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GIGA Research Programme:  
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International Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes:  
Toward a Conceptual Framework

Gero Erdmann, André Bank, Bert Hoffmann, and  
Thomas Richter

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# International Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes: Toward a Conceptual Framework

## Abstract

Authoritarian regimes use multiple forms of international cooperation to sustain their rule. In scholarly research, however, the study of these phenomena has been marginal and still lacks conceptual clarity. This paper takes stock of these shortcomings and embarks on a review of the existing literature from democratization, diffusion, policy transfer and Europeanization studies. In doing so, it identifies a number of conceptual approaches whose integration can provide a useful framework for the study of the international cooperation of authoritarian regimes. For this, the specific characteristics of nondemocratic rule need to be taken into account – from their preference of some forms of cooperation over others to practical difficulties for empirical fieldwork. Against this backdrop, we provide examples of different types of authoritarian cooperation and conclude by sketching a research agenda that is as politically necessary as it is academically promising.

Keywords: authoritarian regimes, international dimension, cooperation, diffusion, learning, policy transfer

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# International Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes: Toward a Conceptual Framework

Gero Erdmann, André Bank, Bert Hoffmann, Thomas Richter

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In politics and political science alike, awareness is growing about the increasing international influence of authoritarian regimes. The primary focus of attention has been the neighborhood policies of Russia's post-Soviet regime as well as China's international political and economic activities. The controversy about a "reverse wave" of democratization, the expan-

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1 Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the international GIGA workshop "Stemming the Wave – International Cooperation and Learning of Authoritarian Regimes," GIGA, Hamburg, 8–9 November 2012; Workshop 16 "International Dimensions of Authoritarian Rule," ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Johannes-Gutenberg University, Mainz, 11–16 March 2013; and the ISA Annual Convention, San Francisco, 3–6 April 2013.

sion of nondemocratic rule (Merkel 2010; Puddington 2008, 2009) and the earlier “backlash against democracy promotion” (Carothers 2006, 2009) reflects these trends.

More recently, scholarly attention has turned away from the international dimension of democratization to address the international dimension of authoritarian regimes. This new interest drew authors from two strands. First, scholars formerly interested in processes of democratization took notice of the authoritarian rollback that reversed many efforts of democracy promotion (Burnell and Schlumberger 2010; Burnell 2011). Second, scholars previously interested in the stability and durability of authoritarian regimes became increasingly aware of the importance of international factors (Art 2012: 201). Some of the literature maintains a democratizing perspective insofar as it asks how and why some nondemocratic regimes were able to fend off international diffusion of or even pressure for democracy (Levitsky and Way 2010; Weyland 2010). However, the strand of research that does not approach the issue from the angle of democratization still needs to develop a comprehensive conceptual approach.

The issue goes well beyond the particular antidemocratic “leverage” of authoritarian powers, such as Russia’s counterinfluence on the color revolutions in its neighborhood. Authoritarian regimes collaborate in various ways:

- They provide each other with ideational and material support;
- They protect each other on the international level – for example, through vetoes in the UN Security Council;
- They help each other in military- and security-related issues;
- They learn from each other in how to deal with opposition and how to build a solid political party;
- They exchange ideas on the design of development strategies;
- And they provide each other with direct personal advice on how to cope with insurgent forces and how to control Internet usage.

While it is obvious that authoritarian regimes use multiple forms of international cooperation to reinforce their rule, the existing literature pays scant attention to these phenomena.

Moreover, the international cooperation of authoritarian regimes is not confined to like-minded regimes; hybrid regimes and democracies also cooperate with authoritarian regimes. In the case of democracies, the general argument is that cooperation eventually leads to the diffusion of democracy and the breakdown of the authoritarian regime. This may be true in the long run, as evidenced by the wave-like increases in the number of democracies over the last two hundred years. In the short run, however, the collaboration between democratic and authoritarian regimes – for example, based on strategic calculations during the Cold War or more recent attempts to secure oil supply – has directly and indirectly supported authoritarian rulers and enabled their endurance.

In this paper, we argue that authoritarian regimes deliberately use international cooperation to bolster their particular type of rule. This includes not only cooperation with each other,

but also with democracies and with hybrid regimes. This statement may seem trivial *prima facie*, but it becomes less so if we ask what cooperation involves and in what ways cooperation becomes effective.

Much of the literature on the interconnections between authoritarian regimes is rather vague about what constitutes cooperation. To address this problem, we first discuss the concept as generally used in International relations (IR). We then screen the existing literature on international “regime diffusion” for the treatment of cooperation and related concepts. This includes the more recent studies on the international dimension of authoritarian rule; the established research on diffusion, learning and policy transfer; and the literature on the promotion of democracy, including Europeanization studies. Our assumption is that most of the concepts developed in these various strands build on an underlying notion of cooperation. In the following sections, we discuss these lines of research. Our aim is to identify useful concepts and mechanisms that will allow us to create a general framework for the analysis of the international cooperation of authoritarian regimes, which is an important subfield in the study of authoritarianism and its international dimension.

One caveat is necessary. We do not systematically address the literature on the international dimension of authoritarian rule during the Cold War era. This is due to space-limitation reasons and systematic reasons. In the era of bloc confrontation, authoritarian regimes were readily supported by either of the two superpowers.<sup>2</sup> With this global context gone, the conditions for cooperation have fundamentally changed. Authoritarian governments now have to seek allies in a world in which political democracy has become more widespread than ever before. Even China’s rise as a global power is far from a reproduction of the old bipolar system. The challenges for contemporary authoritarian rulers to find cooperation partners on the international level are therefore substantially different from those of their predecessors in the Cold War era, and so are the challenges for political scientists seeking to understand these processes.

## 2 Issues Involved

Before discussing in more detail the various approaches to the study of the international dimension of authoritarian rule, we briefly reflect on six fundamental insights into the existing literature. These insights also provide the basis for the guiding questions and the structure of our review.

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2 Not only the Soviet Union but also the United States systematically supported authoritarian regimes. In Latin America, Washington was involved even in military coups against democratically elected governments, such as in Chile in 1973. In its wake, there was intense cooperation between the South American military dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s, including joint Secret Service operations against opponents in the infamous “Operación Condor” (Dinges 2005) and military training programs, such as the School of the Americas (Gill 2004). We also leave out historical accounts on diffusion, learning and international cooperation among nineteenth-century monarchies and between totalitarian or fascist regimes during the interwar period.

First, there seems to be a general agreement that international factors matter for the development of political regimes – although to what degree is still up for debate. Research on democratization has addressed this issue most explicitly (e.g. Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Gleditsch and Ward 2006; Magen and Morlino 2009a: 11–13; Börzel and Risse 2012a). Hence, there is little reason to doubt that international factors also play a role in the resilience or even spread of authoritarian regimes. The reverse wave, for instance, that has recurrently followed each wave of democratization might indicate the relevance of the international dimension for authoritarian rule.

Second, if the relevance of the international factors is agreed upon, the major challenge is to understand how the international dimension impacts the development of authoritarian rule. To be more specific: How does the cooperation between authoritarian regimes help to stabilize authoritarian rule? Does this international dimension of authoritarian power maintenance operate in the same or in a similar way to that identified by the democratization and diffusion literature? Can we use their concepts and instruments?

In fact, most studies on the international dimension of democratization do not consider the (counter)influence of authoritarian regimes; they thus limit the international dimension to one specific group of powers in the international system. Even recent studies on hybrid regimes only analyze the influence of the West (Gilardi 2012: 4), leaving aside that of other nondemocratic powers.

Third, most studies – particularly those under the label of “diffusion” – focus on the process rather than on the outcome. They are interested in detecting causal mechanisms. A causal mechanism postulates a cause ( $X$ ) and an outcome ( $Y$ ), which are linked by a mechanism ( $M$ ). This implies that

- 1) there are at least two actors involved (a sender and a receiver) in a coordinated process or one of at least two actors in the case of an uncoordinated process and
- 2) the international dimension is linked to the domestic level. Hence, to understand the process adequately, we need to be concerned with actors and their relationships (Gerring 2010, 2012; Hedström 2010: 215).

When we ask how authoritarian regimes stabilize their rule through international cooperation, we are interested in processes and outcomes. In a comprehensive analysis, the process of international cooperation will be both the independent and dependent variables, while the outcome will be the latter only.<sup>3</sup> As we leave aside normative considerations, the default outcome is survival and stability (assumed to be the regime’s goal) – not “convergence” or “democratization.”

Fourth, there is a tentative agreement that an integration of structure and agency is required in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the problems involved (Gilardi 2012: 4; Marsh and Sharman 2009: 274–275). Without acknowledging the interactive relation-

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3 For the argument, see Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 8) and Marsh and Sharman (2009: 278–279).



ship between them, any explanation of a phenomenon is limited. While putting the focus on one or the other is basically an issue of the research question, the main challenge is the theoretical integration of both. On the methodological level, the core challenge remains how to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches into meaningful research designs. However, if we want to take the search for causal mechanisms seriously, we have to address the questions about the actors involved. As our review will reveal, despite frequent claims of agency-centered approaches, the literature shows conceptual and empirical problems in coping with the role of actors.

Fifth, the link between the international and the domestic political arenas addresses one of the major divides of political science: the division into the subfields of IR on the one hand, and comparative politics (including area studies and comparative area studies) on the other (Pridham 1991; Schmitter 1996: 28; Starr 1991; Whitehead 1996). It is not only the complexity of the “linkage” process, but also the conceptual and often methodological divide between the two subdisciplines that makes it so difficult to analyze the “interplay of international factors with domestic processes” (Pridham 1991: 8).

Sixth, although diffusion studies have seen substantial conceptual improvements since the early 1990s – mainly due to Europeanization studies (see below) – research in this field still faces conceptual challenges and has been mostly confined to a limited number of qualitative studies (Börzel and Risse 2012a; Erdmann and Kneuer 2009; Freyburg et al. 2011; Leininger 2010; Magen and Morlino 2009a; Sedelmeier 2011; Schimmelfennig 2012). The policies and actions of outside actors are often carefully analyzed. However, what remains largely neglected is the reaction of the domestic actors, how this in turn impacts the actions of the external actors, and, in the end, how the interaction of the two shapes the overall outcome.<sup>4</sup>

As our intention is to focus on processes, outcomes and actors, the following three sets of questions guide the framework for the analysis of the international cooperation of authoritarian regimes (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000: 8; Marsh and Sharman 2009: 278–279):

- 1) What actors are involved in the processes? Who is the sender? Who is the receiver? Are the actors involved governments, civil society organizations and/or international organizations?
- 2) How are these actors involved? Is the process coordinated (intentional) or uncoordinated (unintentional)? Is the process coercive or voluntary?
- 3) What is involved? What content is transmitted in the process (e.g., ideas, actions, policies, programs, advice, etc.)?

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4 For attempts to overcome these shortcomings, see – for example – Magen and Morlino (2009b) and the contributions in Börzel and Risse (2012a).

### 3 Cooperation

In IR, cooperation is an elusive concept that proves difficult to study (Keohane 2005: 10). It is often ill-defined, abstract and normatively loaded. Frequently, cooperation is understood as an opposite of conflict, confrontation and competition, or it is viewed as an early stage of regional integration. For instance, international regimes such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) are presented as cases of cooperation. The entry in the *International Encyclopedia of Political Science* gives a good example of the concept's vagueness:

Cooperation is action for the common benefit. [...] [It] is at the core of the issues of conviviality, democracy, peaceful coexistence between different communities, and the preservation of human life on Earth.

(Colomer 2011: 447)

The entry also illustrates well the strong normative overtones often attached to the concept of cooperation. However, cooperation can also take place for less noble purposes. In studying cooperation between authoritarian regimes, an evident objective of the actors may be to preserve authoritarian rule in each of the countries involved. To ensure cooperation serves as a useful analytical instrument, we strip the concept of any normative connotations and limit its meaning to the peaceful interaction of at least two different actors (here, different countries) that pursue their own strategies and interests.

A second major problem is directly related to the concept's opaqueness. Much of the literature is rather vague about what constitutes cooperation, revealing the lack of a precise understanding of the concept's properties. We deem Keohane's definition the most useful:

Cooperation occurs when actors adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences of others, through a process of policy coordination. To summarize more formally, intergovernmental cooperation takes place when the policies actually followed by one government are regarded by its partners as facilitating realization of their own objectives, as the result of a process of policy coordination.

Keohane (2005: [1984]: 51–52)

The classic IR assumption is that cooperation requires an asymmetrical relationship – for instance, a hegemon (such as the United States) that bears the coordination costs for a cooperation-based international regime.<sup>5</sup> Keohane (2005[1984]) called this phenomenon “hegemonic cooperation.” Snidal (1985) termed it “hegemonic stability theory,” which was later adapted by Norrlof (2010).<sup>6</sup> Seeing US power in decline, Keohane's (2005) crucial point was that co-

5 IR theory is largely inspired by Kindleberger's (1981) conceptualization of international institutions (regimes or cooperation) as public goods.

6 Norrlof's (2010) argument is essentially about the benefits of cooperation. She claims – contrary to the neoliberal and neorealist schools, which see the hegemon as the major cost bearer – that the hegemon, whether dom-

operation does not require hegemony. Once international regimes have been established, based on the hegemonic cooperation of the United States, they develop their own self-interest as an institution in whose maintenance other actors have an interest as well – even if the hegemonic power declines. The result is “nonhegemonic” or “posthegemonic” cooperation (Keohane 2005 [1984]: 224-225), which is usually seen as a difficult but obviously possible type of cooperation.

How cooperation emerges under conditions that are closer to symmetry is better explained by Axelrod’s (2006) cooperation theory (see also Axelrod and Keohane 1985). His model, explicated by using the prisoner’s dilemma, is based upon the self-interest of actors who are not controlled by any central authority or being forced to cooperate with each other. The assumption of self-interest even allows “an examination of the difficult case in which cooperation is not completely based upon a concern for others or upon the welfare of the group as a whole” (Axelrod 2006: 6). It is important in this respect that cooperation “based upon reciprocity *can* develop even between antagonists” (ibid. 22) – see, for example, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE/OSCE) during the Cold War.

Taken together, why do we think that it would be fruitful to use cooperation between authoritarian regimes as an analytical focus for empirical research? First, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence of what we consider to be cooperation between contemporary authoritarian regimes. Second, as will be shown below, cooperation allows us to focus not only on agency – a perspective often neglected in favor of structure in many studies – but also on the relationship between at least two actors. Third, concentrating on actors’ relationships makes the study of the international dimension of authoritarianism much easier because it involves the analysis of concrete interactions between different actors, while a much broader focus on diffusion would comprise a number of rather abstract mechanisms such as competition, lesson-drawing and mimicry that are much more difficult to empirically analyze.

#### 4 Studies on the International Dimension of Authoritarian Rule

Research on the international dimension of authoritarian rule is still rare. Existing studies are of a fragmentary nature compared to the work done on the international dimension of democratization. While a small number of contributions have tried to “translate” some of the more abstract concepts developed in IR or Europeanization research into the realm of research on authoritarian regimes (e.g. Ambrosio 2010; Bader et al. 2010; Vanderhill 2012), most of these studies lack a systematic empirical base.<sup>7</sup> Many of the empirical studies, however,

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inant or in decline, is the major beneficiary of the asymmetrical cooperation. She disputes Keohane’s and others’ claims of US decline.

7 Research on the effects of international sanctions on authoritarian regimes is a “neighboring” field. For key studies in this regard, see Galtung (1967), Escribà-Folch and Wright (2010), Escribà-Folch (2011) or von Soest and Wahmann (2012).

either deal with highly aggregated data (e.g. Keller 2012) or provide evidence on the ways in which international factors might shape the survival and durability of authoritarian regimes without explicitly framing their results in broader conceptual terms (e.g. Heydemann 2007; Richter 2011; Shambaugh 2011). What follows in this section is, therefore, a loosely connected condensation of some of the existing studies. To address a wide range of works with an empirical focus on different world regions, we distinguish between three clusters:

- 1) The minority of democratization studies that also address the international dimension of authoritarian stability (or restabilization);
- 2) An emerging discussion about authoritarian diffusion and learning;
- 3) A number of vaguely conceptualized and poorly interrelated empirical studies on the international relations of authoritarian regimes.

The first cluster of studies emphasizes the roles of democratic powers with regard to the stability (or restabilization) of authoritarian rule. As a subtype of democratization studies, the studies in this cluster draw their main conceptual inspiration from the field of transition studies, anchored in comparative politics. However, they extend this academic connection to the point that they refer to the intentional policies and unintentional effects of democratic powers' behavior vis-à-vis authoritarian regimes. One of the earliest such accounts is Jason Brownlee's study on the survival of neopatrimonialism (classified as a subtype of authoritarian regimes) (2002). Referring to transitology accounts, Brownlee argues that "extensive patrimonialism, when unrestrained by external dependence, can enable regimes to withstand challenges that otherwise lead to transition" (Brownlee 2002: 36). Only when foreign pressure is lacking can authoritarian hard liners fully exert the regime's repressive capacity. Brownlee's argument points to the impact of implicit or explicit noncooperation of democratic powers with regard to authoritarian regimes during times of internal crisis.

Another example is the work of Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2010), who look at the linkage between non-Western authoritarian and Western democratic regimes (and, to a lesser degree, the linkage between the former and Western-dominated multilateral organizations) and also examine the leverage of these Western governments toward nondemocracies. Closely related to ideas developed in diffusion studies, they describe the varying degrees of democratization in different world regions since the early 1990s by combining these two analytical dimensions of linkage and leverage.<sup>8</sup> While not addressing possible interrelations, such as cooperation between and/or patterns of learning of authoritarian regimes, they argue that Western leverage alone is insufficient to force authoritarian regimes to democratize. Rather, the diffuse effects of linkage are important. Eventually, they recognize that a combination of both helps to explain the different degrees of (non)democratization among Eastern European, Latin American, sub-Saharan African and Asian countries since the early 1990s.

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8 It is interesting to note that the only region they do not cover empirically is the Middle East and North Africa.

A number of studies point to the importance of geopolitical and security aspects in regard to the influence democratic powers like the United States or the EU exert on strategically important authoritarian regimes (e.g. Momani 2004; Gause 2010; Jünemann 2005; Caryl 2012). In contrast, surprisingly few studies show how authoritarian regimes use international factors in order to stay in power; Cédric Jourde's (2007) contribution is a notable exception. Against the dominant assumption of primarily passive and dependent "small" authoritarian regimes, he points to the capacities for action of those regimes. Following the concept of extraversion (Bayart 2000), Jourde zooms in on the role that authoritarian regimes play in their own image-making and perception-creating vis-à-vis the "big" Western, democratic regimes in order to shield themselves from external pressure.

A second cluster of works aims to transfer concepts and definitions emanating from international democratization and diffusion studies to the research on authoritarian states. Peter Burnell and Oliver Schlumberger (2010), for instance, concentrate on findings from three interrelated subfields:

- 1) international factors of democratization (diffusion and linkage and leverage),
- 2) international promotion of democracy and
- 3) the new authoritarianism research.

While Burnell and Schlumberger point to a number of deficiencies in all of these subfields when it comes to explaining the survival and durability of authoritarian regimes, their own work fails to explain precisely where researchers should be looking with regard to the processes, the actors and the most crucial issues involved.

Thomas Ambrosio (2010) was perhaps the first to present a more comprehensive conceptualization of authoritarian diffusion. Following Zachary Elkins and Beth Simmons (2005), he understands diffusion as a largely indirect and passive process logically divided into two aspects:

- 1) *Appropriateness* – the impact of changes in the relatively normative power of policy decisions;
- 2) *Effectiveness* – a learning process by which policymakers are better able to identify what does and does not work through the experiences of others.

Ambrosio argues that aspects like geography, linkage, international organizations, great powers and reference groups might be mitigating factors influencing authoritarian diffusion.

Julia Bader, Jörn Grävingholt and Antje Kästner (2010) develop a theoretical argument about why and under what circumstances powerful authoritarian regimes should be expected to impact governance structures in their regional environments. Starting with a critical review of the literature on democracy promotion, democratic diffusion and the new authoritarianism research – along the lines of Burnell and Schlumberger (2010) – they focus on big authoritarian powers like Russia and China. They distinguish between "power of example" – conceptually close to the mechanisms of lesson-drawing or demonstration (Vanderhill

2012) – and “power of influence.” On this basis, the authors point to the domestic sources of foreign policy in these two cases. Given the domestic need to allocate (private) goods to key social groups, an authoritarian great power is likely to use its foreign and, especially, regional relations as a way to secure resources necessary to stabilize political rule at home. While cooperation does not figure prominently in Bader, Grävingholt and Kästner’s account (2010), they provide plenty of empirical examples that could easily be classified as cooperation between authoritarian regimes.

Rachel Vanderhill’s paper (2012) distinguishes between three structural mechanisms of authoritarian diffusion, which involves authoritarian elite learning “from the successes and failures of other countries” (Vanderhill 2012: 2). While she cross-references earlier studies on diffusion in the post-Soviet region, she conceptually distinguishes three mechanisms of how authoritarian elites can learn from each other:

- 1) An indirect, informal and noncoercive mechanism of demonstration, where authoritarian elites adopt political strategies from neighboring countries because they believe in those strategies for normative or functional values.
- 2) A direct, often formal and also noncoercive mechanism of purposive and collaborative action, where successful strategies of authoritarian survival will be intentionally shared with elites in recipient countries.
- 3) A direct, deliberate and coercive mechanism of external pressure, where authoritarian external actors can pressure elites in recipient states for policy change.

All three mechanisms, Vanderhill argues, underlie two conditions of effectiveness. First, the domestic elite balance, as an equal distribution of power between liberals and illiberals, makes external involvement more likely. Second, stronger linkages between elites will increase the likelihood of authoritarian regimes looking abroad.

A third, gradually growing cluster of scholarship analyzes different empirical aspects of the international dimension of authoritarian rule. Thus far, most of this research has been stronger in its empirical description than in its conceptual approaches. Franziska Keller (2012), who bases her research on Timur Kuran’s (1997) “preference falsification,” finds that revolutionary events in authoritarian regimes are more likely to spread to neighboring countries than to more distant parts of the world. However, she neither explicitly explains why this is the case nor does she address actor-specific characteristics, such as concrete cooperation between authoritarian regimes or aspects of learning in order to shield authoritarian regimes from breaking down.

Another example of work from this third cluster is Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders’ (2011) recent article in *Globalizations*, which points to a learning effect among Arab authoritarian regimes as part of the recent upheavals in the Middle East since late 2010. Previous works have made similar observations. While providing solid empirical insights of interesting episodes of “authoritarian upgrading” (2007), on the intra-Arab League cooperation of interior ministers (Mattes 2010) and on the the Gulf Cooperation Council (Richter 2011),

the conceptual framing of these analyses remains either vague or nonexistent. This they share with David Shambaugh (2011), who provides a fascinating summary of the Chinese Communist Party's internal discussions about authoritarian regime breakdown and survival in other world regions. Despite mentioning "learning" several times, Shambaugh's definition of "learning" remains largely unclear.

A subcluster within this third section are recent studies on the post-Soviet and post-Yugoslavian countries. Whereas a number of studies argue that a kind of "transnational learning" has taken place among opposition groups when it comes to electoral innovations (Bunce and Wolchik 2010), there is an emerging literature on the role Russia has played and still plays in authoritarian regimes in Central Asia and Eastern Europe (e.g. Jackson 2010).

To sum up, the literature on the international dimension of authoritarian rule is highly fragmented and only loosely connected to previously developed concepts of democratization and diffusion. The conceptually most developed part is a subunit of democratization research looking at (un)intentional and reverse effects of the relations between Western democratic and non-Western authoritarian regimes. Although much anecdotal evidence points to the empirical relevance of cooperation as well as learning between authoritarian regimes, new conceptual literature on the international dimension of authoritarian regimes is still in its infancy. We find a strong empirical concentration on the role and impact of authoritarian China and Russia, and much less on authoritarian regimes with regional rather than global influences such as Iran, Saudi Arabia or Vietnam. The existing literature currently provides virtually no stocktaking of cooperation efforts between the remaining authoritarian regimes within and across regions. Extant studies have a clear bias toward the structural side versus perspectives that are more actor or process oriented. Another lacuna is the lack of a systematic comparative perspective, be it in terms of time (diachronic) or space (synchronic).

## 5 Studies on the Diffusion of Democracy

### 5.1 Democratization Studies

To describe the international influence on democratization processes, a host of different terms and concepts have been used – sometimes ill-defined, sometimes with different meanings from author to author. Huntington's unspecific dealing with the issue illustrates the problem. The international factor "may be variously termed demonstration effect, contagion, diffusion, emulation, snowballing, or perhaps even the domino effect" (Huntington 1993: 100).<sup>9</sup> Whitehead (1996) suggests a threefold typology-cum-analytical perspective consisting of contagion, control and consent. Contagion describes the "neutral transmission mechanism," which requires no identified actor, instruments or coordination (Whitehead 1986: 5–6);

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9 All these terms reference a particular author or strand of literature; however, Huntington does not identify these.

it is very close to a general concept of diffusion (see below). Control covers a range from the forceful “imposition (or intervention)” from the outside to the peaceful “promotion” of democracy by an external agency with a dominant position of power (Whitehead 1996: 9–12). Analytically, one actor is the coordinating sender. Finally, consent incorporates “the actions and intentions of relevant domestic groupings, and the interaction between internal and international processes” (Whitehead 1996: 15). This is the most complex concept of the three as it includes coordinated actors on both the sending and receiving sides and the interaction between the two. However, it refers to the latter consolidation phase rather than the initial transition process of democracy. Interestingly, consent directly relates to Pridham’s concept of international linkage politics – borrowed from Rosenau (1970) – and thus links up comparative politics with IR (Pridham 1991). When Pridham dissects linkage politics into outer-directed and inner-directed linkages, he touches exactly upon the dimension of interaction between international and national actors and processes; however, he does not address this explicitly.

These concepts were not further elaborated or differentiated by the authors or other scholars. It was obvious that aside from their heuristic value they covered too many different things. Philippe Schmitter added a fourth concept (conditionality) to Whitehead’s threefold typology (Schmitter 1996: 29), thereby highlighting the necessity of further differentiation. Particularly, Whitehead’s category of control covered a wide spectrum of different actors, motives and instruments (coercive/noncoercive means) that was not really accounted for. Since then, democratization studies have settled on a more nuanced conceptualization of the international dimension.

In place of Whitehead’s category of control, Burnell suggested distinguishing between democracy promotion and democracy assistance, while other authors used these concepts interchangeably – democracy promotion tended to become a catch-all term (Burnell 2000a, 2000b). In Burnell’s approach, democracy assistance refers to those provisions that are peaceful, having the primary objective of advancing democracy. It comprises positive measures of “support, incentive, inducement and reward”; above all, the assistance must be related (or lend support) to locally driven democratization processes (Burnell 2000a: 9). “Harder” forms of democracy support are termed “democracy promotion,” which includes not only deliberate acts of forceful imposition or intervention from the outside (such as the threat or implementation of sanctions, economic and political conditionality and even democratization by military occupation), but also “all manner of *development* assistance designed to advance the social, economic and other conditions that experts believe would be beneficial to democracy” (Burnell 2000a: 11).<sup>10</sup>

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10 Including all developmental efforts that might in the long run support democratic change – assuming that socioeconomic development will lead to democratic rule – would be a stretch of the concept of democracy promotion and almost impossible to precisely analyze. Carothers (2009) distinguishes between indirect develop-



Here again, we have the problem that both concepts are stretched, especially as promotion covers coercive and noncoercive as well as direct and indirect means. Above all, these concepts are ill-defined (Burnell 2000b: 340) and not clearly operationalized; they offer little theoretical content and are one reason why democratization studies have yielded little hard evidence of the impact of democracy promotion. Leininger (2010: 56) points out the common properties of all the concepts of democracy promotion:

- 1) There is an internationally active actor.
- 2) Democracy is the policy aim of this actor.
- 3) The actor's policy measures serve to advance democracy.
- 4) The actor has a means to achieve the policy aim.

Regardless of other weaknesses, the crucial point is that this conceptualization focuses on the external actor (sender) and its organization and strategy, but leaves aside the domestic counterpart (receiver). When changes on the receiving side are addressed, the interaction between the two and how they relate to each other remains obscure. The democracy promotion and assistance studies are clearly actor and policy oriented and consequently require a policy analysis approach.<sup>11</sup>

Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way have noted the lack of a coherent theoretical framework for the analysis of the international dimension of democratization.<sup>12</sup> In place of the usual "laundry list of the various mechanisms of international influence" or the focus on a single mechanism, they suggest a comprehensive and "concise theoretical framework" organized – as noted above – into two dimensions: "Western leverage" and "linkage to the West" (Levitsky and Way 2010: 39–40). "Western leverage" is defined as a "government's vulnerability to external democratizing pressure"; it comprises the "regimes' bargaining power vis-à-vis the West," and the "potential impact [...] of Western punitive action toward the regime" (Levitsky and Way 2010: 40–41). "Linkage to the West" is defined as a "multidimensional concept that encompasses the myriad networks of interdependence that connect individual polities, economies, and societies to Western-democratic communities" (Levitsky and Way 2010: 43).

Unfortunately, the two concepts do not solve the conceptual challenge we face. The operationalization reveals that both are entirely structural concepts, although the authors claim they capture all the disparate mechanisms of international influence. In this way, the concepts come close to the very general concept of diffusion, although it is much more nuanced and detailed than, for instance, Whitehead's concept of contagion. The interesting point of

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mental assistance and the more direct political democracy assistance; the former is associated with the European approach, the latter with the US approach.

11 Kneuer (2006: 70–86) provides an analytical framework that takes a differentiated set of international and domestic actors into account.

12 Note that even though Levitsky and Way deal with nondemocratic regimes, they look through the lens of democratization – which means they focus on Western influence, not on how nondemocratic regimes relate to each other.

the conceptualization is that Levitsky and Way move beyond the international dimension by including the domestic in their framework. This is clearly an advancement beyond most previous research. The domestic dimension is captured by the “organizational power” of the autocrat (Burnell and Schlumberger 2010: 54–73). Here again, however, organizational power is conceived of as a structure, as the balance of power between autocrats and opponents. Ultimately, this conceptualization does not address the questions of how the mechanisms between the international and domestic dimensions (coordinated/uncoordinated, voluntary/coercive) operate or who is involved. What they offer instead is just an explanation for the employed coding (Art 2012: 367).

It is hard to imagine how the dynamics of a changing power relationship between the actors involved, particularly in situations of a struggle for regime change, can be captured by this conceptualization. In addition, Levitsky and Way disregard the influence and the direct counterdiffusion of nondemocratic powers that evolve as a reverse wave – an omission found in most studies of the international dimension of democratization.<sup>13</sup> Logically, one cannot assume that the lack of Western (i.e., democratic) linkage and leverage necessarily implies the same degree of autocratic linkage and leverage. The influence of democratic and autocratic powers does not need to be directly converse.

Finally, there is Magen and Morlino’s framework for the analysis of external factors of democratization – EU Cycles and Layers of International Democratic Anchoring (EUCLIDA) – which is somewhere in between democratization and Europeanization studies. EUCLIDA is partly within the field of traditional democratization studies because the authors start their enquiry by discussing this general perspective’s external influence on “democratic anchoring,” they focus on agency and policy, and they provide a typology for the external “methods of influence.” However, EUCLIDA is also partly in the field of Europeanization studies because Magen and Morlino develop a special analytical framework for the European Union’s influence on democratization processes in different types of neighboring countries (Magen and Morlino 2009a). They identify four categories of international methods of influence: democratic control, conditionality, socialization and example. Democratic control is an external coercive intervention “taking control of a country’s political institutions and processes” and can be “heavy” or “light” (Morlino and Magen 2009: 30–31). Conditionality means that “powerful external actors manipulate threats of punitive measures and promises of positive rewards to alter the costs and benefit of domestic policy choices” (Morlino and Magen 2009: 31). Socialization is “a process of inducting individuals and states into the democratic norms and rules of a given international or transnational community” that aims to “[facilitate] the internalization of democratic norms, policies and institutions through the establishment and intensification of linkages between liberal international fora and state actors in transitional countries” (Morlino and Magen 2009: 34). Democratic example means that

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13 For an application of these approaches to the historic diffusion of regime contention in European democratization from 1830 to 1940, see Weyland (2010).

“state and societal actors [...] accept new rules, institutions, and policy choices [...] through sheer emulation of a successful external model” (Morlino and Magen 2009: 38). Magen and Morlino finally focus on conditionality and socialization as the “most promising and potentially malleable methods” for supporting democratization as these are largely the methods the EU employs to democratize neighboring countries (Morlino and Magen 2009: 39). For the analysis of the specific EUCLIDA, they step clearly beyond traditional democracy promotion or early Europeanization studies. Partly borrowing from Europeanization studies, they address not only “rule adoption” but also “rule implementation” and even “rule internalization” (Morlino and Magen 2009: 40–41). By doing so, they take the external and various domestic actors and their interaction into account, although their framework is linked to the particular EU context. However, a closer look at the case studies of the collection unfortunately reveals that this claim remains largely unjustified. The authors essentially look at what the EU demands and the output on the other side – sometimes distinguishing between what is only adopted and what is actually implemented in the end – while rule internationalization is not dealt with at all. Determining how the various actors relate to each other is based on the output and outcome rather than analyzed as a process. The interaction between the external and the various domestic actors largely remains a black box.

## 5.2 Diffusion and Transfer Studies

Ever since the international dimension of democratization was acknowledged, diffusion has played an important role in certain studies. However, democratization research has often used diffusion in a specific way – namely, as a kind of neutral, uncoordinated process or uncoordinated interdependence that spreads throughout the world. Whitehead’s concept of contagion is paradigmatic. Usually, these studies (Brinks and Coppedge 2006; Lauth and Pickel 2009; Starr and Lindborg 2003; e.g. Starr 1991: 1) refer to Rogers’ definition of diffusion as a “process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (Rogers 1995: 10). This definition leaves the channels and practice of communication, as well as the actors, unspecified. It often refers to the more or less spontaneous spread of ideas through media and communication channels, but can also relate to coercive measures. In the end, most of these studies provide statistical correlations or find patterns that implicitly and sometimes explicitly leave out the mechanisms and the actors involved in the process.

There is a strand of research that goes beyond this broad concept of diffusion and suggests, by using a narrower concept, distinguishing various types of mechanisms to get a better understanding of the process (Börzel and Risse 2012a; Elkins and Simmons 2005; Holzinger et al. 2007: 15; Jordana et al. 2011; Marsh and Sharman 2009). For example, Elkins and Simmons suggest “adaption to altered conditions” and “learning” as two classes that comprise three mechanisms each (Elkins and Simmons 2005: 39–45). Here, the general hypothesis

of diffusion is that government decisions in one country are “systematically conditioned” by decisions in others (Elkins and Simmons 2005: 37; Gilardi 2011: 26; Strang 1991: 325).

At the same time, various scholars have discovered striking similarities between the latter strand of diffusion literature and policy transfer studies (Holzinger et al. 2007; Marsh and Sharman 2009). In fact, these research approaches analyze very similar, sometimes even the same, processes in which ideas and knowledge about policies, institutions and institutional arrangements are transmitted from one polity or political setting to another – “lesson-drawing, policy convergence, policy diffusion, and policy transfer” in the words of Dolowitz and Marsh (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000: 5). The authors note that policy transfer studies usually describe “the transfer of ideas or policies between countries but do not analyze and explain the processes involved” (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000: 7). Instead, they point out the necessity to distinguish between “who is involved” and “what is transferred,” and between voluntary and coercive transfer as a continuum, not as a dichotomy (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000: 8–13).

For our purposes, there seems to be little to gain from the debate on whether diffusion is a subtype of policy transfer or the other way around, or whether both are types of lesson-drawing.<sup>14</sup> While there is a “conceptual core and a complementary interest” (Marsh and Sharman 2009: 271) between the two concepts, we also need to keep in mind a number of differences. For example, diffusion studies emanate from IR and tend to be concerned with structural explanations, take a macroperspective and use quantitative methods. Policy transfer studies are grounded in public policy studies, usually focus on actors, apply a microperspective and employ qualitative methods (Gilardi 2012: 5; Holzinger et al. 2007: 16; Marsh and Sharman 2009: 270–274).

The conceptual core mechanisms of diffusion and policy transfer can be grouped into the following: coercion, competition, learning and emulation (mimicry or socialization) (Gilardi 2011: 13–25, 2012: 6; Marsh and Sharman 2009: 271–272).<sup>15</sup>

To summarize, the literature on diffusion has “produced interesting insights on the specific mechanisms that drive the process, although their empirical identification” is still questionable (Gilardi 2011: 313). The major problem is that the “mechanisms” are still underspecified and the “empirical evidence usually is ambiguous and unable to discriminate convincingly among these different explanations” (Gilardi 2010: 650). Quantitative and also most qualitative studies simply focus on spatial and temporal adoption patterns in a number of countries, but – as in democratization studies – the process itself largely remains a black box, only abstractly explained by the theoretical mechanisms. The exact empirical links are assumed rather than proved.

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14 For this discussion and the literature, see Marsh and Sharman (2009: 271).

15 For the details of the definition, see Appendix 1.

### 5.3 Europeanization Studies

Europeanization generally refers to the “dimensions, mechanisms, and outcomes by which European processes and institutions affect domestic-level processes and institutions” (Börzel and Risse 2007: 485). Including Europeanization studies in this review may initially seem implausible given that they deal with a unique case of international influence on domestic politics. However, they provide an assortment of tools to conduct a differentiated analysis of the linkage between the international and the domestic dimensions. Europeanization studies also provide more evidence than any other research field on how influence operates as well as what kind of impact the sender (here, the EU) has.

Europeanization studies are no longer confined to those of old and new EU members. The field includes accession candidates in Central and Southeastern Europe, neighboring countries in Eastern Europe and North Africa without membership prospects, and even the worldwide diffusion of the EU model (Alter 2012; Börzel and Risse 2012b; Jetschke and Murray 2012; Lenz 2012: 201; Schimmelfennig 2012).

Europeanization studies distinguish between not only the statuses of the affected countries (old and new members, accession candidates and neighbors without membership prospects), but also various issue areas and policy fields that the EU seeks to influence. Finally, Europeanization studies conceptualize different layers of the EU’s impact on the domestic dimension, such as policy, institutional and behavioral change (Börzel and Risse 2007, 2012a), which partly corresponds to Magen and Morlino’s external impact on different domestic layers (see above and Appendix 1). This attention to the impact level is a rather recent innovation; EU studies had often been criticized for a top-down, one-way perspective and for confining themselves to the adoption of EU rules, while leaving the reaction in the recipient countries, the implementation and (even more crucial) the internalization of EU rules largely unexplored.<sup>16</sup>

In an attempt to integrate the concepts of the Europeanization literature into the larger literature on diffusion, the most comprehensive toolbox is provided by Börzel and Risse (2012a). Their framework for analyzing the “mechanisms of diffusion” distinguishes between a direct and indirect model of EU influence. They basically draw on well-established concepts of the diffusion and policy transfer literature, but modify the definitions of some of them. The core mechanisms of direct influence (or diffusion) are coercion, conditionality, socialization and persuasion. The indirect variant of diffusion comprises three “mechanisms of emulation”: lesson-drawing, competition and normative emulation/mimicry (Börzel and Risse 2012a; see for details Appendix 1).

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16 Rule adoption has various meanings. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005a) use rule adoption as an overall term and differentiate between formal, behavioral and discursive adoption. Börzel and Risse (2007, 2012a, 2012b) use formal, institutional and behavioral change; these terms correspond to Morlino and Magen’s (2009) layers of adoption, implementation and internalization.

According to the basic findings of the Europeanization literature, the impact of the EU differs across countries and issue areas. The “institutional impact of Europe tends to be differential and asymmetrical, affecting some member states more than others” (Börzel and Risse 2007: 495). Moreover, it is less effective in countries with weak membership prospects. The disagreement about the degree of change is usually attributed to different theoretical approaches. Policy change is clearly greater than institutional or behavioral change. These studies identify conditionality (labeled “external incentives model” as distinctive from conditionality as a political strategy) as the most effective causal mechanism. Socialization and persuasion are additional mechanisms at work – however, clearly less prominent. It should be noted that these mechanisms are rooted in different epistemological backgrounds – namely, in the rationalist and constructivist institutionalism of IR (see also Börzel and Risse 2012a; Sedelmeier 2011: 7, 11–16). Finally, mechanisms such as emulation, mimicking and lesson-drawing are underresearched (Börzel and Risse 2007: 497).

In a recent survey of Europeanization studies, scholars repeatedly pointed out an ongoing research gap (Sedelmeier 2011):<sup>17</sup> While most studies emphasize the importance of the domestic dimension as a mediating factor for EU influence, the conceptualization of the domestic factor is not very sophisticated. These factors – specified as “veto players,” “actor density” and “domestic costs” – remain “rather broad and are therefore subject to ad hoc operationalization.” This also applies to studies that specify the domestic costs by the orientation and constellation of political parties and party systems. Even this indicator, the constellation of political parties, is judged as simply too broad. “As a result, an inductive analysis of domestic costs is not kept separately from the analysis of outcomes, and hence the impact of costs” (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005a; Sedelmeier 2011: 30). In other words, the causes and dynamics of the domestic dimension (e.g., why a government responds in a particular way to EU demands) are most often not properly analyzed. This is also the case in some recent studies that (applying Börzel and Risse’s framework) explicitly address the domestic dimension, but unfortunately in very general terms and only on the macrolevel; these studies fail to fully exploit Börzel and Risse’s framework’s potential and scrutinize the actors involved (Noutcheva and Aydin-Düzgit 2012; Spendzharova and Vachudova 2012). The analyses appear plausible; the evidence, however, is biased and selective in favor of the argument, while alternative hypotheses are not even discussed.

By and large, Europeanization studies still tend to focus on rule adoption rather than on rule implementation, although they have started to analyze the obvious misfit between adoption, implementation and institutionalization (or between formal, institutional and behavioral change) – at least to some degree (Börzel and Risse 2007, 2012a; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005b). In fact, it seems an ongoing challenge to conceptualize and operationalize the domestic dimension and its dynamics and to identify useful indicators for both quantitative

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17 From the perspective of Comparative Politics, see also Erdmann and Kneuer (2009).

and qualitative analysis. Consequently, Sedelmeier argues that, for a better understanding of the domestic dimension, comparative politics and comparative political economy can provide a “stronger contribution” (see also Erdmann and Kneuer 2009: 332–337; Sedelmeier 2011: 31).

## 6 The International Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes: A Conceptual Framework

The review of the various strands of literature reveals a number of promises and pitfalls. On the one hand, the rich panorama of conceptual approaches may be helpful for the comparative analysis of the international cooperation of authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, there are a number of prevalent shortcomings that pose challenges not only for the established field of diffusion studies, but also for research on the international dimension of authoritarian regimes.

On the positive side, we have Börzel and Risse’s broad proposal to integrate the concepts of diffusion, learning, transfer and Europeanization under a common framework (Börzel and Risse 2012a) – probably the most elaborate we have to date. Fabrizio Gilardi’s (2011) suggestion is less comprehensive but along the same lines. At the same time, a strand of literature notes that we do not properly understand, for example, how learning or transfer actually works or how observers can identify and distinguish these. Despite scholars’ claims that they focus on agency, the interaction between the actors is most often not adequately analyzed in these studies. Today, research endeavors concentrate on much more than matching patterns of adoption. Nevertheless, most qualitative case studies rarely go beyond an analysis of what is happening on one side, what the reaction is on the other, and claiming the latter was caused by the former. The literature suggests that we need qualitative research that can provide empirical data on how the mechanisms operate, and we need carefully designed comparisons that allow us to draw conclusions beyond individual cases (see e.g. Gilardi 2012: 17; Sedelmeier 2012: 31).

First, we shall analyze how cooperation is involved in the various mechanisms provided by the integrated framework for international diffusion as summarized in Table 1. We want to find out the degree to which the mechanisms are based on interactions between different actors, and what kind of interaction is required to make the mechanisms work. This will include agency-oriented questions about who the sender is, who the receiver is, and how the message is communicated. It also includes distinguishing between different types of actors, such as governments and nongovernmental actors.

We do not assume that all the identified mechanisms rely on cooperation. For example, the imposition of authoritarian rule by war cannot be considered cooperation between the two governments involved. However, most of the mechanisms of the framework (see Table 1) require – at least to some degree – bilateral or multilateral cooperation, as we will discuss in the following paragraphs. Cooperation also implies a coordinated process (although with different degrees of coordination).

Second, we shall attempt to assess which of the mechanisms are empirically more likely than others to be crucial for the analysis of the international cooperation of authoritarian regimes.

**Table 1: Mechanisms of Diffusion and Cooperation (Coop)**

Indirect Influence			Direct Influence		
(a)	Learning/ lesson-drawing	Coop and/or noncoop	(d)	Coercion (legal)	Coop
(b)	Competition (unilateral)	Noncoop	(e)	Conditionality	Coop
(c)	Emulation / mimicry	Coop and/or noncoop	(f)	Persuasion	Coop
			(g)	Socialization	Coop

Source: See Appendix 1.

Seen from the perspective of international cooperation, the three mechanisms of indirect influence (lesson-drawing, competition and emulation/mimicry) are clearly more difficult to identify than the mechanisms of direct influence. Mechanisms of indirect influence can (but do not necessarily have to) involve some sort of cooperation, while those of direct influence are essentially based on at least bilateral cooperation. In fact, it is difficult to imagine the mechanisms of direct influence being effective without some degree of cooperation – except in cases where physical force is used.

As lesson-drawing (mechanism a) is described as a process in which “actors look to others for policies and rules that effectively solved similar problems elsewhere and are transferable into their domestic context” (Börzel and Risse 2012a: 9), an active sender is not definitively necessary. The receiver can act on its own by collecting information in all sorts of ways without direct contact with an actor of the country it wants to learn from. However, the country drawing the lesson can also directly consult actors of the other country or the country’s governmental institutions or civil society organizations for advice. In this way, lesson-drawing can involve cooperation – but this is only one of the ways in which this mechanism can operate.

An example of lesson-drawing in the context of the Arab Spring is provided by the authoritarian regime in Syria. Studying the counterinsurgency strategy of Mu’ammār Qaddafi in the spring of 2011, the Syrian government attempted to prevent the emergence and consolidation of “liberated territories” dominated by antiregime rebels. In addition to collecting information about Libya, Syrian army defectors reported direct contact between Syrian and Libyan generals. A common reaction of all Arab states (whether monarchies or authoritarian republics) to the Arab Spring was to increase the wages of state employees.

Another case in point of lesson-drawing is Cuba’s handling of digital, web-based information technologies, which was clearly guided by the Chinese experience. Bert Hoffmann (2004) has shown how this started as early as 1991 with Cuba’s first international e-mail connection to Canada copying a modality the Chinese had operated since 1987 via Karlsruhe, Germany. It then passed through the expansion of network technologies in the 1990s which



heavily relied on Chinese equipment, know-how and technical assistance. This learning curve eventually included the creation of the Ministry of Informatics and Communications, admittedly inspired by the homologous ministry in Beijing and following a series of high-level visits by Cuban officials to China (Hoffmann 2004: 206–207).

Lesson-drawing, of course, can also work *ex negativum* by avoiding actions or policies that are perceived to have led to unfavorable results in other cases. Again, Cuba may serve as an example. Because the Cuban leadership believed the glasnost and perestroika policies to have been responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Union, Havana adopted a policy of entrenchment instead of opening in the early 1990s. Similarly, following the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, Cuba “learned” that a course of reconciliation with the United States would eventually include multiparty elections – this had to be avoided at all costs.

An African example would be the present-day regular visits to the Chinese Communist Party’s training center by high-ranking cadres of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and South Africa’s African National Congress (ANC). The training of the ANC cadres is a remarkable example of a democratic ruling party learning from an authoritarian regime.

If competition (mechanism b) means “unilateral adjustments of behavior toward ‘best practices’” (Börzel and Risse 2012a: 9; Gilardi 2012) then no cooperation is involved in this mechanism; defined in this way, it comes close to the one-sided lesson-drawing that involves receiver-learning only. Examples of competition might be found within the set of authoritarian regimes that seek membership in international organizations like the WTO or aim to acquire favorable relationships with a regional power – as in the case of the EU-led processes of negotiating neighborhood agreements with the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Thus in the strict sense, this mechanism does not need cooperation as an interaction between two actors.

Emulation (normative) and mimicry (mechanism c) describe a process by which actors “imitate others for normative reasons – for instance, to increase their legitimacy” (Börzel and Risse 2012a: 10). Here again, we can have both cooperation and noncooperation – for instance, emulation as an active behavior initiated by a receiver who seeks to adopt a model through a consultation process with an actor (sender) from the other side, or mimicry as a one-sided process of simply copying (without actor consultation) or “downloading software” (Hoffmann 2004).

Again, drawing from the context of the Arab Spring, a number of newly empowered Arab Islamic movements such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Tunisian an-Nahda and the Moroccan Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD) emulated the example of the Turkish Islamic AKP party. The Arab Islamists – who are likely to play a prominent role in electoral authoritarian Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco – praised the AKP’s (alleged) amalgam of moderate Islam, capitalism and political pluralism as a model to follow and imitate.

A Latin American example is the gradual reform drive Raúl Castro has initiated in Cuba since he took over for his brother Fidel in 2006, clearly inspired by the economic success of Chinese and Vietnamese reform communism. While some of the government's measures emulate the Asian experiences, their limited success also illustrates that emulating a complex sociopolitical endeavor (e.g., agrarian reform) is in no way as easy as the "downloading of software."

To be effective, legal coercion (mechanism d) – defined as an obligation of international contractual partners (e.g., EU members must comply with EU laws – see Börzel and Risse 2012a: 9; Gilardi 2012) – is based on cooperation between the two parties involved. Without the interaction of a sender and a receiver, legal coercion cannot be effective as a mechanism.

Two crucial preconditions for this mechanism to be effective are (1) that the nondemocratic regimes are part of an international contractual regime by which parts of national sovereignty have been ceded to a superior body and (2) that they are prepared to comply with laws based on this international contract.

Theoretically, some form of (legal) coercion may be found in all forms of multilateral organization among authoritarian regimes – for example, the Arab League or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). However, this mechanism will be relatively hard to find empirically due to the tendency of authoritarian regimes to not formalize decision making.

Conditionality (mechanism e) through negative and positive incentives requires cooperation at least to some degree (Morlino and Magen 2009: 31). Without a sender and a receiver that in one form or another relate to each other, conditionality as the "manipulation of utility calculations" (Börzel and Risse 2012a: 6) seems impossible. Conditionality usually implies unequal actors; when the actors involved have equal power resources, conditionality is unlikely to be effective. It includes conditional financial and technical assistance but also all kinds of sanctions. As long as one side accepts the conditions and adopts the required policies or institutions, cooperation takes place – rather than violent clashes.

In authoritarian regimes, any acceptance of conditionality is usually a political taboo in public discourse as it is at odds with the strong emphasis on national sovereignty that is central to the rebuke of Western democratization efforts. Where it becomes most visible is in the case of Chinese loans, investments and development aid in Africa. While these loans, investments and aid officially are "unconditional" as regards political aspects such as human rights, rule of law and democracy, this approach is clearly conceived as an incentive to take Chinese instead of Western aid and loans. However, these economic transactions are in fact not unconditional; they not only include conditions of repayment, but are often also conditional upon the employment of Chinese companies, personnel and products.

Some sort of conditionality will play a crucial role in the relationships of resource-rich authoritarian regimes with other countries. An example is the Russian control of gas used to influence the politics in neighboring democratic and nondemocratic regimes.

Beijing's "One China" policy is certainly a prominent case of effective political conditionality; it puts nonrecognition of Taiwan as the *sine qua non* in any cooperation. Publicly, however, all partners would argue that they do not recognize the Taipei government for reasons other than Chinese conditionality.

Persuasion (mechanism f) – understood as a communicative rationality – means that actors try to persuade each other about the rationality or validity of their claims (Börzel and Risse 2012a: 8) this implies cooperation at least in the basic form of (benevolent) contact and communication.

There is overwhelming evidence that persuasion regularly takes place between authoritarian governments. However, it is hard to identify successful episodes empirically. A possible example of persuasion may be illustrated by Fidel Castro's role as long-distance counselor to Hugo Chávez during the 2002 coup attempt against the Venezuelan leader. By all reports, a telephone conversation between Chávez and Castro was crucial in Chávez' decision to let himself be detained and trust that the pro-Chávez forces would obtain his reinstatement (which, in fact, is what occurred), rather than opt for heroic sacrifice.

Finally, socialization (mechanism g) is probably the most elusive of all mechanisms. "Rather than maximizing their egoistic self-interest, actors seek to meet social expectations in a given situation [...]. [Socialization] often result[s] in complex learning by which actors redefine their interests and identities" (Börzel and Risse 2012a: 7). According to this definition, in most cases, socialization is a communicative process that involves at least two actors (a sender and a receiver) cooperating by exchanging ideas and more. In a way, socialization can be understood as a specifically long-term form of learning, marked by its duration and the depth of the interest alignments it produces.

While Cuba's Cold War alliance with the Soviet Union saw many Cuban cadres "socialized" into the mold of Eastern Bloc socialism through numerous student scholarship programs, Havana did not intend to repeat similar socialization processes in the post-1989 world with Hugo Chávez' self-proclaimed "socialism of the twenty-first century" or with Asia's reform communist countries.

This brief discussion and the examples given show that most of the mechanisms identified in the diffusion literature can also be applied to explanations of cooperation; only unilateral competition does not fit. For all other mechanisms, empirical cases are at hand. However, we do expect

- 1) that the relevance of the different mechanisms will vary substantially for the analysis of international cooperation of authoritarian regimes and
- 2) that learning or lesson-drawing will probably be the most frequent and politically most important.

## 7 Conclusion

Research on the international dimension of authoritarian rule has only recently reemerged as a genuine topic. The empirical and, in particular, conceptual literature in this field is still insufficient. Some of the studies follow a very “traditional” democratization perspective. Most are only weakly linked to established concepts of related strands of research such as the international dimension of democracy, diffusion studies or learning from abroad. Yet as this review of the literature on the subject reveals, there is a host of concepts and mechanisms that might be useful for the study of the international dimension of authoritarian rule. In fact, our argument is that the grand integration of the various ideas from the literature on democracy promotion, international diffusion studies, learning and lesson-drawing, and Europeanization studies can provide a useful framework for research on the international cooperation of authoritarian regimes. However, we have to point out that “cooperation” covers only a subfield of the international dimension of authoritarian rule. It is, nevertheless, a fruitful concept because it allows us to focus on the analysis of agency and the relationship between (at least) two actors.

While we argue that a range of concepts and mechanisms developed in the diffusion literature can be adapted to the study of cooperation between authoritarian regimes, we also argue that there are significant novelties that require exploration. Some forms of cooperation are, for instance, more likely than others. Unilateral competition and legal coercion will be much rarer among authoritarian regimes than among democracies since, by the very nature of their regimes, authoritarian rulers tend to shy away from binding legal frameworks. Similarly, but possibly to a lesser degree, we expect explicit conditionality to be a rare phenomenon between authoritarian regimes, especially where the implementation of political conditionality is concerned. In the end, empirical research on the international cooperation of authoritarian regimes will probably focus on phenomena explained by mechanisms of learning and lesson-drawing, emulation and/or socialization.

As useful as this framework appears, we are still faced with the challenge of making it applicable to empirical research. Conceptually, the black box of the international diffusion literature, which is the interaction between external and domestic actors, still lacks illumination. This includes the problem of the meso- and microfoundation of the processes under investigation, which also poses a particular challenge to the study of authoritarian cooperation. A particular obstacle for the questions raised in this paper is the opacity of authoritarian regimes, the lack of both transparency and public debate with regard to their international arrangements, and the difficulties of approaching politically relevant actors. It is not surprising that much of the previous research on these issues has been conducted with hindsight or has a completely historical nature – for example, through now-available archival resources and retired actors willing to speak about past regimes. However, such practical difficulties should be no excuse for scholars not to undertake the task of researching the important topic of current authoritarian regimes’ cooperation patterns.

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## Appendix 1: Concepts of International Diffusion

	Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005	Magen and Morlino 2009b	Marsh and Sharman 2009/Gilardi 2012	Börzel and Risse 2012a
Learning, Lesson-Drawing Example	<p>“Explanatory models and mechanisms of rule adoption” EU specific</p> <p>Nonmember states might also adopt EU rules without inducement from the EU. This is the case with a particular type of “policy transfer” in which knowledge of EU rules is used in the development or rules in the political systems of the CEECs. The literature on policy transfer draws a key analytical distinction between voluntary and coercive forms of transfer. While conditionality lies at the more “coercive” end of this continuum, the ideal type of voluntary transfer is lesson-drawing (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000: 13). The concept of lesson-drawing has been developed in the work of Richard Rose (1991, 1993). The lesson-drawing model that we present here departs from Rose’s concept to create an ideal type of Europeanization (20 f.).</p>	<p>“Methods of influence”</p> <p>State and societal actors in transitional states accept new rules, institutions and policy choices not as a result of external incentives or socialization, but through sheer emulation of a successful external model: Voluntary lesson drawing Geographic and psychological proximity</p>	<p>“Mechanisms of diffusion and policy transfer”</p> <p>The process by which a government (or any other unit) takes over – to various degrees – the praxis and experience of other governments’ (units) policies, institutions etc.; it implies a “rational” decision on the side of the “learning” government (other unit) with influences policy making because it can be used to estimate the likely consequences of policies.</p>	<p>“Mechanisms of diffusion” related to EU:</p> <p>a) Direct influence model of diffusion: four causal mechanisms b) Indirect model of diffusion: three causal mechanisms of emulation (p. 1, 5)</p> <p>(b) Lesson-drawing resembles competition insofar as actors look to others for policies and rules that effectively solved similar problems elsewhere and are transferable into their domestic context. [...] Lesson-drawing usually starts with actors who are faced with a particular political or economic problem which requires institutional change to solve it (9).</p>
Competition			<p>Refers to the fact that governments “anticipate or react to the policies” of other governments (or units) in order to ensure certain resources such as investment or competitiveness, etc.; (the argument is convergence)</p>	<p>(b) Unilateral adjustments of behavior toward best practices. Actors compete with each other over meeting certain performance criteria such as creating employment, economic growth etc. (9).</p>

	Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005	Magen and Morlino 2009b	Marsh and Sharman 2009/Gilardi 2012	Börzel and Risse 2012a
Socialization = Mimicry = Emulation Social Learning Model	The social learning model is based on core tenets of social constructivism. [...] It constitutes the most prominent alternative to rationalist explanations of conditionality [...] and Europeanization. [...] In contrast with the rationalist model of conditionality, the social learning model assumes a logic of appropriateness. [...] Whether a nonmember state adopts EU rules depends on the degree to which it regards EU rules and its demands for rule adoption as appropriate in terms of the collective identity, values and norms.	Aims to facilitate internationalization of democratic norms, policies and institutions through the establishment and intensification of linkages between liberal international fora and state actors in transitional countries – a process of inducting individuals and states into the democratic norms and rules of a given regional, international or transnational community – involves variably intrusive linkages, with the socialization potential and practices of different international actors ranging on a continuum of intensity (34).	Aims at the “socially constructed properties of policies such as norms of appropriateness emerging from social interactions” (Gilardi 2012: 6) or as Marsh and Sharman put it: the copying of foreign models “in terms of symbolic or normative factors, rather than a technical or rational concern with functional efficiency” (2009: 272).	(a) Through normative rationality or the logic of appropriateness: Rather than maximizing their egoistic self-interest, actors seek to meet social expectations in a given situation – they result in complex learning by which actors redefine their interests and identities (7).
(=) Emulation/ Mimicry			(b) Normative emulation/ mimicry: actors may also emulate others for normative reasons – for example, to increase their legitimacy (10).	
Coercion			(a) Physical or legal coercion (obligation of members to comply with EU law) (6)	
Control			Control can be “heavy” [use of military force] or “light” – the latter involving efforts to avoid local dependency through the early and/or gradual transfer of control functions to indigenous authorities (30-1).	

	Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005	Magen and Morlino 2009b	Marsh and Sharman 2009/Gilardi 2012	Börzel and Risse 2012a
Conditionality	<p>"The <i>external incentives model</i> is a rationalist bargaining model. It is actor-centered and based on a logic of consequences. In a bargaining process, actors exchange information, threats, and promises to their preferences. The outcome of the bargaining process depends on the relative bargaining power of the actors."</p> <p>"According to the external incentives model, the EU sets the adoption of its rules as <i>conditions</i> that the CEECs have to fulfill in order to receive rewards from the EU." (10) There are "two kinds of rewards to nonmember countries: assistance and institutional ties."</p>	<p>Powerful external actors manipulate threats of punitive measures and promises of positive rewards to alter the costs and benefits of domestic decision policy choices; they can be negative and positive (31).</p>		<p>(a) Manipulating utility calculations by providing negative and positive incentives (financial and technical assistance, sanctions [6])</p>
Persuasion				<p>(a) Based on communicative rationality or the logic of arguing: actors try to persuade each other about the validity claims inherent in any causal or normative statement (8).</p>

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