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Democracy Aid Effectiveness and Authoritarian Survival: Democracy Protests as Windows of Opportunity

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Abstract

This study investigates to what extent democracy aid becomes more effective in times of democracy protests. Regarding incentive compatibility as imperative for aid effectiveness, I develop a decision-theoretic model to predict the circumstances under which democratic reforms become incentive-compatible in response to protests and test the empirical implications using a panel regression design with 53 non-democratic countries between 1991 and 2011. I show that democracy aid becomes more effective the larger the protests and the greater the natural resource wealth. However, benign effects are contingent on the type of democracy aid and the absence of an excessive coercive apparatus.

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List of Abbreviations

ASII	Alternative Sources of Information Index
CCSI	Core Civil Society Index
CSI	Civil Society Index
DI	Democracy Index
EDI	Electoral Democracy Index
FH	Freedom House
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MFI	Media Freedom Index
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares
USD	Unites States Dollars
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy Institute

Democracy Aid Effectiveness and Authoritarian Survival: Democracy Protests as Windows of Opportunity

Democracy constitutes a universal value. Political participation is both of intrinsic and instrumental importance, making the demands of citizens heard and holding governing officials accountable to them (Sen, 1999). At the same time, democracy is a demanding political system, requiring electoral integrity, respect for political liberties, freedom of expression and association, and an unbiased press (Dahl, 1972; Sen, 1999). The paramount importance of a democratic political system is widely recognised, constituting the core value of the United Nations (United Nations, n.d.). Thus, over the past 30 years, the international donor community has increasingly invested resources to assist the spread of democracy across the globe, moving from 1 billion United States Dollars (USD) a year by the 1990s to more than 10 billion USD by 2010 (Carothers, 2015). However, opinions diverge on whether aid can successfully promote democracy in recipient countries. While some scholars posit that aid has a detrimental effect on democracy (e.g. Djankov et al., 2008), other studies find more encouraging results of democracy assistance, yet the aggregate empirical literature is inconclusive (see recent meta-studies by Askarov & Doucouliagos, 2013; Gisselquist et al., 2021).

To understand why democracy aid may fail to achieve its desired results, it is helpful to consider the general impediments to aid effectiveness. Bauer (1976) highlights that foreign aid can be understood as a government-to-government subsidy, such that the incentives of leaders ultimately determine the usage of funds. If these have no intention to improve the lives of their citizens, aid will not either. To address the issue of incentive-incompatibility, the 1980s and 1990s increasingly saw aid supplied in combination with policy conditionalities. Yet, conditional packages have had a disappointing track record, generating a consensus in the early 2000s that such aid is ineffectual (e.g. Dollar & Svensson, 2000; Killick, 2004; Mosley & Suleiman, 2005; Dijkstra, 2011). Despite agreeing to reforms ex-ante, countries have widely not upheld their end of the bargain, either not implementing these reforms altogether or reversing them shortly after (Dornan, 2017).

Given this experience, the issue of aid effectiveness resembles a principal-agent problem, where the principal (donor) wishes to achieve development outcomes contingent on the agent‘s cooperation (recipient country). Due to information asymmetries and monitoring and enforcement issues, whether or not development outcomes materialise ultimately depends on the agent's incentives. As Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2009) put it:

'[d]emocracy is the worst form of government for political leaders and the best for almost everyone else' (p.167). Therefore, since democratic aid in countries with a democratic deficit is confronted with a fundamental incentive misalignment between donors and targets, it is unsurprising that such foreign assistance is not generally effective.

In light of this background, developments in Kenya, as depicted by Chemin (2020), are thought-provoking. The ruling cadre resisted pressures to democratise, sustaining a considerable repressive state machinery (Human Rights Watch, 2005). Yet, when in 2007, the opposition challenged the general election results openly on the streets, the incumbent government eventually enacted democratic reforms to appease the protestors. These were supported by foreign aid contributions, which successfully strengthened judiciary independence (Chemin, 2020). It seems that democracy protests may have altered the incentive structure of political leaders in favour of pursuing reform, which may have caused aid contributions to become more effective. As such, democracy protests may open up temporary windows of opportunity in which the incentives of leaders and donors are aligned, allowing local democracy promoters to promote democratisation more effectively. The present dissertation examines to what extent these events in Kenya can be systematised and follow a more general pattern that applies to other non-democratic countries. The research question for this dissertation is therefore:

> *Research question: To what extent is democracy aid in non-democratic regimes more effective when it is received in times of democracy protests?*

The extant literature provides a theoretical background that can be leveraged to specify the conditions under which protests incentivise political leaders to enact democratic reforms, thereby creating windows of opportunity for democracy aid to become more effective. One strand of the literature examines the incentives of survival-oriented political leaders to either repress protesters or accommodate their demands, as ultimately occurred in Kenya. While some scholars focus on explaining and predicting the occurrence of repressive responses (e.g. Ritter, 2014; Hill & Jones, 2014; Girod et al., 2018; Carey, 2010; Davenport, 1995), other scholars have emphasised concessionary reforms as an alternative strategy, focusing on the tradeoff between repression and concession (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2010; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2000; Conrad, 2011; Davies, 2016; Harrijvan & Weerdesteijn, 2020; Bellin, 2012; Poe, 2019). Yet, scholars that model the tradeoff between these strategies frequently consider democratic concessions only as a measure of last resort or when

institutions at the time of public contestation are already sufficiently democratic (see, e.g. Acemoglu & Robinson, 2000; Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2010).

However, as Davies (2016) shows empirically, concessionary responses to domestic opposition can be frequently observed, even in the most autocratic regimes. Although democratic reforms appear contradictory at first sight, they can be highly consistent with the short-term interests of regime stabilisation (Conrad, 2011). Both authors highlight the limited extent to which studies analysing political survival strategies have considered concessionary responses to civil unrest, calling for future research to fill this gap. At the same time, how authoritarian regimes can leverage democratic institutions has received considerable attention from scholars studying so-called *hybrid regimes* (e.g. Diamond, 2002; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Magaloni, 2006; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010). Indeed, the adoption of certain democratic institutions by authoritarian regimes defines the new normal among non-democratic countries.

In this dissertation, democracy aid ineffectiveness is approached as a fundamental symptom of incentive misalignment between targets and donors. In the subsequent section, a theoretical framework is constructed to model the main elements of the incentive structure of non-democratic regimes in times of democratic protests. In doing so, insights from studies focusing on non-democratic survival are combined with elements of the *hybrid regimes* literature. This framework is then used to empirically test whether, in instances in which the model predicts democratic reforms as a survival strategy, democracy aid is more effective. To do so, data on 53 countries between the years of 1991 and 2011 is used in an ordinary least squares (OLS) two-way fixed effects panel regression analysis. Finally, the results are discussed in light of the existing literature.

Theoretical framework

In this section, the argument why democracy aid would be more effective in times of democracy protests is formalised in two steps. Firstly, why the effectiveness of democracy aid hinges on incentive compatibility with incumbents is justified by applying the principal-agent logic to a micro-perspective of the democracy assistance community. Secondly, a decision-theoretic model is developed to define the circumstances under which democratic reforms become incentive compatible for non-democratic leaders, thus making democracy aid incentive-compatible and more effective. The guiding principle of the model is that political leaders do a cost-benefit analysis, opting for the strategy that effectively restores political order at the lowest cost.

The Taming of Democracy Aid

The core underlying assumption of the argument forwarded in this dissertation is that democracy aid can only effectively influence democratic progress when it is incentive-compatible with the interests of non-democratic regimes. To justify this assumption, it is useful to consider how democracy assistance programs are designed and implemented in practice. Bush (2015) analyses the infrastructure of democracy assistance programs, highlighting the role of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that design and implement them. These organisations are positioned between donors and target states, strategically interacting with both to ensure their survival. The relationship between NGOs and donors is characterised by principal-agent dynamics, bestowing a certain degree of autonomy on NGOs in fulfilling the task delegated to them.

Crucially, to have access to target states with a democratic deficit, NGOs are incentivised to follow programs that do not directly threaten the survival of their incumbents because rulers of host countries have the power and authority to deny democracy practitioners access. This can take the form of bans, threats to safety, or more subtle actions to inhibit the work of democracy promoters. For example, Venezuela, Russia, and Zimbabwe have typically granted democracy-promoting NGOs access but imposed legal and non-legal barriers to these organisations (Carothers, 2006). More severely, the safety of democracy promoters can become compromised when the host country puts staff on trial, as occurred in Egypt in 2012, or conducts raids on NGOs, like in Belarus in 2010 (Bush, 2015). As a result, to retain access to target states, democracy-promoting NGOs tailor assistance to the boundaries set by incumbents in host countries, following regime-compatible actions, which ultimately tames democracy assistance. As Bush (2015) conjectures, the best strategy for democracy promoters may be to ‘bide their time and wait for an opportunity to push hard for democratization‘ (p. 66). The present dissertation examines the merits of such an opportunity, namely democracy protests. In the following, a decision-theoretic model is developed to pin down under which circumstances windows of opportunity open for the international democracy establishment to *push hard*.

Decision-theoretic model of political survival

To illuminate the propensity of leaders to permit democracy aid to be used effectively, this section develops a decision-theoretic model that focuses on the conditions under which politicians respond with democratic concessions to public pressures. In developing the logic

of this model, I adopt the core structure of the Most-Starr (2015) decision-making model. Four testable hypotheses are developed throughout this section, guiding the subsequent empirical section of this dissertation.

As the main starting point, I assume that political leaders of non-democratic regimes want to stay in power. When confronted with popular threats to the regime, incumbents need to balance their *strength-to-threat* ratio (Most-Starr, 2015). Strength is the degree to which the regime secures support from critical parts of the population, while threats are those forces that can potentially end the current regime. One source of such threats is a large-scale democracy protest that damages the position of the ruler by strengthening oppositional candidates and by signalling to all citizens that discontent is widespread, potentially leading to ever-larger protests in the future (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Ritter, 2014; Hellmeier & Bernhard, 2023). Therefore, pro-democracy protests cannot be ignored and require counteractions to restore the *strength-to-threat* ratio. Two main actions that serve this purpose are to engage in repression and policy concessions through democratic reforms. Enacting democratic reforms would thus follow a logic of instrumental incoherence, where these are not enacted to bring about the innate benefits of democratic institutions but rather to solve a separate short-term problem, which is to secure political (or literal) survival (Faguet & Shami, 2022).

A cost-benefit comparison between the two strategies determines how precisely the non-democratic leadership proceeds. Rulers must accurately assess the degree of threat and determine a suitable mix between repression and democratic reforms while considering contextual details (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010). In line with Dahl (1972), I assume that democratic reforms become more likely as the cost of repression increases relative to the cost of democratic reform. In the following, the strengths and weaknesses of each strategy are outlined, after which I show how contextual details affect the degree to which the incumbents can be expected to favour either repression or democratic reforms.

To Repress or to Reform

Firstly, non-democratic rulers may engage in repression, which is an attractive strategy where it is likely to be successful (Bell, 2011). Repression here is defined in its narrower sense, following Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2010)‘s conceptualisation, as violating physical integrity rights, thus focusing on violent forms of coercion to achieve

desired outcomes. As Machiavelli concluded 500 years ago, ‘it is safer to be feared than loved‘ (Bell, 2011; p. 628). Scholars today further add that it is not only safe but also cheap to repress relative to the alternative of accommodating demands since an existing coercive capacity of the government merely needs to be activated to eliminate threats to the regime (della Porta, 1995; Pierskalla, 2010; Ritter, 2014). The assumption that a repressive strategy is innately preferred over a concessionary strategy has been coined the ‘law of coercive responsiveness‘ (Davenport, 2007; p. 7). If effectively employed, repressive actions immediately reduce the short-run threat emanating from protests by neutralising them (Escribà-Folch, 2013). However, sufficient coercive capacity is a necessary pre-condition for this strategy since, if not effectively deterred, violent repression can escalate the conflict, causing protestors to radicalise in their efforts to overthrow the government (Pierskalla, 2010). The long-run implications of deploying violence in response to protest activity are similarly ambiguous. Some scholars, such as Lyall (2009), posit that future opposition can be deterred by raising the cost of public dissent. However, others point out that repressive counteractions by the government may generate further antipathy among the citizenry, motivating dissidents to mobilise against the government in the future (Rasler, 1996; Hellmeier & Bernhard, 2023). Thus, in aggregate, the consequences of a repressive strategy are ambiguous and depend on the degree to which the coercive capacity is sufficient to deter dissidents in the short run and the long run.

As an alternative to repression, leaders may accommodate protesters' demands and enact democratic reforms. As mentioned in the introduction, the strategic adoption of certain democratic institutions by non-democratic regimes in service of regime survival is widespread and has received substantial scholarly attention (*hybrid regimes* literature). Frequently adopted democratic institutions are political parties and elections, which broadly serve to bargain with elites, cultivate mass support, and domesticate the opposition (Cornell, 2013; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007). There are three core ways in which these institutions help autocrats to attain these results, namely signalling, information revelation, and patronage facilitation (Brancati, 2014). Firstly, holding elections that are won by substantial margins shows potential opponents that the current regime is unbeatable, thereby deterring dissent (Magaloni, 2006). Secondly, elections generate information for the regime. By convening with oppositional leaders in legislatures or observing sources of societal discontent via particularly strong oppositional parties during elections, the regime can adjust its policies to convert opponents into regime supporters (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Magaloni, 2006). Finally, parties and elections make patronage easier to conduct. Members of political parties

and citizens that vote for certain candidates can be rewarded with benefits, such as jobs, subsidies, food, land titles, and other privileges (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010).

However, adopting incentive-compatible electoral institutions is neither necessary nor without cost for dictators. Electoral institutions are fundamentally dangerous to incumbents, given that oppositional parties can win elections. Furthermore, formally sanctioning elections and legislative organs creates democratic arenas of contestation, which oppositional forces can use to topple the incumbents (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Moreover, electoral victories in which fraud becomes blatantly obvious can come at the cost of political office, as became apparent in Serbia in 2000 or Mexico in 1988. Non-democratic leaders must thus carefully manage the innate risk that electoral institutions bear for regime survival to prevent oppositional forces from overthrowing incumbents. Given that blatant electoral fraud may endanger the regime's legitimacy, non-democratic incumbents need to use other strategies to secure their dominance under more democratic institutions (Blaydes, 2010; Magaloni, 2006). To manage the threat emanating from electoral institutions, controlling media outlets to disseminate a pro-government bias and inhibiting the formation of powerful civil society organisations are important supplementary actions to ensure regime survival (Bush, 2015; Lührmann et al., 2017). The recent presidential elections in Turkey in which President Erdoğan secured another term in office are an illustrative example. While the electoral process was technically free and fair given the presence of several impartial monitoring organisations, the variety of candidates running for office, and the high voter turnout, Erdoğan enjoyed a distinct advantage over his competitors due to an actively biased media coverage, as well as restrictions in the freedom of assembly and association (Parker & Berger, 2023).

Translating the above into the language of the Most-Starr model, democratic reforms generally decrease the imminent threat emanating from protests given the appeasement, thus restoring regime stability (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007). To the extent to which democratic reforms lead to enhanced legitimacy within the population, this can be expected to increase regime strength, at least in the short run (Poe, 2019; Bader & Faust, 2014). However, not all democratic reforms are born equal. Electoral reforms can sustainably increase strength in the long run *if* electoral rules are effectively exploited to generate support in the future. On the other hand, the long-run impact on the threat level is ambiguous. While they may enable a challenger to legitimately supersede incumbents, they facilitate detecting and managing discontent among the population more effectively.

Table 1

Impact of Survival Strategies on Regime Strength and Threat

	Short Run		Long Run	
	Strength	Threat	Strength	Threat
Repression		+/-		+/-
Electoral System	+	-	(+)	+/-
Civil Society	+	-		+
Media Freedom	+	-		+

However, media or civil society reforms unambiguously introduce a serious source of threat to the regime in the long run. *Table 1* summarises the preceding discussion regarding the effects of democracy reforms and repression on strength and threats in the short- and long run. A comparison among democratic reforms reveals that electoral reforms are strictly preferred over civil society and media reforms since electoral reforms may increase strength in the long run and potentially help to contain threats. In combination with the leading assumption that aid should become more effective where incentive-compatibility is established, the first hypothesis of this dissertation is therefore:

Hypothesis 1: In times of democracy protest, electoral aid becomes more effective, whereas civil society and media aid do not.

When comparing electoral reforms with a repressive response, contextual details matter. A coercive response would be preferred if (a) short- and long-term threats can effectively be contained and (b) adopting electoral reforms leads to an increase in the threat level in the long term. If, however, the regime manages to leverage the electoral system and contain the oppositional threat in the long run, it becomes strictly preferred even over an effective coercive strategy due to its superior performance in terms of the effects on regime strength. Thus, contextual details need to be taken into account to determine under which circumstances either of these strategies trumps the other. In the following, I highlight how three main contextual features influence the choice between repression and democratic reforms: the magnitude of the threat, natural resource wealth, and the size of the coercive apparatus.

Contextual Influences

First, the magnitude of the threat is an important determinant of the type of strategy rulers will deploy. A primary factor that increases the threat perception of incumbents is the scale of protest action (Tilly, 1978; Davenport, 1995). An important implication of the magnitude of the threat is that it is inversely related to the cost of repression (Bermeo, 1997; Bellin, 2012). The cost of employing violence to quell protests increases in the size of protests. This has to do with the greater material costs incurred to quell protests of greater magnitude, as well as with the incentive structure of the coercive apparatus since violently repressing civilian protesters endangers its legitimacy (Bellin, 2012). Put differently, where very large crowds in the order of tens of thousands of protesters need to be repressed, the more effective repression becomes a question of will, and the more likely it becomes that the military will stand down or side with the protesters (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Brancati, 2016). Thus, while Machiavelli asserts that it is safer to be feared than loved, there are limits to the extent to which force can reduce threats in the short- and long-run and secure political survival. This limit, it appears, is demarcated by the number of people the incumbent needs to repress, imposing a practical constraint on the *law of coercive responsiveness*. The second hypothesis following from the above discussion is therefore:

> *Hypothesis 2: As the number of democracy protestors rises, democracy aid becomes more effective.*

Two additional factors that influence the survival strategy of authoritarian rulers are the extent of natural resource wealth and the strength of the coercive apparatus. According to the prominent *natural resource curse* strand of the political economy literature, natural resource wealth tends to go hand in hand with autocratic leadership, an effect which Orihuela (2018) terms political anomia. This is typically explained by the fact that resource-rich leaders are held less accountable by their populations and can be appeased with increased public spending. However, in the context of the present study, the question is not whether the population will take to the streets and engage in protest but how the regime will respond to pressures once they arise. In this regard, Ross (2001) proposes a *repression effect*, where resource-rich authoritarian leaders use excess funds to strengthen their military capacity, allowing them to repress demands for democracy more effectively. The proposition that a large military provides an effective way to resist public pressures for democratisation has indeed been forwarded by several scholars (e.g. Huntington, 1981; Bellin, 2004; Albertus &

Menaldo, 2012). As such, a similar threat level emanating from public dissent will produce different effects in non-democratic regimes, depending on the underlying capacity to effectively mobilise coercive agents to quell protests (Way & Levitsky, 2006). Where the coercive capacity is limited, strategies of appeasement become the dominant strategy by necessity (Larreguy et al., 2019). A core indicator of this capacity is the size of the coercive apparatus, referring to the number of coercive agents the government has at its disposal. Since repressing citizens in large-scale operations requires a sufficiently large coercive apparatus, scope is a necessary pre-condition for a survival strategy rooted in repression (Poe, 2019). Thus, the third hypothesis of this dissertation is:

> *Hypothesis 3: In times of democracy protests, a larger coercive apparatus inhibits democracy aid from becoming more effective.*

Notably, while Ross (2001) links natural resource wealth to an increased capacity to repress, the mechanism allowing for more effective repression is a large and well-funded military rather than natural resources. In more technical terms, the effect of natural resources on an increased capacity to repress is therefore mediated by military strength. There is, however, another attribute of natural resource wealth that directly links with the disposition to adopt certain democratic reforms. Bader and Faust (2014) argue that the cost of democratising is reduced for those regimes that dispose of substantial resources to distribute since this allows them to perform well under more democratic institutions. As described previously, democratic institutions such as political parties and elections facilitate patronage, where leaders are supplied with information regarding the loyalty of citizens. The abundance of natural resource wealth increases the extent to which a patronage system can be sustained in service of regime survival. Collier (2007) argues that where natural resource wealth is paired with electoral competition, the rules of the political jungle can be described as ‘the survival of the fattest‘ (p. 46), meaning that those best able to buy off the population will succeed. As long as there are no substantial checks and balances restraining how public funds are used, incumbents can use natural resource wealth to systematically buy off the population, thereby securing political survival. This resonates with Morrison (2009), who proposes that natural resource rents do not necessarily have anti-democratic properties. Instead, they provide a means to ensure regime survival under democratic and more authoritarian conditions. The final hypothesis of this dissertation is therefore:

Hypothesis 4: In times of democracy protest, greater natural resource wealth increases the extent to which democracy aid becomes more effective.

In summary, I expect democracy aid to become more effective the larger the democracy protests and the more natural resource wealth a regime possesses. However, for regimes with greater military size, democracy aid should not become more effective. Also, aid that assists in the area of elections is expected to become more effective in periods of democracy protests, whereas civil society and media aid do not. In the following, the empirical strategy is described alongside the data used for the empirical analysis, after which the results are reported and discussed.

Empirical Research

Endogeneity and Empirical Approach

In designing a suitable empirical strategy to infer to what extent democracy aid becomes more effective in times of democracy protests, it is imperative to recognise endogeneity problems that impact the validity of findings and to adjust the empirical design to ameliorate these as much as possible. The first-order concern for any aid effectiveness study is that assistance funds are most likely not allocated randomly. Instead, donors can be expected to provide more aid flows to countries where the impact is likely to be meaningful. Generally, relatively more democratic countries can be expected to receive more significant quantities of democracy aid, which implies that a regression model which utilises democracy levels as the outcome variable and compares the impact of aid across countries is substantially biased.

As a first step, I therefore analyse *changes* in the level of democracy between a base year and a future value. Still, a core threat remains that donors can effectively react to signals that indicate a certain receptiveness to democratisation efforts irrespective of the democracy level. It may then statistically look as though democracy aid significantly increases democracy, while in truth, donors merely select countries that appear more receptive to democratic reforms. To account for this extensive margin bias, I include country-fixed effects, thereby converting the variation used for identification to changes in variables within countries over time. However, the described selection bias applies to the intensive margin as well, in that the same country likely receives more democracy aid in periods where donors deem democracy progress more likely. This intensive margin of endogeneity means that a causal claim cannot be made regarding the impact of democracy aid on future democracy

performance. It is crucial to realise, however, that given the research question of the present study, this issue may be less problematic because this dissertation inquires to what extent democracy aid is *more effective* at certain times compared with others. The core identification assumption on which empirical inference rests is thus not that donors allocate democracy aid randomly. Instead, donors should strategically allocate assistance funds *constantly* within countries over time.

Albeit a weaker version of the typical selection bias concern in the aid effectiveness literature, it may nevertheless invalidate my findings. A looming second-order concern is that protests provide a superior signal to donors, such that more aid is allocated during these times. In other words, democracy protests may provide an exceptional opportunity for donors to target democracy assistance *more effectively* compared to other periods within the same country over time. If democracy protests are succeeded by increased democracy performance and the quantity of provided democracy assistance is generally larger in times of democracy protest, then selection bias inflates the actual effect of democracy aid during democracy protests. To check to what extent this bias alters the results of this study, *Figures A1-A4* in Appendix A plot democracy receipts per country over time alongside the occurrence and size of democracy protests. What can be observed is that there are only two countries for which democracy aid receipts are generally more significant in years of protests, namely Iraq and Sri Lanka. For all other countries, democracy aid receipts fluctuate considerably and spike frequently in years where there were no democracy protests recorded. Since these figures appear to indicate no apparent changes in democracy assistance in years of protest relative to other periods within the same country, the reverse causality concern that democracy aid flows in times of protests are fundamentally incomparable with receipts by the same countries at other points in time seems to be less of an issue.

Nevertheless, for causation to be identified, a source of exogenous variation in democracy aid receipts is imperative. For this purpose, some authors have employed an instrumental variable analysis with various instruments (see for instance Dietrich & Wright, 2015; Finkel et al., 2007; Kalyvitis & Vlachaki, 2010). However, their relevance is typically merely justified in statistical terms, while the theoretical link between the instrument and changes in democracy aid provisions is generally unconvincing. For instance, Dietrich and Wright (2015) use women‘s representation in donor country parliaments as an instrument for democracy aid, claiming that women generally support democracy promotion more than their male counterparts. As the authors acknowledge themselves, this instrument lacks a thorough theoretical justification. Thus, an OLS panel regression design seems most fit for the

purposes of this study. Nevertheless, given the absence of exogenous variation, the statistical associations identified in this empirical analysis cannot be labelled causal and should instead be read as suggestive evidence.

In light of the above discussion, I conduct an OLS panel regression with two-way fixed effects, where the cross-sectional identifier (subscript i) is the recipient country of democracy aid, with the year as the time-series identifier (subscript t). As discussed, country-fixed effects are included to transform the variation from between countries to within countries over time. These also account for all observable and unobservable effects that may bias coefficients that are constant within a given country over time. The second set of fixed effects is year-fixed effects to account for changes common to all countries in the sample in a given year that are correlated with both the independent and the dependent variable. Given the focus of the research question, the sample features all countries that can be classified as non-democracies. Further, I include only those countries that have received democracy aid throughout the period of inquiry and have experienced at least one democracy protest. The number of included countries is 53, mainly featuring African and Asian countries but also countries in Europe and the Americas.[1] As the outcome variable, I use changes in a democracy index between the base year in which all other variables are measured and the democracy index two years into the future.[2] In line with previous research, I include the most critical control variables to reduce a potential omitted variable bias. Informed by a review of the empirical strategies of 15 suitable quantitative democracy aid studies featured in the meta-review by Gisselquist et al. (2021), I add controls for the most widely acknowledged confounders, namely country size and income levels. These may confound the effects of democracy aid, given that they impact the size of democracy aid receipts and the prospects of democratic reforms (Fielding, 2014; Gibson et al., 2015).

Model Specification

Two sets of regression equations are developed to test the four hypotheses developed in the theoretical framework section. The first set focuses on how relevant contextual details impact the effectiveness of democracy aid in times of popular protests. In contrast, the second

[1] The full list of countries can be consulted in Appendix B.
[2] The decision to apply a two-year lag is motivated by a balancing act between allowing enough time for democratic reforms to take shape, while at the same time ensuring that an effect can be attributed to protest dynamics, which rules out lags that are too long. In this way, a two-year lag is appropriately positioned in the middle.

set of models investigates whether election aid, media aid, and civil society aid perform differently in times of protests.

Regarding the first set of models, the outcome variable is the two-year change in a democracy index (DI), where the base year is that in which all variables in the model are measured. The democracy index value in that year is thus deducted from the democracy index value within the same country two years into the future. Model (1) includes the level of democracy aid received (β_1), the democracy protest size (β_2), and a multiplicative interaction term that combines these two (β_3), which is the primary focus of this empirical analysis. This interaction effect is designed to capture the additional effect of democracy aid on changes in democracy ratings when the threat to incumbent rulers increases. Further, as described previously, country size and income levels are included as control variables. Finally, country-fixed effects (ψ_i) and year-fixed effects (τ_t) are included.

(1) $$\mathrm{DI}_{i,t+2} - \mathrm{DI}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{Democracy\ Aid}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_3 \mathrm{Democracy\ Aid}_{i,t} * \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_4 \mathrm{Income}_{i,t} + \beta_5 \mathrm{Country\ Size}_{i,t} + \psi_i + \tau_t + \varepsilon$$

Two remaining models within the first set include additional variables to determine how military size and natural resource wealth affect the extent to which democracy aid leads to changes in the outcome variable when the threat to survival increases. Model (2) focuses on the role of military capacity, extending model (1) by adding an indicator for military size (β_6) and a triple interaction term with *Democracy Aid*, *Protest Size*, and *Military Size* (β_7). The latter is designed to capture the top-up effect of a larger military on the degree to which democracy aid leads to greater changes in democracy ratings as the threat to the regime increases.

(2) $$\mathrm{DI}_{i,t+2} - \mathrm{DI}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{Democracy\ Aid}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_3 \mathrm{Democracy\ Aid}_{i,t} * \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_4 \mathrm{Income}_{i,t} + \beta_5 \mathrm{Country\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_6 \mathrm{Military\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_7 \mathrm{Democracy\ Aid}_{i,t} * \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} * \mathrm{Military\ Size}_{i,t} + \psi_i + \tau_t + \varepsilon$$

Finally, model (3) focuses on the role of natural resource rents and closely mirrors model (2)'s design. It too extends model (1), adding an indicator for natural resource rents

(β_6) and a triple interaction term with *Democracy Aid*, *Protest Size*, and *Resource Rents* (β_7). As before, the triple interaction term is added to capture the top-up effect that natural resources exert on the extent to which democracy aid leads to larger changes in democracy ratings in times of protest.

(3) $$\mathrm{DI}_{i,t+2} - \mathrm{DI}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{Democracy\ Aid}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_3 \mathrm{Democracy\ Aid}_{i,t} * \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_4 \mathrm{Income}_{i,t} + \beta_5 \mathrm{Country\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_6 \mathrm{Resource\ Rents}_{i,t} + \beta_7 \mathrm{Democracy\ Aid}_{i,t} * \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} * \mathrm{Resource\ Rents}_{i,t} + \psi_i + \tau_t + \varepsilon$$

The second set of models focuses on the types of democratic reforms employed by non-democratic leaders in response to survival threats, thus testing *hypothesis 1*. These are variations of model (1) in that the outcome variable is the change in a democracy index, while the focus is an interaction term between the size of democracy protests and the level of democracy aid received. The main difference is that both the democracy index, as well as the democracy aid flows, are adapted to reflect the subcomponents of electoral quality, civil society, and media freedom. Model (4) focuses on the electoral aspect, featuring an electoral index (EI) as the outcome variable and electoral aid as the independent variable. Models (5) and (6) mirror this design, where the former focuses on civil society, using a civil society index (CSI) as the outcome variable, while the latter focuses on media freedom, using a media freedom index (MFI) as the independent variable.

(4) $$\mathrm{EI}_{i,t+2} - \mathrm{EI}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{Electoral\ Aid}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_3 \mathrm{Electoral\ Aid}_{i,t} * \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_4 \mathrm{Income}_{i,t} + \beta_5 \mathrm{Country\ Size}_{i,t} + \psi_i + \tau_t + \varepsilon$$

(5) $$\mathrm{CSI}_{i,t+2} - \mathrm{CSI}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{Civil\ Society\ Aid}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_3 \mathrm{Civil\ Society\ Aid}_{i,t} * \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_4 \mathrm{Income}_{i,t} + \beta_5 \mathrm{Country\ Size}_{i,t} + \psi_i + \tau_t + \varepsilon$$

(6) $$\mathrm{MFI}_{i,t+2} - \mathrm{MFI}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{Media\ Aid}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_3 \mathrm{Media\ Aid}_{i,t} * \mathrm{Protest\ Size}_{i,t} + \beta_4 \mathrm{Income}_{i,t} + \beta_5 \mathrm{Country\ Size}_{i,t} + \psi_i + \tau_t + \varepsilon$$

Data

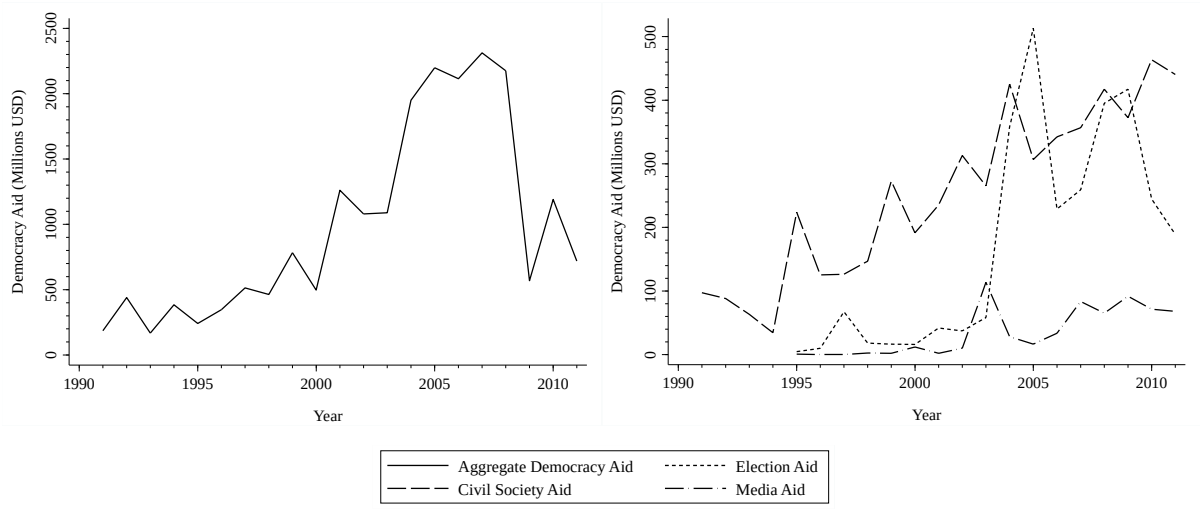
The primary outcome variable of interest is the change in democracy performance, which is measured using the *Electoral Democracy Index* (EDI) by the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem), which measures democracy on a scale of zero to one (Hellmeier & Bernhard, 2022). This index is modelled after Dahl‘s (1972) definition of polyarchy, where popular contestation and participation are viewed as central attributes of democracy. The subcomponents of this index defining the five core tenets of democracy by this definition are the following: (1) freedom of expression, (2) freedom of association, (3) freedom of media, (4) universal suffrage, and (5) free and fair elections. Furthermore, this index is used to identify non-democratic regimes, such that following Kasuya and Mori (2019), a cutoff value is placed at 0.42. For models (4)-(6), I adopt V-Dem’s *Clean Elections Index* (CEI), the *Alternative Sources of Information Index* (ASII), and the *Core Civil Society Index* (CCSI), respectively (Hellmeier & Bernhard, 2022). All four indexes are converted to a scale between zero and 100.

To measure aggregate and disaggregated democracy aid receipts, AidData‘s Core Research Release is used, which documents aid receipts measured in constant 2010 USD (Tierney et al., 2011). The aggregate democracy aid measure is constructed by compiling yearly receipts of aid flows in the areas of civil society, legal and judicial development, government administration, elections, and media freedom. Those earmarked for elections, civil society, and media freedom are utilised for the disaggregated aid flows. I also follow the standard convention to scale aid receipts by population size (Lührmann et al., 2017; Kalyvitis & Vlachaki, 2010; Savun & Tirone, 2011). *Figure 1* below portrays aggregate democracy aid receipts over the period of inquiry (left panel) and the mentioned subcomponents (right panel).

To capture democracy protests, the primary analysis uses Brancati‘s (2016) dataset, where democracy protests focus on legal and non-legal barriers to electoral participation against citizens and candidates. The main variable used from this dataset indicates the protest size, reflecting the estimated number of participants in the largest rally in a given year. Because this democracy protest measure builds on a narrow definition of democracy, Hellmeier and Bernhard‘s (2022) collection of democracy protests is used for robustness checks, where the definition of democracy protests matches the EDI deliberately. Unfortunately, the latter conflates protest frequency and size and lacks meaningful interval interpretations, such that it disqualifies as the primary protest variable for this study.

Figure 1

Democracy Aid Trends

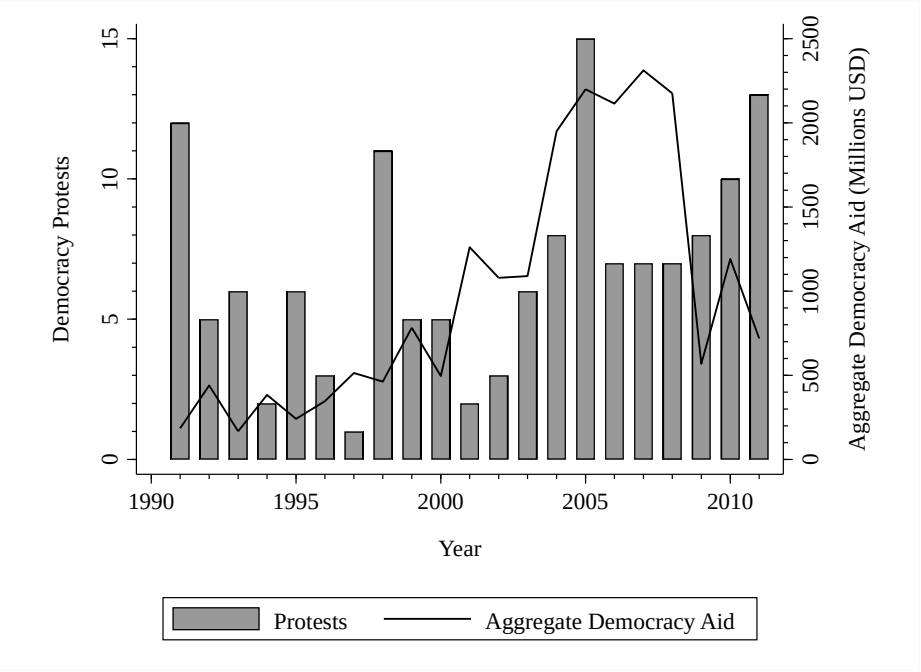


The years covered by Brancati (2016) are 1989-2011, thus restricting the time frame of the analysis to the post-Cold War period. To avoid picking up immediate democratisation waves that occurred due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, I restrict the analysis to 1991-2011. An overview of the distribution of democracy protests over the years is featured in *Figure 2* below, where the left y-axis measures the number of countries that experienced a democracy protest each year. For reference, aggregate democracy aid disbursements are also featured, the values of which should be read off the right y-axis.

To test the extent to which the coercive apparatus size and natural resource wealth alter the extent to which democracy aid becomes more effective in times of protest, data on the size of the military and natural resource wealth is required. For both variables, I use the World Development Indicators by the World Bank, given the extensive coverage of countries and years (World Bank, 2023). To operationalise *Military Size*, I adopt military expenditures scaled by the gross domestic product (GDP), while oil and natural gas rents as a percentage of GDP measure natural resource wealth. Finally, population size and GDP per capita measured in constant 2015 USD are used to measure country size and income levels (World Bank, 2023). As is common in democracy aid studies, I take the natural log of these two variables to account for decreasing returns to scale (e.g. Dietrich & Wright, 2015; Fielding, 2014; Savun & Tirone, 2011). Summary statistics for the independent variables of interest are reported in *Table B1* in Appendix B. A more detailed description of the exact measures used, as well as justifications for the choice of measures can be consulted in Appendix B.

Figure 2

Trends in Democracy Protests and Democracy Aid



In the following, the regression results are analysed and interpreted, after which follows a discussion of the findings in light of the existing literature.

Results

Table 2 below features the results of models (1)-(3), focusing on aggregate democracy flows and how contextual details potentially alter the degree to which democracy aid exerts a larger impact on democracy performance in times of democracy protests. As can be seen, across the three models, a positive and significant association generally exists between *Protest Size* and changes in the democracy index over the next two years. This aligns with the expectations since the decision to engage in protests is fundamentally risky, such that democracy protests ensue when the population deems the chance of success reasonable (Ritter, 2014). Similarly, *Democracy Aid* is positively and significantly correlated with changes in the democracy index. As described previously, *Democracy Aid* is highly endogenous to the outcome and should therefore only be read as a correlation. The coefficients of *Protest Size* and *Democracy Aid* are similar across model (1) and model (3) in terms of statistical significance and magnitude. However, in model (2), neither is associated with a statistically significant increase in the democracy index.

Turning to the focus of this empirical inquiry, the interaction effect between *Protest Size* and *Democracy Aid* is statistically insignificant in model (1). Without controlling for

Table 2

Regression Results: Models 1-3

	(1) ΔEDI	(2) ΔEDI	(3) ΔEDI
Protest Size	0.221*	0.112	0.242**
	(0.116)	(0.086)	(0.118)
Democracy Aid	0.182*	0.064	0.137*
	(0.098)	(0.066)	(0.080)
Protest Size * Democracy Aid	0.016	0.352***	-0.014
	(0.037)	(0.070)	(0.011)
Military Size		-0.137	
		(0.159)	
Protest Size * Democracy Aid * Military Size		-0.105***	
		(0.021)	
Resource Rents			-0.084**
			(0.039)
Protest Size * Democracy Aid * Resource Rents			0.004***
			(0.000)
Constant	77.637*	142.771***	75.893*
	(44.938)	(49.312)	(38.939)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Two-Way Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	773	656	760
Number of Countries	53	51	53

Robust standard errors in parentheses
**** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*

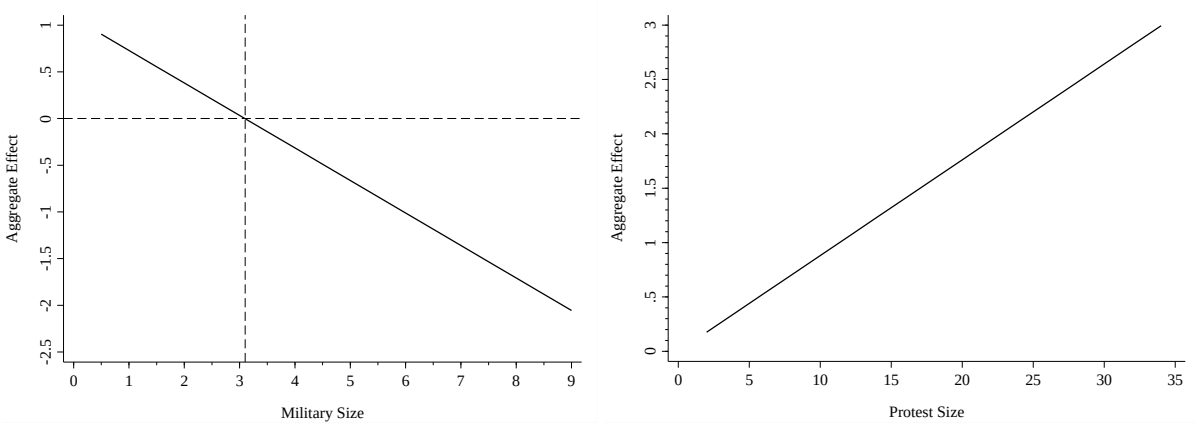
military size or natural resource wealth, the association between *Democracy Aid* and changes in the democracy index does not seem to be impacted by democracy protests, casting doubt on *hypothesis 2*. However, in model (2), where the influence of military strength is controlled for, the interaction term is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level. Its magnitude implies that a one-unit increase in *Protest Size* increases the effect of *Democracy Aid* by 0.35 units. In other words, holding the level of democracy aid receipts constant, an increase in the magnitude of democracy protests enlarges the impact of democracy aid on

changes in the democracy index. Interestingly, this effect seems to be counteracted by *Military Size*, as posited in *hypothesis 3*. Adding *Military Size* as a multiplicative term to the interaction effect between *Democracy Aid* and *Protest Size* can be read as follows. For constant levels of both variables, a one-unit increase in *Military Size* reduces the joint effect of *Democracy Aid* and *Protest Size* on democratic progress by approximately 0.11 units of the democracy index. This result is consistent with *hypotheses 2* and *3* since larger democracy protests increase the effect of democracy aid only insofar as military size is below a certain threshold.

To illustrate this, *Figure 3* plots how the joint coefficient of *Democracy Aid * Protest Size + Democracy Aid * Protest Size * Military Size* develops for given values of *Democracy Aid*, *Protest Size* and *Military Size*.[3] To ensure representability, I adopt the average value of *Democracy Aid* (1.28) as reported in *Table B1*. The left panel explores the effect of increases in *Military Size* on the joint coefficient, considering an average-sized democracy protest (2.59).[4] As can be seen, the top-up effect of *Democracy Aid* during democracy protests is positive only when the *Military Size* is lower than approximately three percent of GDP. Beyond this threshold, the top-up effect is nullified and turns negative. Considering that countries in the sample dedicated approximately 2.44 percent of their GDP to military expenditures, this suggests that, on average, *Democracy Aid* has indeed been more effective in times of democracy protests. The right panel focuses on the impact of an increasing *Protest Size*, considering the average value of *Democracy Aid* (1.28) and the average *Military Size*

Figure 3

Aggregate Top-Up Effect of Democracy Aid in Times of Protest: Model 2



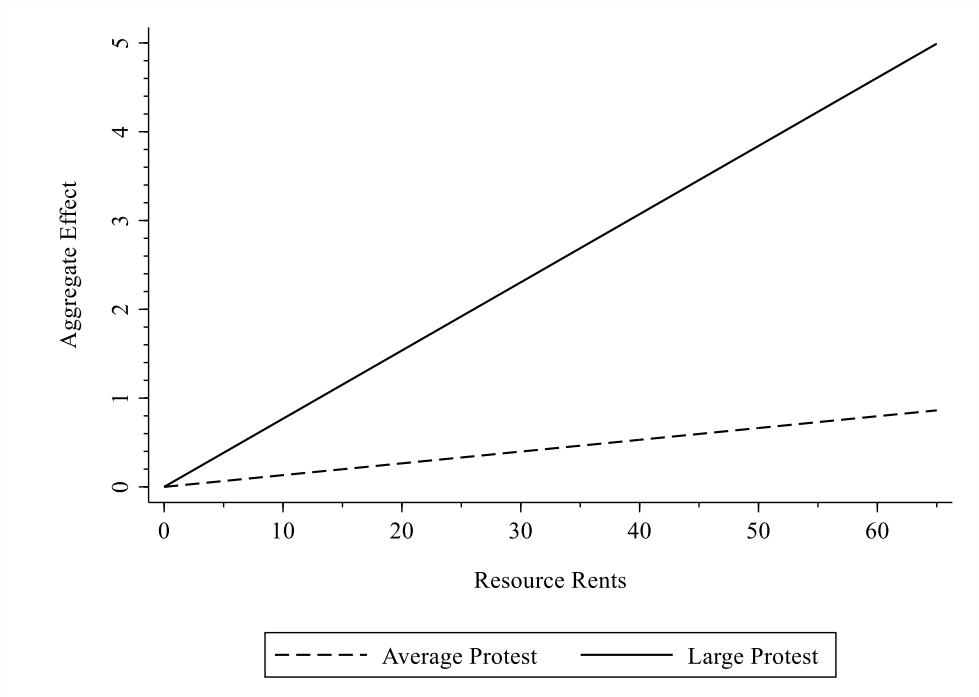
[3] This corresponds to $\beta_3 + \beta_7$ in model (2).
[4] Note that this is conceptually different from the average value of *Protest Size*.

(2.44). As can be seen, the larger the *Protest Size*, the greater the additional effect of *Democracy Aid*. Considering the average size of a protest in this sample (2.59), this additional effect is modest. However, as *Protest Size* increases within the range observed in the sample, the effect dramatically increases to up to three additional points on the democracy index.

Turning to model (3), there does not seem to be a statistically significant top-up effect of *Democracy Aid* for increasing values of *Protest Size*. However, the estimated regression coefficient of the triple-interaction term featuring natural resource wealth suggests that a one-unit increase in *Resource Rents* increases the joint effect of *Democracy Aid* and *Protest Size* by 0.004 units, which is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level. In conformation with *hypothesis four*, this suggests that the degree to which democracy aid becomes more effective in times of democracy protests depends on the size of oil and gas rents. To illustrate this further, *Figure 4* plots the size of this estimated effect, considering an average value of *Democracy Aid* (1.28) alongside an average-size democracy protest (2.59) with the dashed line and a relatively large democracy protest (15) with the solid line. It shows that while this additional effect is relatively modest for smaller-sized democracy protests, for

Figure 4

Aggregate Top-Up Effect of Democracy Aid in Times of Protest: Model 3



countries with significant natural resource wealth that experience large democracy protests, up to five points on the democracy index are added. This concludes the analysis of the first set of models. In the following, the disaggregated democracy aid results reported in *Table 3* are analysed.

A notable first observation is that in contrast to the results where aggregate democracy aid receipts were considered, larger democracy protests do not generally show a significant positive correlation with the respective subcomponent-democracy index. In model (4), which focuses on the electoral aspect of democracy, the coefficient for *Protest Size* is negative and highly statistically significant, suggesting that larger democracy protests are associated with

Table 3

Regression Results: Models 4-6

	(4) ΔCEI	(5) $\Delta CCSI$	(6) $\Delta ASII$
Protest Size	-1.081***	0.296**	-0.0639
	(0.409)	(0.131)	(0.312)
Election Aid	0.748		
	(1.404)		
Protest Size * Election Aid	4.482***		
	(1.470)		
Civil Society Aid		-0.895*	
		(0.513)	
Protest Size * Civil Society Aid		0.166	
		(0.146)	
Media Aid			7.904**
			(3.376)
Protest Size * Media Aid			-0.259
			(0.380)
Constant	371.0**	144.5	517.8*
	(179.7)	(141.8)	(296.4)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Two-Way Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	290	607	286
Number of Countries	44	53	45

Robust standard errors in parentheses
**** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*

decreases in electoral quality. In addition, *Election Aid* is not significantly associated with changes in electoral quality. However, the interaction term between these two variables is positive and highly significant at the 99 percent confidence level. The coefficient suggests that a one-unit increase in *Protest Size* increases the effect of electoral aid by 4.48 points. Notably, the size of this effect dwarfs the interaction between aggregate democracy aid and protest size found in *Table 2*, suggesting that electoral aid leads to large increases in electoral quality in times of democracy protests, especially in comparison to the effects of aggregate democracy aid on the *EDI*. Considering the regression results of model (2), which focuses on the civil society aspect of democracy, the coefficient for *Protest Size* is positive and statistically significant and the 95 percent confidence level, suggesting that an increase in democracy protests is correlated with advances in the civil society aspect of democracy. *Civil Society Aid*, on the other hand, shows a weakly significant negative correlation with the outcome variable. However, the interaction between *Civil Society Aid* and *Protest Size* is not significantly associated with changes in the civil society index, suggesting that an increase in democracy protests does not significantly alter the effect of *Civil Society Aid*.

Finally, model (6) shows that while *Protest Size* is not significantly associated with progress in media freedom, *Media Aid* is associated with substantial increases in the *ASSI*. The magnitude of this effect is astounding, suggesting that a one-unit increase in *Media Aid* is associated with a 7.9-point increase in the outcome variable, requiring extra attention. It is helpful to remember that all democracy aid variables are scaled by population size, such that a one-unit increase in this variable translates to a substantial increase in nominal democracy aid receipts. A particular aspect about *Media Aid* that becomes apparent both in *Figure 1* and via the summary statistics reported in *Table B1* is that this type of democracy aid constitutes a tiny part of aggregate democracy aid. The average value of *Media Aid* is equal to 0.1, which suggests that an average amount of *Media Aid* is associated with a 0.79-point increase in the *ASSI*. Lastly, the interaction effect between *Media Aid* and *Protest Size* is statistically insignificant, suggesting that an increase in democracy protests does not alter the effects of *Media Aid*. The results of the second set of models are thus consistent with *hypothesis 1*.

Limitations and Robustness

The results presented above are subject to several caveats. Firstly, given the absence of exogenous variation in democracy aid, the estimated coefficients cannot be read as evidence for causal relationships. A second concern is that the results may be contingent on

the measures used in the empirical analysis. While this could apply to several measures used in this research, it is especially worrying in the case of the central *Protest Size* variable, which focuses distinctly on electoral concerns. Suppose only protests in which electoral concerns are put at the centre of demands are included. In that case, it should be no surprise that the two interaction terms of *Protest Size* with *Civil Society Aid* and *Media Aid* are statistically insignificant. Therefore, *Tables C1* and *C2* in Appendix C replicate the results using Hellmeier and Bernhard (2022)'s democracy protest data, which builds on a broader definition of democracy. As can be seen, the results are overwhelmingly consistent with those reported in the preceding results section, lending some additional confidence to the robustness of the findings. A concern that remains, however, is that while this alternative protest data includes civil society components and media freedom in their definition of what constitutes a democracy protest, it may be that demands related to the electoral aspect of democracy are dominant. If so, concessions in the areas of civil society and media freedom would simply not represent reforms tailored to the concerns of protesting citizens.

A third concern is related to the empirical design. Inherent to all four hypotheses is the implicit assumption that democracy aid has a greater effect on advances in democracy *due to* democratic reforms enacted by political leaders in response to the threat emanating from citizens. The regression models do not directly test for this, so the robustness of conclusions concerning the four hypotheses must be qualified. Similarly, the theorised mechanism that explains why democracy aid would be more effective in times of democracy protests, being that democracy-promoting organisations can more effectively push for democratisation since the range of incentive-compatible actions becomes enlarged, is not explicitly tested for. Therefore, while the regression results are consistent with an interpretation along the lines presented in the theoretical framework, they do not provide direct evidence that the hypothesised mechanisms drive the results.

In light of these limitations, the findings presented in this section provide suggestive evidence in favour of all four hypotheses. However, given the lack of exogenous variation and the lack of more profound insight into the hypothesised mechanisms that drive the found correlations, alternative explanations cannot strictly be ruled out. In the following, these results will briefly be interpreted in light of the theoretical framework and embedded into the existing literature.

Discussion

To begin with, the results presented above are consistent with the core expectation that democracy protests trigger survival strategies by non-democratic leaders that are not confined to a repressive response to quell protests. Instead, political leaders seem to enact certain democratic reforms as appeasement, opening windows of opportunity for democracy aid to be used effectively. The results depart from expectations in line with the *law of coercive responsiveness*, suggesting that democratic reforms can be attractive devices to secure political survival. As such, they align with Conrad (2011) and Davies (2016), who emphasise the merits of concessionary responses to domestic unrest. Furthermore, the results of regression models (1)-(3) suggest that democracy aid may not per se become more effective in times of democracy protest. Rather, this effect depends on the size of protests, the coercive capacity, the extent of natural resource wealth, and the type of democracy aid. Firstly, the additional effectiveness of democracy aid in times of democracy protests depends on the scale of action. In line with the theoretical framework, this may indicate that as protests increase in scale, repression becomes less attractive as a survival strategy, either due to the associated costs (see Bermeo, 1997; Bellin, 2012) or the decreased disposition of military officers to quell protests (see Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Brancati, 2016).

At the same time, it seems that where the military is sufficiently large, non-democratic leaders have an increased ability to secure their survival by force, such that repression may be preferred over the accommodation of demands. At first sight, these two findings appear at odds with each other. However, large democracy protests likely tend to occur in countries with limited coercive capacity, which is a reasonable expectation, given that protests manifest in contexts where the likelihood of success is deemed sufficient (see Ritter, 2014). This implies that there may indeed be an increased propensity to resort to force when confronted with democracy protests in line with the *law of coercive responsiveness*, but only to the extent to which the coercive capacity is significant enough for such a strategy to be successful. In developing the decision-theoretic model, I argued that electoral reforms should be preferred even over a successful repressive response if leaders expect to perform well under a more liberalised political system. It may therefore be that incumbents either build an excessive coercive apparatus *because* they expect to perform poorly under a more liberalised system (see Ross, 2001) or that the uncertainty associated with democratic reforms makes a reform trajectory unattractive relative to the more straightforward use of force. Future research may inquire further into this. Thus, in accordance with Bell (2011) and Poe (2019), repression is an attractive strategy where it is likely to be successful. However, sufficient scope of the

coercive apparatus is a necessary pre-condition. Under such circumstances, it is less likely that non-democratic leaders engage in democratic reforms, such that the constraints on democracy-promoting organisations in host countries are unchanged, and democracy aid does not become more effective.

Regarding the role of natural resource wealth, the results support the view held by Collier (2007) and Morrison (2009) that natural resources do not necessarily have anti-democratic properties, qualifying the so-called *repression effect* described by Ross (2001). Instead of acting as an inhibitor of democratic progress, natural resource rents may help the non-democratic leader to perform better under a more liberalised political system. This is likely if resource rents can be disproportionately leveraged to finance an effective patronage system, which works particularly well with certain democratic institutions, such as an electoral system and political parties. Therefore, the increased effectiveness of democracy aid in times of democracy protests that rises in the size of natural resource rents can be understood as the consequence of an increased disposition to adopt certain democratic reforms in response to democracy protests.

Finally, the result that only election aid appears to evince increased effectiveness in times of democracy protests in contrast to civil society aid and media aid is consistent with the views of Bush (2015) and Lührmann et al. (2017) that liberalisation of the electoral system requires tighter control of media outlets and civil society activity to ensure that freer elections can still be won by incumbents. As such, these findings add another layer of complexity to the *law of coercive responsiveness*. Were all democratic institutions equally orthogonal to leadership survival, a coercive response to democratic protests would be the only viable strategy to protect the privileges that come with political office. However, it is essential to distinguish between different democratic reforms since allowing a freer media and the formation of a strong civil society entail greater risks for leadership survival than electoral rules and party systems. As the *hybrid regimes* literature shows, the dangers emanating from free elections and an opposition organised in political parties can be contained.

In sum, the findings of this dissertation align with the expectations of all four hypotheses. Therefore, the answer to the research question is that democracy protests do not unambiguously increase the effectiveness of democracy aid. Rather, this effect depends on the size of democracy protests, the scope of the coercive apparatus, natural resource wealth, and the type of democracy aid. However, this finding is subject to at least two limitations. Firstly, given the absence of exogenous variation, the empirical results cannot be labelled

causal, which renders the findings suggestive, and secondly, the empirical analysis does not test explicitly for the hypothesised mechanisms. Future research may inquire specifically into these, such as whether democracy-promoting organisations indeed enjoy greater leeway to push for democratisation under the stipulated circumstances. For this purpose, a qualitative process-tracing research design would be particularly informative.

Conclusion

To conclude, this dissertation has analysed to what extent democracy protests provide a window of opportunity for democracy aid to support democratic progress more effectively. This is motivated by the fact that there is no consensus in the literature regarding the effectiveness of democracy aid and inspired by developments in Kenya, where democracy protests may have altered the incentive structure of political leaders in favour of pursuing democratic reforms. Adopting incentive compatibility as the core requirement for aid effectiveness, a decision-theoretic model has been developed to derive testable hypotheses concerning the circumstances under which non-democratic leaders can be expected to pursue democratic reforms as a survival strategy in response to democracy protests. The critical insight from the quantitative analysis is that democracy aid may indeed achieve more significant democratic progress under certain conditions, namely, the larger the size of protests, and the greater the natural resource wealth. However, this effect is contingent on a limited coercive capacity of rulers and is limited to the electoral aspect of democracy, excluding advances in media freedom and civil society independence.

This result paints a mixed picture for democracy promoters. On the one hand, for those interested in strengthening electoral accountability, democracy protests may provide a fruitful window of opportunity in which democratic progress can be achieved more effectively. At the same time, free and fair elections are insufficient for a healthy democracy. Without a vibrant civil society and an unbiased media, rulers are not truly held accountable, such that even universal suffrage and the absence of blatant electoral fraud cannot guarantee that the election of government officials is genuinely free and fair. The international democracy aid community should therefore move beyond a conceptualisation of democracy that puts electoral integrity at the centre, focusing more vigorously on strengthening civil society and media freedom. However, given that incentive compatibility is central to the effective usage of funds directed to these purposes, it is unclear how such an endeavour can be successful. The tragic brilliance of non-democratic leader survival lies in that democratic tenets can be weaponised to prolong a fundamentally illiberal system. Thus, the value of

strengthening certain aspects of democracy may ultimately lie in whether these eventually facilitate a proper democratic transition in a step-by-step process. While history has shown that *hybrid regimes* possess a remarkable capacity to survive, they are not immune to democratic transitions, as the fall of the long-standing Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party in the year 2000 demonstrates (Magaloni & Kricheli, 2010; Magaloni, 2006). Thus, there is room for hope that aid-facilitated democratic reforms set the scene for an eventual democratic transition.

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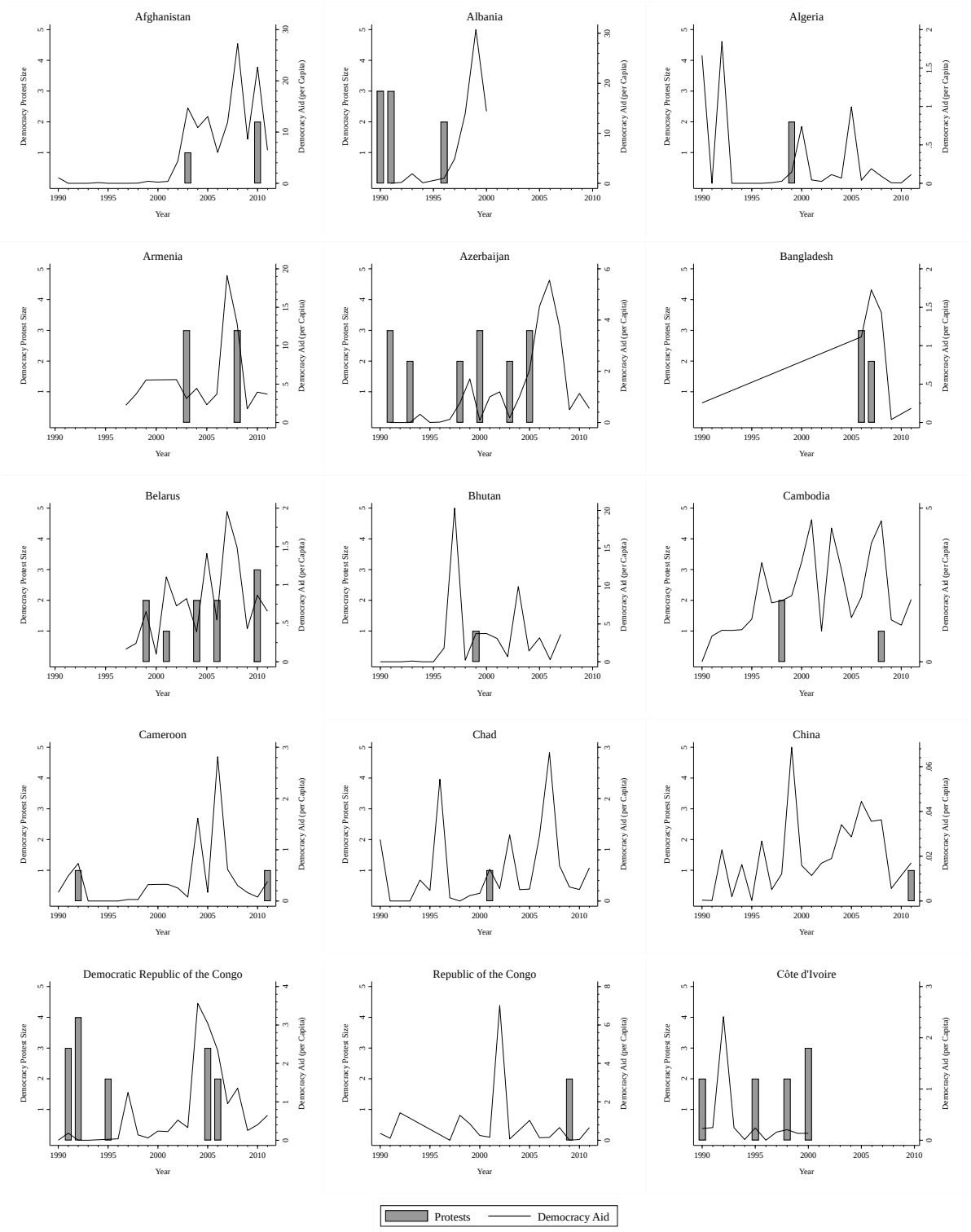
Appendix A

Figure A1

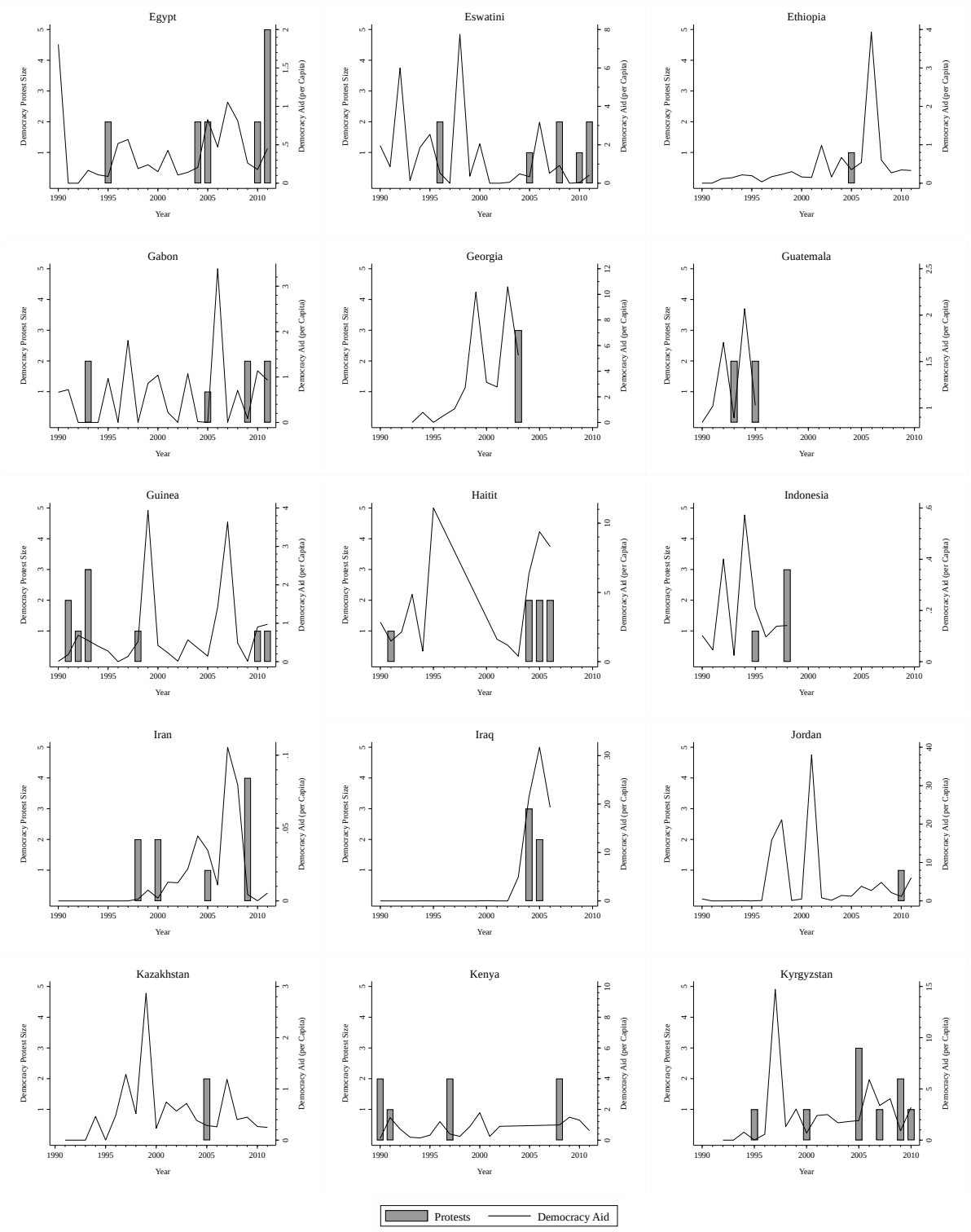
Time Trends of Democracy Aid and Democracy Protests: Afghanistan - Côte d'Ivoire



Appendix A

Figure A2

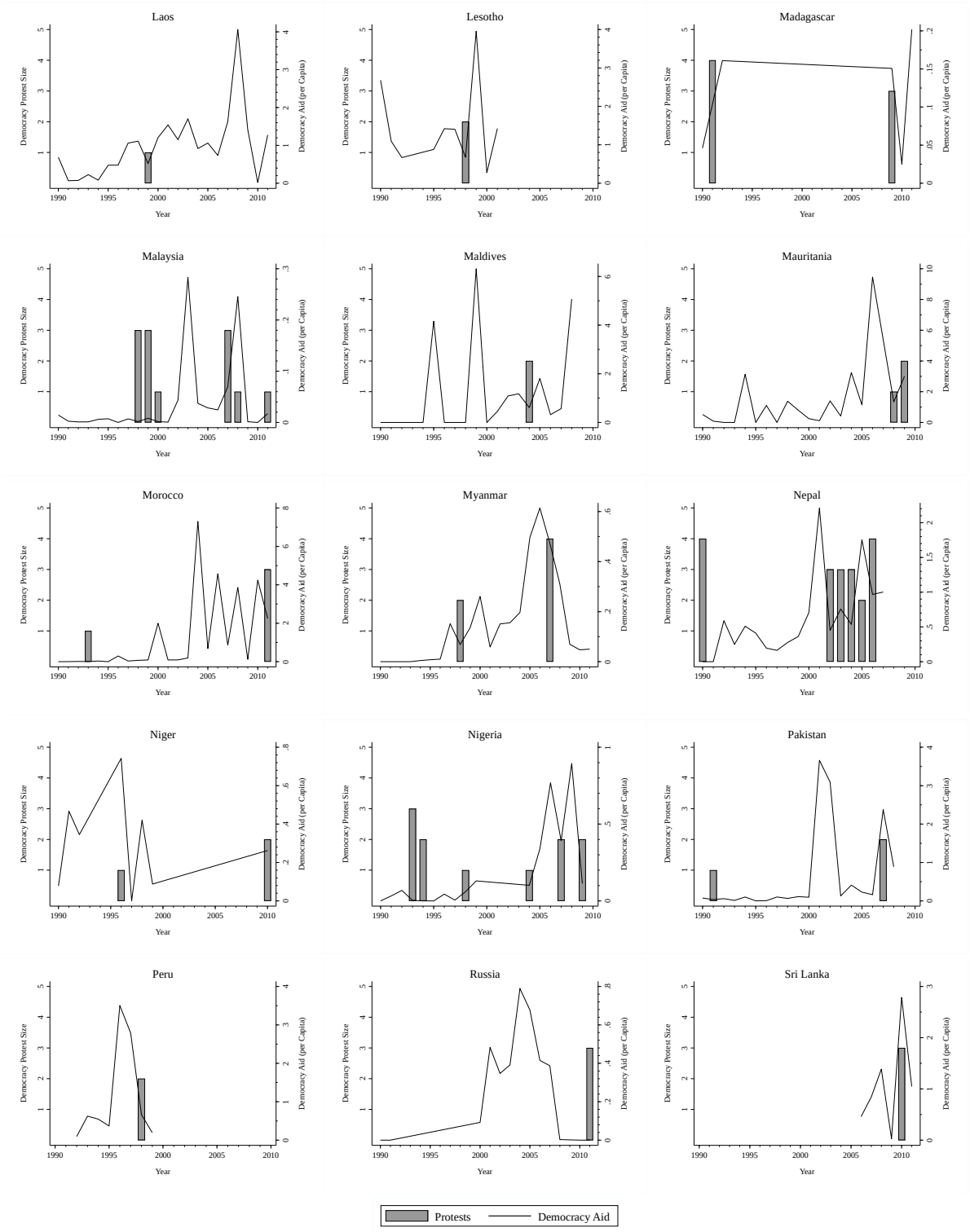
Time Trends of Democracy Aid and Democracy Protests: Egypt – Kyrgyzstan



Appendix A

Figure A3

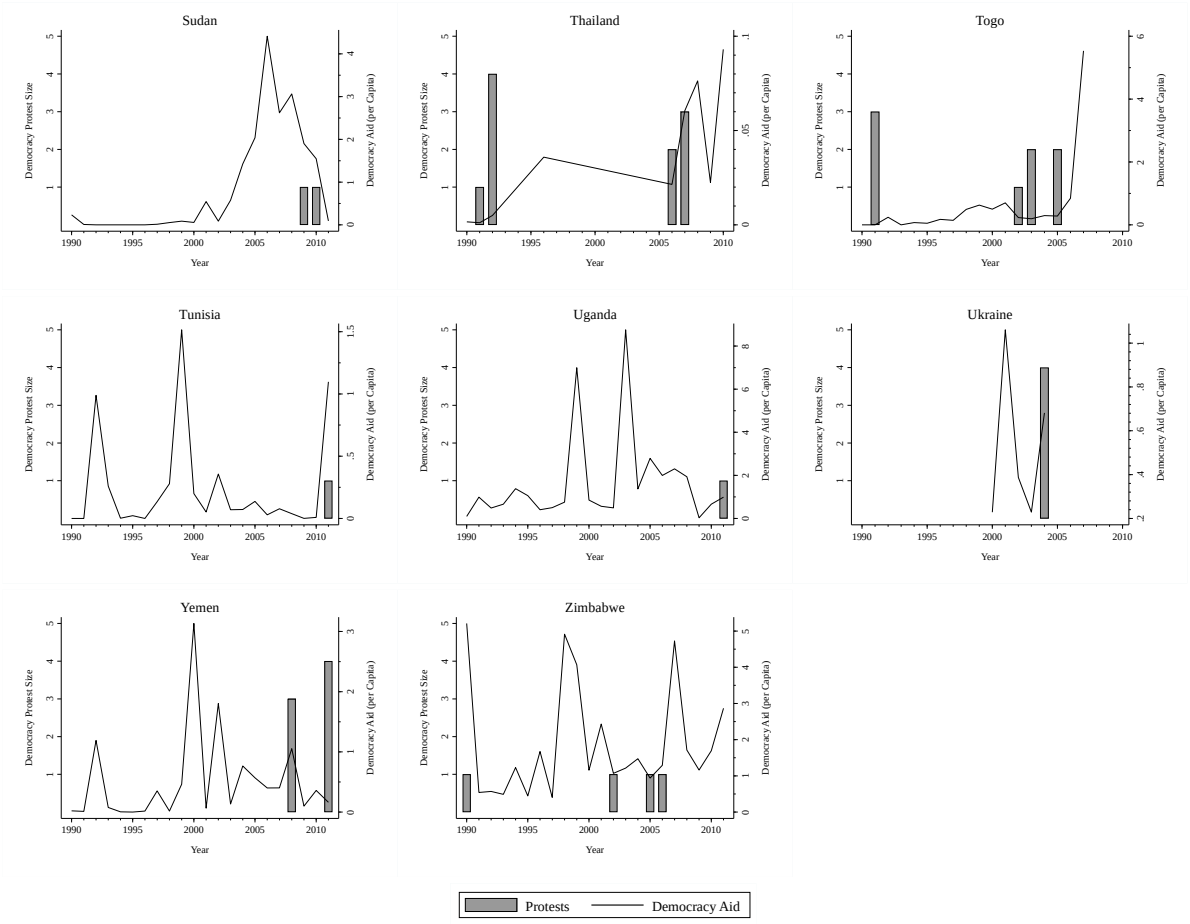
Time Trends of Democracy Aid and Democracy Protests: Laos – Sri Lanka



Appendix A

Figure A4

Time Trends of Democracy Aid and Democracy Protests: Sudan – Zimbabwe



Appendix B

Country List

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Georgia, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Russia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, Yemen, Zimbabwe

Appendix B

Table B1

Summary Statistics of Main Variables

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Democracy Aid	924	1.28	3.25	0	38.03
Election Aid	386	.39	1.06	0	8.99
Civil Society Aid	743	.46	0.79	0	9.92
Media Aid	381	.1	0.29	0	3.69
Protest Size (Brancati)	822	.3	2.04	0	35.46
Protest Size (Brancati) *if* a protest occurred	95	2.59	5.51	0.00	35.46
Protest Size (V-Dem)	1023	1.87	1.29	0	4
Military Size	871	2.44	1.55	.08	9.97
Resource Rents	1004	7	11.87	0	67.41

Appendix B

Democracy Measures: Justification and Detailed Description

The main outcome variable of interest is the change in democracy performance. There exist several indicators that are commonly used in the democracy aid effectiveness literature for this purpose, the most popular of which are the Freedom House (FH) index (see Scott & Steele, 2005; Kalyvitis & Vlachaki, 2010), the polity2 index (see Savun & Tirone, 2011; Tan, 2016) and the EDI by V-Dem (see Lührmann et al., 2017; Uberti & Jackson, 2020; Hellmeier & Bernhard, 2022). The selection of the most appropriate measure for democracy is informed by Boese‘s (2019) thorough comparison of these three commonly used indexes. Most importantly, a suitable democracy index ought to be appropriate for a time-series analysis and should therefore feature meaningful interpretations of differences in the index values. In this regard, only the democracy index by V-Dem can be treated as being quasi-continuous, with the polity2 and FH indexes lacking the required methodological attributes to be used as such. Moreover, the polity2 index has been shown to measure the underlying democracy concept inconsistently, while the FH index faces substantial criticism regarding the subjectivity of its democracy ratings (Goertz, 2006; Cheibub et al., 2010). In contrast, the democracy index by V-Dem excels both in terms of concept-measure consistency and objectivity of ratings (Boese, 2019). For these reasons, I adopt V-Dem‘s EDI as the outcome variable for models (1)-(3).

Next to informing the dependent variable of my inquiry, this democracy measure also serves to identify non-democratic regimes in the sample of countries. Kasuya and Mori (2019) have recently proposed a suitable cutoff point at 0.42. It is worth noting, that given the time-series aspect of the empirical analysis some countries will transition from non-democracies to democracies and viceversa across the period of inquiry. Therefore, I include only those country-years in which the EDI falls below this threshold. Because the outcome variable is a two-year change in the democracy index, this implies that transitions to democratic regimes are captured by the analysis, whereas democratic backsliding is not. This is because if at the base year a country is below the threshold it is included in the sample, regardless of the nominal democracy score at t+2.

For models (4)-(6) I adopt V-Dem’s *Clean Elections Index,* the *Alternative Sources of Information Index*, and the *Core Civil Society Index* respectively (Hellmeier & Bernhard, 2022). In doing so, I follow Lührmann et al. (2017) closely, who adopt the same outcome

measures to identify the effects of the corresponding disaggregated types of democracy aid. The *Alternative Sources of Information Index* measures to what extent the media is allowed to be critical of the regime, represents a wide array of political perspectives, and is unbiased toward the opposition. The *Core Civil Society Index* measures the extent to which civil society organizations can freely engage in political activity independently of the state, while the *Clean Elections Index* captures the extent to which offices are appointed free of fraudulent means by the state.

Appendix B

Democracy Aid Measures: Detailed Description

To measure the receipts of democracy aid in each country, AidData‘s Core Research Release is used (Tierney et al., 2011). This database records both the emissary, as well as the recipient on a yearly basis, including an activity code that identifies the purpose of the particular aid project. Included in the analysis are both bilateral and multilateral aid flows, as long as a specific recipient country is reported. Thus, I drop those instances in which democracy aid is directed at larger regions featuring several countries. As such, aid receipts for individual countries as covered in this study represent a lower bound, given that regional projects are not taken into account. Although AidData also assigns a narrower set of purpose codes based on the specified activity, there is no specific purpose code for democracy aid. Conventionally, empirical studies include aid flows earmarked for government and civil society, economic development, public sector financial management, legal and judicial development, government administration, civil society (which includes election and media aid), and conflict prevention and resolution (see for instance Carothers, 2015; Tan, 2016).

However, to more closely align the democracy aid flows with the *Electoral Democracy Index*, I exclude economic development, public sector financial management, and conflict prevention and resolution. The AidData purpose codes that are used are therefore 15000, 15105, 15130, 15140, and 15150. Regarding the operationalisation of aid directed at improving elections, free media, and civil society activity, I use the Common Reporting System by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which too are reported by AidData. These feature suitable purpose codes, namely 15150 for civil society aid, 15151 for election aid, and 15153 for media aid. Civil society aid supports civil society organisations, initiatives to hold government officials to accounts, and diverse activities that support citizens to become active in the public sphere (OECD, n.d.). Electoral aid targets both organisations and processes, as well electoral observation. Finally, media aid bolsters activities that foster an unbiased flow of information.

Appendix B

Democracy Protest Measures: Justification and Detailed Description

With respect to democracy protests, two main data bases are available, namely Brancati‘s (2016) and Hellmeier and Bernhard‘s (2022) collection of democracy protests. These differ slightly in their definitions of democracy, and in the operationalisation of the protest variable itself. Regarding the definition, Brancati (2016) focuses on the electoral aspect of democracies, such that protests are included in which legal and non-legal barriers to electoral participation against both citizens and candidates are the main concern of demonstrators. As such, the definition of democracy differs slightly from Dahl‘s (1972) definition of polyarchy which informs the main dependent variable of this inquiry by putting a lesser emphasis on civil and political rights. However, Brancati‘s (2016) protest data has a tangible advantage in that it gives an estimate of the size of protests in terms of participants, which is a vital aspect given my hypotheses.

Hellmeier and Bernhard‘s (2022) collection of democracy protests, on the other hand, is deliberately designed to match the EDI, and thus provides superior alignment with the outcome variable. Unfortunately, the measurement of their protest variable conflates the size and frequency of protests in a given year, making it somewhat unsuitable for the present study. A country-year is assigned an ordinal score between zero and four, where zero means there were no events, one means there were some small-scale events, two means there were many small-scale events, three means there were some large-scale and small-scale events, and four means there were many large-scale and small-scale events. Therefore, the protest data by Brancati (2016) is used, while the protest data by Hellmeier and Bernhard (2022) is utilized for robustness checks. The latter is broadly suitable despite the conflation of protest size and frequency, since increases in this variable can be read as an increase in threat to political survival. Brancati‘s (2016) protest size variable measures the estimated number of participants in the largest rally scaled by population size. I divide this variable by the factor 1,000, such that this variable can be read in terms of one thousand participants per one million inhabitants.

Appendix C

Table C1

Regression Results: Models 1-3 using V-Dem Protest Data

	(1) ΔEDI	(2) ΔEDI	(3) ΔEDI
Protest Size	-0.501	-0.851	-0.478
	(0.544)	(0.611)	(0.549)
Democracy Aid	-0.137	-0.199	-0.117
	(0.109)	(0.129)	(0.113)
Protest Size * Democracy Aid	0.147**	0.239***	0.100
	(0.066)	(0.083)	(0.068)
Military Size		-0.034	
		(0.155)	
Protest Size * Democracy Aid * Military Size		-0.026**	
		(0.012)	
Resource Rents			-0.105**
			(0.043)
Protest Size * Democracy Aid * Resource Rents			0.002***
			(0.001)
Constant	48.133	124.896**	43.667
	(53.751)	(52.486)	(53.443)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Two-Way Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	870	745	855
Number of Countries	53	51	53

Robust standard errors in parentheses
**** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*

Appendix C

Table C2

Regression Results: Models 4-6 using V-Dem Protest Data

	(4) ΔCEI	(5) ΔCCSI	(6) ΔASII
Protest Size	-2.579	-1.151**	-3.121***
	(2.035)	(0.569)	(0.969)
Election Aid	-1.696*		
	(0.907)		
Protest Size * Election Aid	1.233*		
	(0.741)		
Civil Society Aid		-0.595	
		(0.754)	
Protest Size * Civil Society Aid		-0.0984	
		(0.365)	
Media Aid			0.989
			(4.069)
Protest Size * Media Aid			2.139
			(1.702)
Constant	463.0***	124.1	451.4***
	(135.0)	(151.4)	(166.7)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Two-Way Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	354	698	357
Number of Countries	44	53	45

Robust standard errors in parentheses
**** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*