action and the expression of dissent, particularly via elections and (ii) have broader and deeper support coalitions comprising poor households in which we expect the income effect of remittances to operate most strongly. To explore the proposed mechanism linking remittances to democratization, we further examine whether remittances alter electoral behavior in autocracies in a way that punishes the incumbent.

First, weakening clientelism permits individuals to revise their evaluation of the government and express their true preferences about the regime. When the utility of registering disapproval of the regime—given remittances—is larger than that of supporting it, expressing dissent cannot be too costly. On one hand, dominant-party-regimes are both less repressive (Davenport 2007) and more likely to have regular, institutionalized mechanisms for leadership turnover that typically occur through elections (Geddes 2003). If the ruling party loses an election, this generally leads to a democratic transition. In other regimes, in contrast, destabilizing dissent more often entails contentious collective action (Ulfelder 2005).

Second, dominant-party-regimes have broader winning coalitions than other autocracies and politicize public resources to mobilize support. To retain power, the regime party typically wins elections. Broader support coalitions in these dictatorships are more likely to contain poorer households that rely on remittances. In many countries, the share of households that receive remittances is substantial.¹⁵ Further, the positive income effect

¹² See, for example, Pfutze (2014) for a formalization of this argument.

¹³ Fajnzylber and López (2007) show that Mexican remittance recipients are predominantly poor, with 61 percent of the households that report receiving remittances falling in the first quintile of non-remittances income, whereas only 4 percent of them are in the top quintile. Further, this report states that “once we take into account remittances income, recipient households significantly climb the income ladder. In fact, after we take into account the role of remittances, only 10 percent of the households that receive them belong to the lowest quintile of the income distribution. In contrast, on the basis of total income, more than 30 percent of the households receiving remittances would now be in the highest income quintile. Thus, this aggregate analysis indicates that remittances seem to have a positive impact on the incomes of the poor” (Fajnzylber and López 2007:33). Adams and Page (2005) also show that remittances reduce the level and severity of poverty in developing countries, while other cross-country studies provide similar evidence (IMF 2005; Ratha, Mohapatra, Özden, Plaza, Shaw, and Shimeles 2011).

¹⁴ Our analysis in Appendix E using a sample of autocracies finds no evidence that remittances increase tax revenue.

¹⁵ Data for some relevant cases in our sample suggest as much. More than 25 percent of Haiti’s households received remittances in 2001 (Fajnzylber and López 2007). Survey data from 2004 in Mexico indicate 21 percent of Mexicans received remittances (González, Schiavon, Crow, and Maldonado 2011:99–100). More than 60 percent of those interviewed affirmed having a relative living in the United States, and one-third reported that remittances represent half or more of total household income. In Senegal, recent data suggest that 32 percent of households receive remittances regularly (Orozco, Burgess, and Massardier 2010). According to a recent Gallup survey, by 2009–2010 the percentage of households receiving remittances in Mexico was 7 percent; 17 percent in Paraguay; 7 percent in Serbia; 22 percent in Senegal; 8 percent in Kenya; 9 percent in Sri Lanka; 22 percent in Niger; and roughly 5 percent in Indonesia (<http://bit.ly/k5plfa> [accessed July 28, 2013]). Finally, official remittance figures may underestimate the true number due to the extensive use of informal channels of sending remittances (World Bank 2006a).

of remittances may not be limited to direct recipients, as foreign income can have multiplier effects leading to improvements in the living conditions of non-migrant households as well (World Bank 2006a: 70, 95). These spillover effects increase “environmental economic autonomy” (McMann 2006:31–34). Through the income mechanism, remittances undermine clientelistic ties and make some individuals and localities more likely to manifest disapproval or withdraw their support for the regime party. Elections reflect the loss of political support from the coalition, as a decline in turnout for the incumbent party may lead to electoral victory for opposition parties, as occurred in Mexico and Senegal in 2000.

Other dictatorships—particularly personalist regimes—also rely on the distribution of benefits to supporters, but they are more likely to have a relatively small coalition comprised mainly of individuals with family and ethnic ties to the leader (Geddes 2003:72–74). In contrast, party-regimes more often co-opt large groups of potential opponents into the support coalition or rely on large preexisting organizations such as labor unions or independence movements (Bratton and van de Walle 1994; Geddes 1999; Smith 2005). In personalist dictatorships, which typically have smaller support coalitions than party dictatorships, this group is less likely to contain poorer individuals whose main income comes from remittances. The political support of relatively low-income supporters is therefore less likely to be necessary to retain power in non-party-based regimes. Further, benefits accruing to each member of a personalist coalition are private goods and thus substantially larger (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003:129–132). It is therefore less likely that utility from remittances exceeds the benefits obtained by supporting the regime. Thus, even though patronage politics is central to the logic of personalist rule, we do not expect remittances to undermine the patronage links between regime supporters and the dictator in personalist regimes.¹⁶ In military regimes, patronage may be present too but it is not the main instrument such regimes use to retain power. Rather, repression and institutional power-sharing between branches or factions within the military are the most significant instruments (Davenport 2007; Geddes, Frantz, and Wright 2014a).

There may be other mechanisms through which remittances enhance the prospects of democratization, particularly in dominant-party-regimes. However, these mechanisms are likely to strengthen our argument. For example, migrant diasporas directly influence political events in sending countries by disseminating information, framing political issues, financing candidates and parties, as well as by lobbying foreign governments and international organizations. As O’Mahony (2013:805) notes, “[p]olitical contributions may be given directly to parties by migrants or passed on to politicians by migrants’ families.” Thus, remittances work in conjunction with migrant diasporas that help finance and mobilize domestic opposition groups.

The influence of augmented political resources for opposition mobilization should differ across autocratic contexts as well. Regular elections in dominant-party-regimes often pit legal opposition parties against the incumbent. The ruling party wins these elections because it enjoys resource advantages thanks to its

monopoly access to public resources and state-controlled institutions such as the media (Magaloni 2006: Chapter 1; Greene 2007:5–6). Excluded from such resources, opposition parties benefit from foreign contributions, increasing their ability to compete for office, thus facilitating democratic transition. Hence, in dominant-party-regimes, remittances undermine the resource advantage ruling parties enjoy by providing opposition groups with funds they are unable to generate domestically.

For example, in Ethiopia, opposition parties that boycotted the 1995 and 2000 elections won 172 seats in the 2005 parliamentary election, while the ruling EPRDF retained “only” 327 seats—more than 150 fewer seats than it had won in the 2000 election. As Lyons (2007:540) emphasizes, “[t]he two main opposition coalitions that participated in the May 2005 elections had clear roots in the diasporas of North America and Europe.” In fact, most of the campaign funding for one of the main opposition coalition groups, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy, came from diaspora communities (Arriola 2008:120).

In contrast, in regimes that are less likely to have regular and competitive mechanisms for leadership succession, remittances may simply increase the capacity of outside groups to forcibly oust the regime. In autocratic contexts where opposition groups and parties are banned, diaspora funds thus finance insurgencies (Collier and Hoeffler 2004).¹⁷ While remittances in these cases may increase the prospects of a forced, or even violent, regime change, these regime ousters usually lead to a subsequent autocracy and not to democracy (Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014b).

Finally, emigration also fosters social learning by transmitting ideas and information about social norms, including democratic values, to those left behind (Levitt 1998; Pérez-Armendáriz 2014). However, the social learning mechanism would operate provided emigrants settle in advanced, well-governed democracies, which is far from the rule in many developing countries (World Bank 2011:12). Further, emigration—rather than economic remittances—should be a better measure of transferring values because migration is more likely to reflect political preferences as citizens leave when they dislike the state of political affairs at home (Hiskey, Montalvo, and Orcés 2014). Thus, their departure may decrease turnout for the incumbent (Pfütze 2014). Addressing the multiple mechanisms through which emigration may influence democratization requires time-series data on emigration, but existing data are low quality, with poor coverage for most autocratic countries.¹⁸ Yet, we acknowledge that emigration can be a potentially confounding variable and show that the influence of remittances is robust to controlling for net migration, which is the best available measure given our research design.

¹⁷ Available data on formal remittances are less likely to capture the informal funds accruing to outside groups from diasporas (Regan and Frank 2014). In Appendix Table A-6, we test whether formal remittances are associated with an increased likelihood of autocratic transition; as expected, we find no significant effect. To account for the fact that remittances may facilitate political protests, we control for the occurrence of protest events in some specifications.

¹⁸ Only a few published studies account for emigration empirically (Goodman and Hiskey 2008; Pfütze 2014). This research relies on a cross section of municipalities, which allows the authors to use census data. We cannot follow the same strategy with time-series cross-country data.

¹⁶ We confirm these expectations about the influence of remittances in personalist dictatorships in Appendix Table A-5.

Data and Methods

Whereas prior research explores how remittances influence government change, our focus is democratic transition.¹⁹ These regime transitions occur when the ruling elite lose power and the new government that replaces the fallen regime is democratic. When some autocratic regimes fall, they are replaced by a new autocracy, as was the case during the 1979 Iranian Revolution when a theocratic regime overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty. We do not examine these types of autocratic regime failures because they rarely come about via an election, which is the proposed mechanism through which we expect remittances to influence autocratic stability. More importantly, the measure of democratic transition excludes government changes that occur during the lifetime of an autocratic regime. “Government change” in many autocracies occurs when one leader replaces another via an institutionalized mechanism for rotating the leadership of the regime. When these events do not coincide with regime failure, they are often successful maneuvers by incumbent elites to prolong their rule and should not be interpreted as political instability.

In Mexico, for example, the long dominant PRI loses its monopoly on power when an opposition candidate won the presidency in 2000. During much of its nearly eight decades of rule, the PRI selected a new leader every 6 years. These leadership changes are coded as “government change”²⁰ in some data sets, but they are not a reliable measure of autocratic instability because they conflate the leader and the regime in an autocracy where selection of new leaders is a regime feature that enhances its chances of survival.

Similarly, the natural death of a leader may not threaten the regime with collapse, even though naming a new leader often constitutes “government change.” Monarchies, for example, have established mechanisms for leadership succession within the royal family. Because these regimes have dynastic political structures that institutionalize the selection of new leaders without jeopardizing the regime itself, they are relatively resilient (Herb 1999:40–49; Menaldo 2012:711). In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the monarchy continues in power despite “government changes” that occurred after King Khalid died of a heart attack in 1982 and after King Fahd succumbed to pneumonia in 2005.²¹ The data-generating process we model excludes natural deaths of the leader when the regime remains in power because we do not expect remittances to influence these types of events.

To test the main hypothesis, we use data from Geddes et al. (2014b), which codes two types of regime collapse: those that lead to a transition to democracy and those that result in a new autocratic regime.²² We focus on democratic transitions and treat transitions to a new dic-

tatorship as right-censored. The dependent variable is coded 1 if a regime change that results in democracy takes place in a given year and 0 otherwise. Democratic transitions are relatively rare, occurring in 3 percent of observation years.

The main explanatory variable is *worker remittances*, from the *World Development Indicators* (2010), measured in constant US dollars per capita (logged). To avoid reverse causality, we lag this variable one year. We use this measure instead of remittances as a share of GDP because the latter is composed of two variables—remittances and GDP—making it difficult to disentangle which one influences transitions. For instance, sustained growth increases GDP, which entails a lower value of $\frac{\text{Remit}}{\text{GDP}}$. If sustained growth—and hence lower values of $\frac{\text{Remit}}{\text{GDP}}$ —influences stability in autocracies, we might observe a spurious correlation between $\frac{\text{Remit}}{\text{GDP}}$ and transitions, driven by changes in the denominator (GDP) rather than the numerator (remittances).

The other main explanatory variable is *party-regime*, which is a binary indicator from Geddes et al. (2014b). Of the 137 regimes in the sample 39, or 29 percent, are party-regimes.²³ However party-regimes comprise 41 percent of the sample observations because they tend to endure longer than many other autocracies. This variable measures concepts related to the electoral basis of regime support, such as whether the regime has a support party with local level organizations; whether the party holds competitive intraparty elections; and whether party supporters include members of more than one regional, religious, or ethnic group (Geddes 2003). In contrast, other autocracies are categorized as military, monarchical, or personalist. On one hand, military regimes and monarchies have other organizational mechanisms for securing support and managing elite conflict (that is, the military and the royal family). On the other, personalist dictatorships lack a broad-based support party, have leaders who create their own party rather than inherit a support party from their predecessor, are less likely to govern with routine elections, and if they have elections, these are more likely to resemble plebiscites than competitive contests.

To test the main hypothesis, we create an interaction term from the two main variables: *Remit* × *Party*. We test this model as well as specifications that include controls for: log GDP per capita; log Population; neighboring country democratization; and civil war—all lagged one year.²⁴ Then, we add a control variable for net migration, which helps isolate the influence of remittances while accounting for the net loss of citizens.²⁵ Next, we test a specification with controls for growth and anti-government protest.²⁶ These represent alternative channels

²³ For the reported results, we group party-hybrid regimes with pure dominant-party-regimes. The main results hold for both pure and hybrid-party-regimes (Table A-5).

²⁴ GDP per capita and population data are from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2010). Neighboring country democratization takes three values: 0 for no neighboring country democratic transitions; 1 for one transition; and 2 for 2 or more, where neighbor is defined as any autocratic country with a capital city within 4000 km of the target country. Civil war, from Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Eriksson, Sollenberg and Strand (2002), takes 3 values: 0 for no civil war; 1 for at least one low-intensity civil war; and 2 for at least one high-intensity civil war.

²⁵ Net migration data are from World Bank (2010), measured every five years. We use this measure for each of the five years following the year in which this variable is reported.

²⁶ Economic growth, measured as the 2-year lagged moving average, is from World Bank (2010). Protest data are the lagged, logged value of the number of riots, strikes, and anti-government demonstrations, from the Bank’s data set.

¹⁹ Ahmed (2012), for example, uses the variable “years in office” from the Database of Political Institutions (DPI) which marks how long the leader or ruling party has been in power.

²⁰ Government change in Mexico, according to the DPI, occurred in 1976, 1982, 1994, and 2000, but not in 1988. Notably, the PRI splits prior to the 1988 election, when Cárdenas formed the opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and the PRI used electoral fraud to win. Thus, according to this measure, instability in Mexico occurred every six years except during the year it faced its strongest electoral challenge prior to 2000.

²¹ Even the assassination of King Faisal in 1975 “did not reflect any wider split within the royal family and did not disturb the equilibrium of the institution” (Herb 1999:99).

²² As a robustness test, we replicate the main finding using the Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010) coding of democratic transition (Table A-3).

through which emigration might influence autocratic stability, independently of remittances. For example, remittances are often counter-cyclical income flows correlated with economic growth, which may independently influence regime survival. Last, we test a specification that controls for other channels of foreign influence: foreign aid, oil rents, and capital account openness. The aid and oil variables are each logged, lagged two-year moving averages, while capital account openness is an index that measures the extent of capital controls based on the information from the IMF's *Annual Report on Exchange Arrangements and Exchange Restrictions*.²⁷ We account for duration time dependence by including polynomials of regime duration (Carter and Signorino 2010).²⁸ To model global shocks to democratization as well as the global trend in remittances, we include a quadratic calendar time trend.

Finally, we address unit heterogeneity by conditioning the explanatory variables on their respective unit means \bar{X}_i . This approach is similar to directly modeling country-fixed effects. However, we opt for the unit means approach because directly including country-fixed effects forces a binary dependent variable model to drop highly stable autocratic countries that do not democratize during the sample period.²⁹ For example, a conditional logit drops stable regimes such as the monarchy in Jordan and dominant-party-regimes in Botswana and China. Our approach circumvents this issue by conditioning on the unit means of the explanatory variables as a substitute for country-fixed effects (Wooldridge 2002:487). In doing so, the interpretation of the explanatory variables is similar to the interpretation from a fixed-effects model. To address any further unit heterogeneity not captured by the fixed-effect proxy \bar{X}_i , we estimate the equation with random effects and clustered standard errors.³⁰ The specification is:

$$\begin{aligned} Pr(Y_t = 1 | Y_{t-1} = 0) = & \alpha_{j[i]} + \beta X_{i,t-1} + \gamma \bar{X}_i \\ & + \varepsilon_{i,t}; \alpha_j \sim N(\mu_x, \sigma_x^2); \varepsilon_{i,t} \sim N(0, \sigma_y^2) \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where X includes the explanatory variables, regime duration polynomials, and a time trend. After we present the results from this model, we examine a two-stage model that uses an instrument to capture exogenous variation in remittances.

Results

Table 1 presents results for testing whether remittances increase the likelihood of democratic transition. The odd-numbered columns report models with no interaction, while the even-numbered columns report results

²⁷ Foreign aid data are constant dollars per capita from World Bank (2010); oil and gas rents are constant dollars per capita from Ross (2008); and the capital account openness index is from Chinn and Ito (2008).

²⁸ Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998) show that a binary dependent variable model, such as a logit, is a similar estimator to standard duration models if we include controls for time dependence.

²⁹ In Appendix Table A-2, columns 5 and 6 show that the main result remains when using a conditional logit, even though this approach drops 49 of 88 countries. Further, we test a linear probability model with country- and year-fixed effects, reported in columns 3 and 4 in Table A-2, again with results similar to those reported in Table 1.

³⁰ By construction, the estimates of the main variables (that is, not the unit means) are the same irrespective of whether we center these variables around the mean.

that include $Remit \times Party$. The first two columns report models that include controls for party-regime, duration dependence polynomials, and a quadratic calendar time trend. The next two include four additional variables: *GDP per capita*, *Population*, *Civil war*, and *Neighbor democratization*. The next two add *Net migration*. Columns 7 and 8 add *Economic growth* and *Protest*. The final two models add *Foreign aid*, *Oil rents*, and *Capital account openness* as control variables. All models include the unit means as explanatory variables.

The results for remittances in party-regimes are consistent: a large, positive, and statistically significant coefficient for the interaction term as well as for the linear combination, $\beta_{Remit} + \beta_{Remit \times Party}$, which estimates the marginal effect of remittances in party-regimes. This indicates that remittances in party-regimes are correlated with the likelihood of democratic transition. Figure 2 shows the substantive result from the model in column 4. It depicts the simulated predicted risk of democratic transition across a range of values for remittances.³¹ In party-regimes, increasing remittances by two standard deviations around the mean raises the simulated predicted risk of transition from 0.1 percent to 2.4 percent. In other dictatorships, this increase in remittances changes the predicted risk of transition from 1.2 percent to 1.5 percent.

To test the robustness of this finding, Appendix Tables A-1 to A-3 report models that control for (i) state capacity; (ii) repression; (iii) protest interacted with remittances; (iv) using a remittance variable without population in the denominator; (v) using the lagged two-year moving average for remittances; (vi) including the year means of the explanatory variables instead of a time trend; (vii) employing a linear probability model with country- and year-fixed effects;³² (viii) with a conditional logit; (ix) dropping Latin American countries from the sample; and (x) using a different measure of democratic transition from Cheibub et al. (2010). Further, Figure A-1 shows the result is robust to the exclusion of any country with a party-based regime.

Two-stage Model

To address the concern that remittances are endogenously determined by political change in the receiving country, we use an instrument that combines information from the time trend for received remittances in high-income OECD countries as well as the share of a country's land that lies within 100 km of a coastline and the share of land area that contains fertile soil. First, we sum remittance receipts in high-income OECD countries (per capita constant dollars) in each year $WorldRemit_{i,t} = \sum_j Remit_{j,t}$, where j are high-income OECD countries, none of which are autocracies. Citizens who receive remittances in high-income OECD countries mostly come from other rich OECD countries. The World Bank, for example, estimates that 83 percent of emigrants from high-income OECD countries migrate to other high-income OECD nations (World Bank 2011:12). Thus, domestic factors in OECD countries,

³¹ The simulation sets the value of all explanatory variables (including the unit means) at their respective within-sample mean, except for the calendar time trend which is set at 1993 and regime duration which is set at the median.

³² Figure A-2 shows the result from linear probability models with country- and year-fixed effects.

TABLE 1. Remittances and democratic transition

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Remittances	0.297* (0.12)	0.236* (0.11)	0.121 (0.12)	0.059 (0.12)	0.111 (0.12)	0.056 (0.12)	0.21 (0.15)	0.163 (0.15)	0.149 (0.16)	0.108 (0.16)
Party regimes	-0.259 (0.39)	-1.307** (0.47)	-0.466 (0.40)	-1.412** (0.43)	-0.473 (0.43)	-1.454** (0.48)	-0.976+ (0.51)	-1.999** (0.59)	-1.118* (0.47)	-1.845** (0.51)
Remit × Party	0.393* (0.16)	0.377* (0.15)	0.377* (0.15)	0.377* (0.15)	0.377* (0.15)	0.377* (0.15)	0.377* (0.15)	0.375* (0.15)	0.375* (0.15)	0.323* (0.15)
Log GDP per capita		-1.191+ (0.63)	-1.176+ (0.66)	-1.185+ (0.66)	-1.176+ (0.66)	-1.185+ (0.66)	-0.51 (0.76)	-0.604 (0.78)	0.196 (0.86)	0.175 (0.86)
Log population		-5.101** (1.77)	-4.464* (1.85)	-5.282** (1.62)	-4.464* (1.85)	-4.753** (1.70)	-4.125+ (2.11)	-4.563* (1.97)	-4.259* (2.11)	-4.559* (1.94)
Civil conflict		-0.023 (0.16)	-0.026 (0.17)	-0.089 (0.18)	-0.026 (0.17)	-0.088 (0.18)	-0.095 (0.21)	-0.145 (0.22)	-0.061 (0.24)	-0.111 (0.26)
Neighbor democracy		0.094 (0.11)	0.099 (0.11)	0.105 (0.11)	0.099 (0.11)	0.114 (0.11)	0.06 (0.13)	0.08 (0.13)	0.027 (0.14)	0.044 (0.14)
Net migration			0.727 (0.79)	1.699+ (0.88)	0.727 (0.79)	1.699+ (0.88)	4.059** (1.43)	4.861** (1.52)	4.043* (1.70)	4.969** (1.72)
Growth							-0.097** (0.03)	-0.097** (0.03)	-0.097** (0.03)	-0.096** (0.03)
Protest							0.085 (0.12)	0.081 (0.12)	0.103 (0.13)	0.112 (0.13)
Aid									-0.065 (0.11)	-0.062 (0.11)
Oil									-0.097 (0.18)	-0.104 (0.17)
KA open									0.137 (0.16)	0.148 (0.17)
(Intercept)	-0.614 (0.47)	-0.623 (0.48)	-3.544** (1.15)	-3.363** (1.13)	-4.024** (1.18)	-3.737** (1.15)	-1.749 (1.39)	-1.378 (1.33)	-1.373 (2.96)	-0.39 (3.01)
$\beta_{Remit} + \beta_{Remit \times Party}$		0.630** (0.20)		0.435* (0.20)		0.434* (0.23)		0.538* (0.23)		0.431* (0.22)
N × T	1567 91	1567 91	1527 88	1527 88	1485 88	1485 88	1470 88	1470 88	1381 85	1381 85

(Note: + $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Dependent variable is a democratic transition. Regime duration polynomials and time trend not reported. All models include the unit mean of all explanatory variables (not reported). T = 1975-2009.)

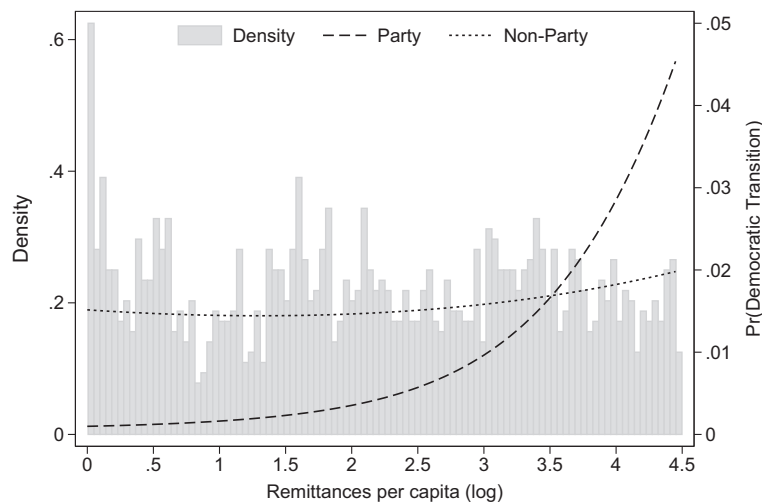


FIG. 2. Remittances and Democratization. The figure depicts the simulated predicted probability of a democratic transition. The dotted line depicts the predicted risk of democratization in non-party-based regimes; the dashed line depicts democratic transition risk for party regimes. Horizontal axis represents a range of values for remittances, with the shaded histogram depicting the distribution of remittances (log) in the sample, up to the 95th percentile.

such as economic growth and level of development, which influence remittance receipts from other high-income OECD countries also determine the extent to which migrants from autocratic countries who work in these rich OECD countries send remittances back home. Consequently, we find that the yearly average of high-income OECD remittances is correlated with remittances sent to non-OECD autocratic countries. Remittances received in high-income OECD countries are unlikely to directly influence political change in remittance-receiving autocratic countries except through their indirect effect on remittances sent to autocratic countries. We control for the possibility that remittances received in OECD countries reflect global economic trends that also influence domestic politics in autocratic countries by adding a calendar time trend.³³

Information on the high-income OECD trend in remittances received varies by year. To add cross-sectional information, we weight the trend by the share of land area in the receiving autocratic country that lies within 100 km of a coastline multiplied by the share of land area with fertile soil.³⁴ We call this variable $W\text{ RemitDistance}$. This strategy is similar to Abdih et al. (2012), who use the ratio of coastal area in a recipient country to total area as a cross-sectional instrument. Coastal land area is correlated with ease of emigration and therefore emigrant population and remittances received, while fertile soil is correlated with population density. But neither of these geographic features is endogenously determined by domestic political outcomes. Other ways through which coastal land and fertile soil might influence politics are captured in GDP per capita, economic growth, and civil war variables.³⁵ Further, we employ country-fixed effects to directly model the influence of time invariant factors correlated with coastal land, such as distance from

advanced market economies, that may also influence democratic transition.

There are two endogenous variables, $Remit$ and $Remit \times Party$. Therefore, we add the interaction between $W\text{ RemitDistance}$ and $Party$ to the excluded instrument set. To mimic the empirical approach used earlier, we employ a linear probability model *with country-fixed effects* to account for unit heterogeneity. This allows us to easily estimate the model with two endogenous variables and unit effects.³⁶ The specification includes the following control variables: *Party regime*, *GDP per capita*, *Population*, *Civil war*, *Neighbor democratization*, *Net Migration*, calendar time period dummies for each 5-year period, and duration time, as well as country-fixed effects.

The first column of Table 2 reports the first stage regression. The coefficient for $W\text{ RemitDistance}$ is positive and statistically significant, indicating a strong correlation between the excluded instrument and the endogenous variable (F-statistic > 10).³⁷ The next column estimates the model without the interaction term; $Remit$ is positive and statistically different from zero. The final column estimates the model with two endogenous variables. The estimate for $Remit \times Party$ is positive and statistically different from zero. Further, the F-statistic is still larger than 10 with two endogenous variables, and the linear combination of $\beta_{Remit} + \beta_{Remit \times Party}$ is positive and different from zero.

To test the robustness of this finding, Appendix Table B-2 reports models (i) without control variables; (ii) without net migration; (iii) with trade added; (iv) with economic growth added; (v) with growth and protest added; (vi) with growth, aid, oil, and capital account openness added; (vii) with year-fixed effects; and (viii) dropping first stage outliers. The main finding remains in each of these tests. If we believe the excluded instrument meets the exclusion restriction, the findings can be interpreted as causal evidence that is consistent with the expectation that remittances increase the chances of democratic transition in dominant-party-regimes.

³³ The Appendix includes a model with year-fixed effects, with similar results.

³⁴ Data on these variables are from Nunn and Puga (2012). See Appendix B for further information on the instrument construction.

³⁵ In Appendix Table B-2, we show the results remain when controlling for trade level.

³⁶ An instrumental variable's probit does not converge with two endogenous variables.

³⁷ We report the Kleibergen Paap rank Wald F statistic.

TABLE 2. Two-stage model

Dependent variable	Remittances		Democratic transition
	(11)	(12)	(13)
W RemitDistance	2.108** (0.43)		
Remit		0.100+ (0.06)	0.066 (0.06)
Remit × Party			0.083+ (0.05)
Party regime	-0.147 (0.15)	0.022 (0.05)	-0.108 (0.09)
GDP per capita	0.122 (0.34)	-0.044 (0.06)	-0.042 (0.06)
Population	-1.512** (0.52)	-0.062 (0.14)	-0.038 (0.14)
Civil conflict	-0.041 (0.05)	-0.002 (0.01)	-0.001 (0.01)
Neighbor democracy	0.027 (0.03)	0.013 (0.01)	0.014 (0.01)
Net migration	-0.814 (0.81)	0.017 (0.12)	0.118 (0.14)
(Intercept)	19.814* (8.63)		
$\beta_{Remit} + \beta_{Remit \times Party}$			0.148* (0.075)
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
F-statistic		24.3	11.4
Stock-Yogo weak ID test critical values (10%)		16.4	7.0
Countries	83	83	83
N × T	1464	1464	1464

(Note. + $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. 2SLS-IV. Clustered standard errors in parentheses. Duration polynomials, time period effects, and country-fixed effects included but not reported.)

Mechanisms

Our theoretical expectations focus on how remittances influence the prospects of democratic transition by reducing electoral support for incumbent regimes. To this point, we have shown that remittances are associated with a higher likelihood of democratic transition in party-based autocracies. To further explore the proposed causal mechanism, we first look directly at the electoral connection by examining whether remittances are associated with less electoral support for incumbent parties. This test focuses on executive elections in autocracies to establish a direct link between remittances, elections, and democratic transitions. Second, we test whether remittances are also associated with transitions from one autocratic regime to another, what we call autocratic transitions. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, the ouster of the Mobutu regime in the former Zaire in 1997 by rebel insurgents, and the military coup by a junior officer in Guinea in 2008 are examples of these autocratic transitions. This test helps establish whether remittances are simply a tool to help opponents oust autocratic regimes by any means or whether remittances mostly harm autocracies by furthering the prospects of democratic transition.

The Electoral Connection

Remittances, we argue, facilitate democratization in party-based regimes because these dictatorships are the most

likely to rely on broad and deep clientelistic networks to buy loyalty. Control of state resources allows the party to reward loyalty through clientelism and targeted public goods.

Case study research on party-regimes shows how they use clientelism to mobilize voters while punishing opposition supporters (Magaloni 2006; Greene 2007; Pepinsky 2007). Poor citizens are generally more likely to sell their votes to political patrons since they place a higher value on consumption goods and their votes are relatively cheap compared with high-income voters (Dixit and Londegran 1996). As Magaloni and Kricheli (2010:128) note, “this punishment regime is particularly effective at trapping poor voters into supporting the dictatorship because their livelihood depends on state transfers.” Because they rely on government transfers for consumption, citizens may vote for incumbents despite their true political preferences. For instance, Blaydes (2011:Chapter 6) finds that material rewards often influenced voters in Egypt’s 2005 election. Similarly, Chhibber (1996:130–31) notes that the National Liberation Front (FLN) dominated Algerian politics for three decades by building a large coalition of supporters with oil-funded goods.

Remittances weaken clientelistic ties by providing extra income to households. Because enjoying the regime’s spoils depends on showing electoral support for the incumbent, increasing remittances should influence the likelihood of democratization by changing electoral behavior.³⁸ In particular, recipients in party dictatorships should be less likely to vote for incumbent parties as this extra income increases. Citizens may vote for opposition parties or simply abstain from voting, thereby reducing turnout for the ruling party. Indeed, Pfütze (2012) shows that remittances reduced turnout for the PRI in the 2000–2002 elections. In Senegal, Galvan (2001:60) notes that “the 2000 elections sealed the collapse of the highways-for-ndigel patronage ties between the Socialists and the marabouts.”³⁹

Even though autocratic rulers use elections strategically to prolong their rule (Magaloni 2006; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009), elections may lead to liberalizing outcomes (Howard and Roessler 2006; Donno 2013). Indeed, elections have been the most common way through which party-regimes have democratized since 1946 and especially since the end of the Cold War. Following our argument above, we expect remittances are associated with lower vote shares for the incumbent regime, which translate into an electoral loss and a higher likelihood of democratic transition.

To test this proposition, we examine remittances and changes in incumbent vote share, collecting data on incumbent vote shares for each election and the prior election.⁴⁰ The dependent variable is the change in vote share for the incumbent in a direct executive election; the measure of remittances is the lagged three-year

³⁸ Remittances may also influence stability via anti-regime protest. Appendix D provides some evidence that remittances are associated with a higher incidence of protest in party-regimes.

³⁹ Marabouts are Murid religious leaders, while *ndigels* are edicts of these leaders that were also used to instruct Murids to vote for the regime party (Galvan 2001). This electoral defeat was largely brought about by the growing financial autonomy of Murids caused by remittances (Dahou and Foucher 2009; Diedhiou 2011). The Murids had traditionally supported the hegemonic socialist party. However, since the 1990s, “the marabouts adopted a stance of political neutrality, neither supporting the ruling party nor mobilizing support for opposition candidates” (Galvan 2001:59).

⁴⁰ See Appendix C for information on the coding rules, sources, and data.

TABLE 3. Remittances and incumbent vote share

	Base models		Control variables		Region, year-fixed effects		Country-fixed effects	
	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)
Remittances	-0.148*	-0.041	-0.147+	-0.076	-0.198*	-0.065	-0.079	0.000
	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.08)
Remit × Party		-0.339**		-0.296		-0.439**		-0.542 ⁺
		(0.11)		(0.20)		(0.14)		(0.33)
Party regime	-0.15	0.721*	-0.038	0.585	-0.176	0.897*	0.045	1.548 ⁺
	(0.17)	(0.3)	(0.28)	(0.37)	(0.21)	(0.37)	(0.04)	(0.91)
Growth	0.042**	0.037*	0.045*	0.048*	0.024	0.021	0.044*	0.035 ⁺
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Prior vote	2.501**	2.453**	1.901**	1.969**	2.450**	2.496**		
	(0.68)	(0.65)	(0.66)	(0.66)	(0.59)	(0.53)		
$\beta_{Remit} + \beta_{Remit \times Party}$		-0.380**		-0.373**		-0.504**		-0.542 ⁺
		(0.06)		(0.16)		(0.11)		(0.31)
N × T	83	83	76	76	83	83	83	83

(Note. + $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Dependent variable is the change in incumbent vote share from the last election. Unit of observation is an election year. Constant not reported. Control variables not reported in columns 3 and 4: civil war, government spending, net migration, regime duration, a calendar time trend polynomials (2). Tears: 1975–2009.)

moving average.⁴¹ The base specification includes a control variable for lagged economic growth because growth and remittances are correlated; and domestic growth can influence incumbent vote share. The specification accounts for ceiling (and floor) effects by including the incumbent vote share in the prior election as a control variable. The estimator is a generalized linear model with a logit link function that accounts for the bounded nature of the dependent variable. We cluster standard errors by country. Even-numbered columns include the interaction between *Remit* and *Party*.

The results in Table 3 indicate a strong negative correlation between remittances and changes in incumbent vote share. The first column reports the base model, with no interaction; the estimate for *Remit* is negative and statistically different from zero suggesting that as remittances increase, the incumbent vote share declines. The second column reports the interaction specification: The negative relationship between remittances and vote shares is concentrated among party-based regimes. Figure 3 depicts the substantive finding: An increase in remittances from the 25th to the 75th percentile is associated with a decline of roughly 14 percent in the incumbent vote share in party-regimes. In other regimes, the remittance effect is negligible.

Additional columns report robustness tests. Columns 3 and 4 report results from models with additional control variables: migration, government spending, civil war, regime duration, and a calendar time trend.⁴² Adding these variables does not materially change the main finding. The next two columns include region- and year-fixed effects, while the final two columns model country-fixed effects and drop the lagged dependent variable. This last specification is a difficult test for the theory because the average number of elections per country in the sample is roughly three (see Table C-1). Thus, the coefficient estimate for remittances is interpreted as the marginal effect of a change in the deviation from the in-sample country mean level of remittances. Further robustness

tests in the Appendix indicate that the result remains in a full error-correction model, when excluding potential outliers, and estimating a robust regression model.⁴³

Remittances, Elections, and Democratic Transitions

In the Appendix, we provide further evidence linking remittances to democratic transitions via elections. We return to the democratic transition model (equation 1) to examine whether the observed remittance effect occurs in election years or non-election years. First, we test specifications that include a binary indicator for executive *Election* year.⁴⁴ We then interact *Election* with remittances, as well as with party-regimes and the interaction between party-regimes and remittances. We stress that this strategy is not a good one for assessing how elections influence democratic transitions because the information used to code *Election* is the exact same political event as the information used to code democratic transition (that is, the election event when the incumbent loses). Thus, the exact same event is included on both sides of the equation, making interpretation of *Election* nonsensical. However, this can be a useful exercise to examine whether the cases in which there is the expected correlation between remittances and democratic transition (in party-regimes) occur in election years or non-election years.

Second, we restrict the sample to election years and then estimate a model to show that remittances are correlated with democratic transitions, but only in party-regimes. The estimator is a random-effects probit with clustered errors and controls for the unit means from the full sample. Thus, the remittance coefficient is interpreted as the time-varying deviation from the country mean level of remittances—similar to the interpretation in the main reported results in Table 1.

Both strategies yield findings consistent with our expectations. Remittances are only associated with democratic

⁴³ See Table C-2.

⁴⁴ Results reported in Table A-7. The election variable indicates whether the final round of an election in which the seat of the incumbent is contested took place in an observation country-year. Data are from Hyde and Marinov (2012).

⁴¹ See Table C-2 for results from a full error-correction specification.

⁴² Government spending is lagged one year, with data obtained from World Bank (2010).

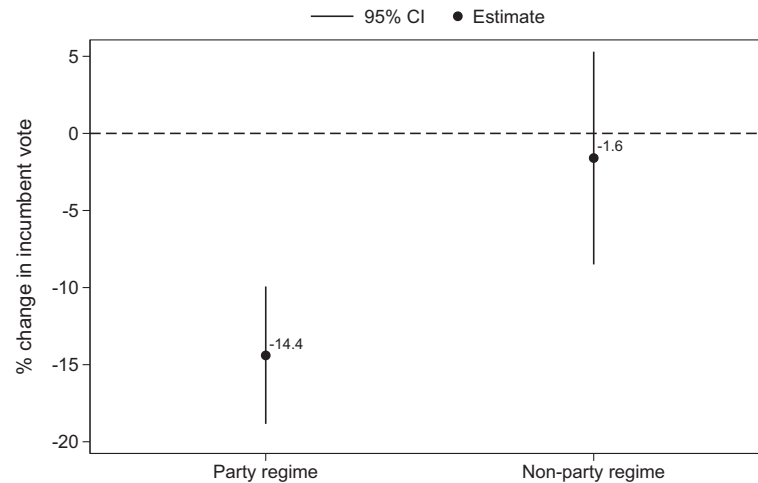


FIG. 3. Remittances and Incumbent Electoral Support. Estimates from column 2, Table 3.

transition in party-regimes in election years; and similarly once we restrict the sample to election years, remittances are only associated with democratic transition in party-regimes.

Autocratic Transitions

Next, we examine whether remittances are associated with autocratic regime collapse that results in a transition to a new autocracy: *autocratic transitions*. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, the rebel ouster of the Mobutu regime in the former Zaire in 1997, and the military coup in Guinea in 2008 are examples of these regime collapse events. We examine the same models as those reported in Tables 1 and 2, but switch the dependent variable from democratic transition to autocratic transition. Appendix Tables A-6 and B-3 report the results. We find no evidence that remittances are associated with autocratic transitions. This should not be surprising because examination of these regime collapse cases shows that only 3 of the 34 autocratic transitions entail any sort of election (the subsequent regime in each of these three cases is not a democracy).⁴⁵ The other 31 regime collapse events are popular revolutions, military coups, and insurgents or rebels toppling the regime. In contrast, 31 of 49 democratic transition events entail elections. This provides additional support to the claim that remittances influence autocratic regime survival by increasing the prospect of democratic transition.

Figure 4 contrasts the substantive finding from the democratic and autocratic transition models. The left panel depicts the substantive finding for the democratic transition model reported in column 4, Table 1, using the observed values approach suggested by Hanmer and Kalkan (2013). The estimates correspond to an increase in remittances from the 25th percentile of the remittance distribution to the 75th percentile. In party-regimes, this change in remittances is associated with a 12 percent increase in the predicted probability of democratic transition, while in other regimes, a similar change in remittances results in a negligible change in the predicted risk of transition. The right panel shows the substantive finding from the same model but with autocratic transition as

the dependent variable (column 4, Table A-6). There is no relationship between remittances and these types of regime collapse events.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article adds to the expanding literature on how international migration shapes domestic politics. The evidence in this paper suggests that remittances do not stabilize autocracies—or, at least, not all of them. Rather, we show that remittance flows jeopardize autocratic rule by increasing the prospects of a democratic transition. Using data from a more than 35-year period covering the third wave of democratization, we find that remittances are associated with a higher likelihood of democratic transition in party dictatorships and a lower vote share for incumbent parties in autocratic elections.

Together, these findings stand at odds with recent research that suggests that remittances stabilize autocracies (Ahmed 2012). Three possibilities may account for these divergent findings. First, we look at remittances separately from other types of non-tax revenue, such as foreign aid. Our measure avoids conflating changes in worker remittances with changes in the receiving country's economy, which are also likely to influence autocratic stability. Second, we focus on democratic transitions instead of all government changes in autocracies. The events we model, therefore, do not include institutionalized rotation of leaders atop an autocratic regime or the natural death of a leader—unless these also entail the regime being ousted from power. Finally, our account of how remittances influence autocratic stability emphasizes an electoral connection (Pfütze 2012). Some dictatorships rely on retaining the support of a broad-based electoral coalition and employ a range of state resources to secure their continued support. This is a qualitative characteristic of autocracy measured with a binary indicator for party-based regimes.

We argue that remittances can change the electoral behavior of voters in regimes with a broad-based electoral connection to their supporters, namely party dictatorships. If remittances reduce electoral support for incumbents in these regimes, they should also increase the prospects of democratization. We find evidence consistent with this proposition: Remittances are associated with a higher likelihood of democratic transition in party-

⁴⁵ Table S-3 in the Appendix lists each collapse event in the sample period; whether it is coded as a *democratic* or *autocratic* transition and whether the event is an election.

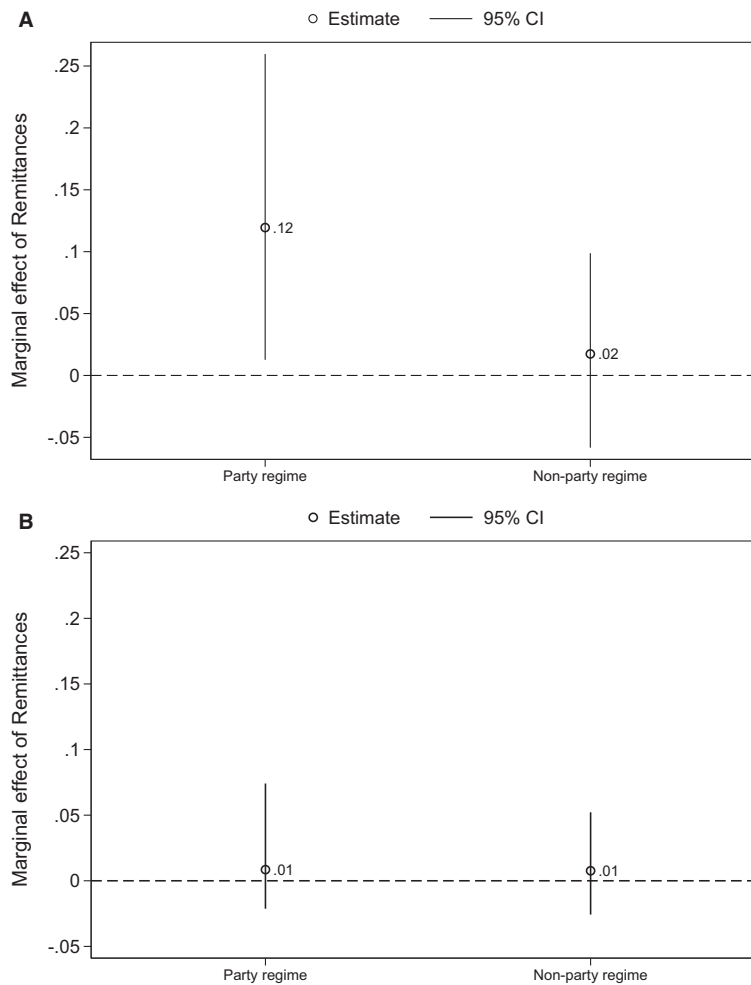


FIG. 4. Remittances and Regime Transitions. The left panel depicts the marginal effect of remittances on the likelihood of democratic transition, using the observed values approach. The marginal effect simulation reflects an increase in remittances from the 25th to the 75th percentile. The right panel depicts the marginal effect on the likelihood of autocratic transition.

regimes. In other dictatorships, however, remittances appear to have little influence on transitions. We then investigate how remittances change incumbent vote shares in autocratic elections; we find that higher remittance flows are associated with a decline in electoral support for incumbent parties, but again only in dominant-party autocracies.⁴⁶

Our explanation for how remittances influence autocratic stability does not rule out the possibility that they allow dictatorships to reduce public goods spending in favor of particularistic spending on core elites. Indeed, this may provide one reason for why remittances do not appear to influence the prospects of democratization in a range of non-party-based dictatorships, including personalist autocracies.⁴⁷ However, central to understanding the spending substitution effect is the task of identifying the core regime elite in different autocratic contexts as well as the marginal influence of increased private spending on their loyalty to the dictator.

Our findings inform important policy concerns. Dominant-party autocracies have been some of the most resil-

ient dictatorships in the past six decades. Migration policies that enhance the flow of remittances to autocratic countries may prove an important tool of foreign policy for wealthy democracies interested in promoting democracy abroad. However, because remittances are most likely to further democratization by eroding electoral support for incumbent autocratic parties, they may contribute little to the political change in regimes—such as China’s—that do not hold multiparty elections at the national level.

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⁴⁶ Moreover, the alternative hypothesis that remittances facilitate regime durability by easing dissatisfaction with incumbents does not find support in dominant-party-regimes.

⁴⁷ Table A-5 shows remittances are not associated with an increased likelihood of democratic transition in personalist autocracies.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

Data S1. Appendices A–E

Data S2. Twitter and ISQ blog.