

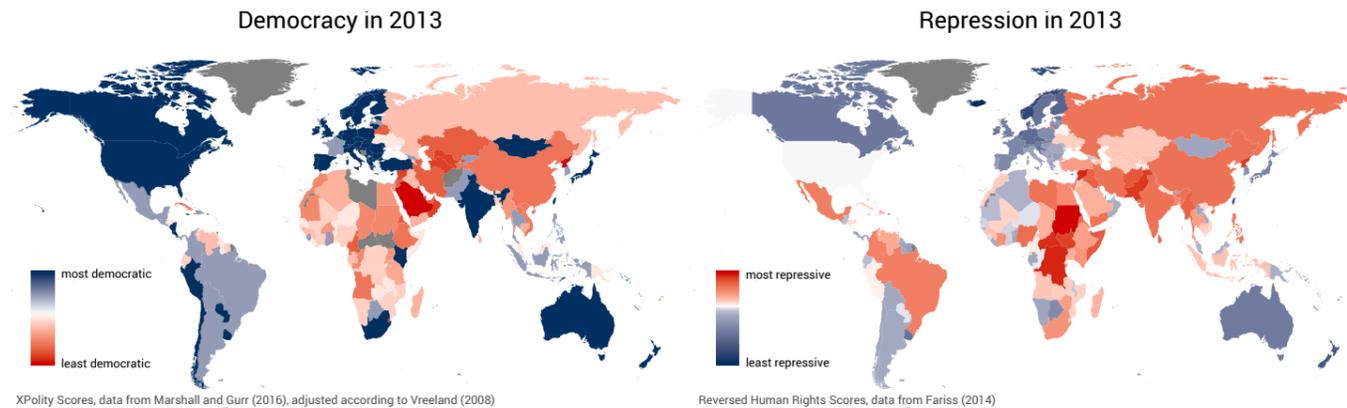
# (When) Does Democratization Reduce State Repression?

Jonathan Old, Department of Economics and GRI

Research in collaboration with Martin Rößler and Patrick Zwerschke, TU Dresden, Germany

## Problem

- Repression comprises acts of violations of physical integrity rights by state-sponsored actors
- Over the last century, state repression has caused **six times as many fatalities** as all international wars and civil conflicts taken together
- The literature agrees that democracy is associated with lower repression
- However, the effect of a *regime change* towards democracy is unclear, because regime changes can go in hand with civil unrest.



The maps suggest a moderate relationship between the level of democracy and repression in 2013.

## Theory

- We assume that the welfare of individuals is influenced by both economic and political factors
- The objective of the government is to remain in power. To this aim, it can use repression.
- In principle, democracy can affect government repression in **two directions**:

| Motivation  | Opportunity   |
|---|---|
| ↳ Democratic government represents wider spectre of societal groups | ↳ Under democracy, opposition has more freedom to organize than under autocracy |
| ↳ Better representation of preferences                              | ↳ Violent opponents <b>more effective</b> under democracy                       |
| ↳ Less aggregate dissatisfaction                                    | ↳ Government faces greater threat   |
| ↳ <b>Fewer violent opponents</b>                                    |   |
| → Democratizations <b>reduce</b> repression                         | → Democratizations <b>increase</b> repression                                   |

- Using a mathematical model, we predict that **income** acts as a **moderating variable**
- Civil unrest is more closely linked to economic factors in democracies than in autocracies
- Hence, higher wealth of the population requires democratic governments to use less repression

**Hypothesis:** Democratizations are more likely to **reduce repression in countries with high income levels** and more likely to **increase repression in low-income countries**.

## Data

- We use "Human Rights Scores" from Fariss (2014) to measure repression
- We restrict our analysis to **rapid and stable full democratizations**. To define a democratization event, we use the Polity Scores, an index for democracy. A country experiences a democratization event if:
  - (1) It reaches the highest or second-highest value on the democracy index
  - (2) This happens after a substantial improvement in the democracy index within a short time period
  - (3) It has not been democratic for 10 years before and stays democratic for 5 years after the event
- Common control variables are included: GDP per capita, population, civil war, youth bulges, and trade

## Results

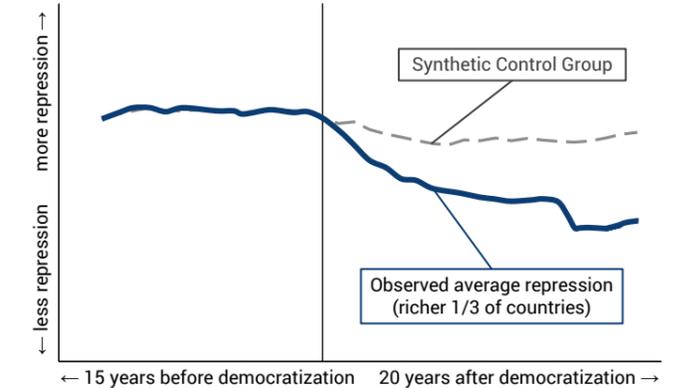
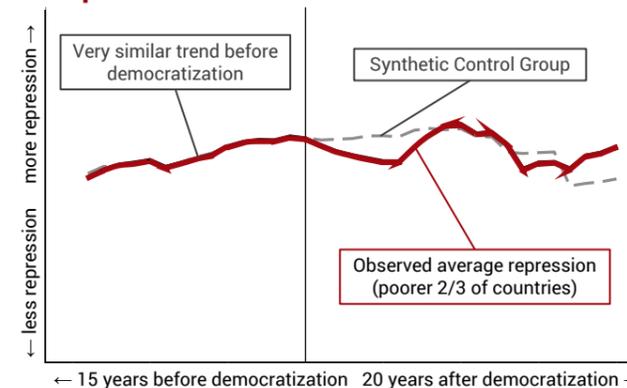
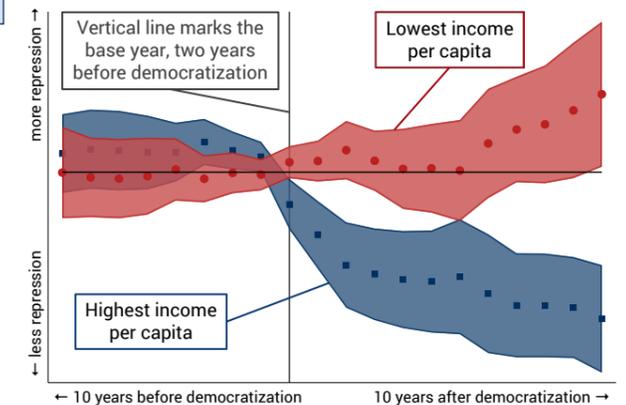
### "Traditional" technique: Event study

- Run regressions using observations around democratization event
- To test our hypothesis: Include interaction term between event-time-dummies and income
- Rich and poor countries are similar before event
- After event, **repression only declines in rich countries** and **slightly increases in poor countries**

### "Modern" technique (Xu 2017):

#### Generalized synthetic control group

- Divide sample in control and treatment group
- Construct "synthetic" (averaged) control group similar to treatment group until the democratization
- The difference between treatment and control group after the event is the effect estimate
- After event, **repression relative to the control group declines in rich countries** and **does not change in poorer countries**



## Conclusions

- Our theoretical model predicts that **democratizations reduce repression only in countries with sufficiently high income**. This reduction is immediate and persistent.
- Both traditional and modern econometric techniques provide evidence for this hypothesis
- This indicates that promoting democracy may, in some contexts, be detrimental to human rights

## References

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- Vreeland, JR (2008): The effect of political regime on civil war: Unpacking anocracy. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52(3), 401–425.
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