The diffusion of repression: An analysis of the relationship between autocratic linkages and state repression

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Introduction

The world is moving toward authoritarianism faster and in deeper ways than ever before (Maerz et al, 2020). Autocratic regimes are increasingly cooperating and exchanging values and ideas, threatening liberal democracy globally. It is critical to understand the consequences of this phenomenon, which most scholars refer to as *autocratic diffusion*. More specifically, this term concerns how events, institutions and strategies that are particularly pertinent to authoritarian regimes, travel between them (Ambrosio & Tulstrup, 2019). Despite its intensifying disposition, it has been problematically overlooked by political scientists and international relations scholars (Eschenburg, 2012). Important repercussions of autocratic diffusion may have gone under the radar as a result.

State repression is a core element of what makes up an autocratic state, as it considers the control and impediment of personal and civil freedoms of citizens by governments. As authoritarianism is on the rise, over 80 per cent of the world's population has had to face decreasing levels of freedom, and increasing levels of state repression in the last decade (The Human Freedom Index, 2021). The Freedom in the World 2022 report highlights the transnational nature of state repression, declaring that authoritarian regimes are increasingly collaborating to develop and spread state repression (Freedom House, 2022). This further obscures the mechanisms through which authoritarianism is increasing in the world.

This thesis aims to support the existing research on autocratic diffusion by taking a detailed approach to the international dimension of state repression. As will be discussed subsequently, research has highlighted the explanatory power of democratic and Western international institutions on decreasing state repression. Yet, as levels of authoritarianism are rising, it may be more relevant to theorise the problem from the perspective of authoritarian regimes, rather than from democracy. Using a conceptual framework that encapsulates the interconnectedness and collaboration of authoritarian regimes, I argue that the increasing density of ties and cross-border flows between non-democratic leads to higher state repression. The quantitative method of regression analysis is applied to test my hypothesis, from which I derive interesting conclusions about the nature of state repression and the intricacies of autocratic diffusion.

I will proceed as follows. First, the existing literature on the international spreading of authoritarianism will be discussed, after which, the conceptual framework of 'autocratic linkages' will be introduced. Importantly, as existing research has mostly overlooked the spreading of authoritarianism, I will also consider the international dimension of democratisation. As will become clear, I am nevertheless able to draw useful inferences on the international dimension of regime change and, more specifically, autocratisation. After that, state repression will take the forefront, which is when the expectations for my statistical analysis will become clear. Then, before I get to the discussion of my results, attention will be paid to the methods and variables used. In the final section, I will present a brief recap and give my recommendations for further research.

Literature review and theoretical framework

The international dimension of regime change

Research on regime types and characteristics, and the diffusion thereof, has suffered from a 'democratisation bias', as most literature before the 2000s was built on the assumption that most countries are moving toward democracy, rather than away from it (Levitsky & Way, 2002, p. 51). As a consequence, some regimes were wrongly treated as weak forms of democracy, or as regimes undergoing long transition periods toward democracy (p. 52). The normalisation of democracy, as Lynch (2004) refers to it, has harmfully permeated the literature because it is seen as a "natural, normal and sometimes even inevitable process" that all regimes will eventually undergo (p. 341). In the influential essay of Francis Fukuyama (1989, p. 4), it was even argued that Western liberal democracy ought to be seen as the lone survivor of the century-long struggle between political ideologies, as the end of the Cold War presented a defeat of communism and fascism. In the 21st century, however, we have seen a resurgence of authoritarianism (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019, p. 1097). The rise of China as a challenger to the United States' world hegemony, democratic backsliding in emerging world powers such as Brazil, Russia, Turkey and India, and the autocratization of countries within the European Union (V-Dem Democracy Report, 2021) demonstrate how Fukuyama's (1989) optimism may have been premature.

Specifically for this research, the bias toward democratisation has had negative consequences for the understanding of the diffusion of authoritarianism. As Vanderhill (2013,

p. 5) puts it: “only in the past few years have scholars even begun to consider how external factors can promote authoritarianism”. Nevertheless, the research conducted has been useful in producing evidence and demonstrating that governments, institutions and other actors can, by and large, impact regime types externally (p. 3). As such, in the next section, a review of literature on the international dimension of regime change and regime diffusion will follow. Though this field of research has a focal point of democracy and democratisation, valuable insights can be taken for the understanding of autocratic diffusion and promotion (Burnell, 2010, p. 8). Importantly, however, attention will be drawn to the (admittedly more limited) literature on the international dimension of autocratic consolidation, as this constitutes my theoretical point of departure.

In that regard, the writings of Levitsky & Way (2006) have been considered to be one of the most influential. Their paper puts forward a new theoretical framework for understanding the international dimension of regime change. Therein, they argue that researchers can make predictions about regime changes once they identify the specific external environment of countries, as well as their vulnerability to the pressures inherent to that environment. Specifically, they highlight ties and cross-border flows to the West (Western linkages), as well as the countries’ vulnerability to Western democratisation forces and demands (Western leverage), as the determinants of the effectiveness of international democratisation and anti-authoritarian pressures. In essence, they find that democracy is most likely to be established in countries that are connected politically, economically and socially to the West (p. 379) through, for example, high flows of trade, migration and media information, international organisation membership, military cooperation, and transnational networks. The effect thereof is further strengthened by a regime’s vulnerability to Western leverage (p. 387), determined by a country’s own strength and size of economy and bureaucracy, competing foreign objectives and ties to counter-hegemonic forces (p. 383).

More research on the international dimension of regime change is constituted by country case studies of democratisation, or by discussions on particular factors that consolidate democracy. First, in existing literature, an emphasis is placed on the conditionalities of accession to the European Union (Vanderhill, 2013, p. 3). As laid out in the Copenhagen criteria, it is required that countries desiring to join the European Union have stable domestic institutions, which guarantee democracy, the rule of law and human rights (Presidency conclusion European Council, 1993). Illustratively, when Croatia and Slovakia looked to join

the EU, democracy was established because incentives were found for the elites to support it (Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2010, p. 458; Vanderhill, 2013, p. 3). Second, foreign aid is often mentioned in research as a determinant of democratisation, as it is often used by external governments and institutions as an incentive for democratic state-building (Burnell, 2010, p. 4). Nevertheless, empirical analyses have generated inconclusive results about its relationship (Scott & Steele, 2011, p. 48). Specifically, Knack (2004, p. 262) argues that the democratisation effect of foreign aid may be counterbalanced by byproducts of foreign aid, such as the empowerment of dictators (Easterly, 2014) and the diminishing of local and state accountability (Deaton, 2013). However, Scott & Steele (2011) conclude that carefully targeted democracy aid packages (p. 61), rather than more general economic aid (p. 63), significantly increase democratisation. Third, democratic diffusion is discussed, as it is generally argued that the more democratic states there are in a certain region, the less likely it is for authoritarian regimes to survive, and the more likely it is for democratic norms to spread (Gel'man & Lankina, 2008; Kopstein & Reilly, 2000). This also holds when considering not only geographic proximity but also regime type similarities (Goldring & Greitens, 2020) and the closeness of cultures (Wong & Woodberry, 2015).

Autocratic linkages as a concept

Notably, Levitsky & Way (2006) argue that Western leverage can be limited or otherwise countered by the existence of regional powers or neighbouring autocracies (p. 383). This hints at the existence of non-Western influence through linkages and leverage. In their subsequent book on competitive authoritarianism, the authors address this matter, arguing that not all international linkages are Western (Levitsky & Way, 2010). The authors bring up the examples of Russia and the international Muslim community, which assisted autocrats internationally through social, political and economic ties in Belarus and Ukraine, and Malaysia, respectively (pp. 42, 50). However, glossing over its importance, they merely highlight the blunting effect of such linkages on the impact of relations to the West (p. 50). As a consequence of this, non-Western linkages are seen as a moderating variable in the Western linkage-regime change relationship, rather than being understood as the theoretical opposite of Western linkages.

Research on the topic of so-called "black knights" challenges this assumption, as it foregrounds regional authoritarian powers that not only hamper democratisation but also encourage authoritarianism (Tolstrup, 2014, p. 676). Such counter-hegemonic forces, as

Levitsky & Way (2010, p. 41) previously noted themselves, provide nearby autocrats with economic, diplomatic, military and other types of assistance. Generally speaking, literature on black knights includes only case studies on the great powers of China and Russia, of which the latter has great linkages with, and leverage over, former Soviet Union states (Tolstrup, 2014, p. 733).

Interestingly, however, Hall (2014, pp. 75-78) was able to exemplify how Belarus, during the Colour Revolutions, taught Russia how to consolidate authoritarianism, rather than the other way around. Drawing on more examples from Armenia and Uzbekistan, he argued that it is a multilinear process between authoritarian regimes: "whilst the Kremlin provides an authoritarian model for other states it also learns from others" (p. 163). The socialisation and norm diffusion of dictatorships then becomes a two-way street (Van den Bosch, 2015, p. 16). Moreover, Hall (2014) argues that the concepts of linkage and leverage are relevant and suitable to theories of autocratic diffusion, and autocratic learning. In that sense, authoritarian consolidation within Eastern Europe can be explained by common history, culture and economic traits between Ukraine, Belarus and Russia (p. 56).

Moving further away from the democratisation assumptions within the regime diffusion literature, Tansey, Köhler & Schmotz (2017) create a new theoretical framework to fill in the research gap Levitsky & Way (2006, 2010) left behind. The authors argue, consistent with Hall (2014), that authoritarian regimes effectively promote their regime type internationally through dense ties and cross-border flows between regimes. Such 'autocratic linkages', as they refer to them, are particularly distinct from the Western linkages Levitsky & Way (2006) introduce, since they constitute more than the theoretical opposite of Western linkages, because they account for relationships between countries that have varied over time independently of Western linkages (p. 1248). Autocratic linkages can however be apprehended in similar ways to Western linkages, being a multidimensional concept that includes economic, social and political measures (p. 1225). The term serves to empirically analyse the systemic mechanisms of international autocratic diffusion, as the authors contend that existing works have failed to create such systemic analyses (p. 1225). In that sense, the theoretical framework and the concept of autocratic linkage as proposed by Tansey et al (2017) prove to be useful for future literature, because not much is known about the effect of cross-border ties between non-

democratic regimes (Kendall-Taylor, Lindstaedt & Franz, 2019, p. 245). It resembles a new structure through which the influence of growing ties between autocracies can be surveyed.

Autocratic linkages and state repression

Relevantly, Tansey et al (2017) employ autocratic linkages in an event history analysis to find that they have had a consistently positive effect on the survival of non-democratic regimes (p. 1248). Though they hypothesise that autocratic linkages encourage autocratic consolidation for both international and domestic actors (pp. 1225-1227), they do not identify or isolate specific mechanisms that explain the autocratic linkage - regime survival relationship in their statistical analysis. Therefore, examining what determines regime longevity can be valuable, because it is not obvious what it is about autocratic regimes that makes them survive longer thanks to cross-border ties with other autocratic regimes.

Gerschewski (2013) creates a theoretical framework for the durability of autocratic regimes, by introducing the three pillars of stability: repression, legitimation and co-optation. The author argues that such a framework is general enough to include all autocratic regimes within the analysis, while still respecting the complexity of autocracies and their survivability individually (p. 14). Interestingly, the author also notes that state repression is the backbone of autocracies, and that it is seen as a defining feature of authoritarianism. Especially in critical situations, repression is seen as a strategy that can restabilise regimes (Joshua & Edel, 2015, p. 290), because its power lies in "channelling public demands vis-à-vis the political system in a way that these demands do not endanger the autocratic regime" (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 21).

Combining insights from Gerschewski (2013) and Tansey et al (2017), we may, therefore, be able to explain the autocratic linkages - regime durability relationship, by emphasising the role such linkages have on enabling or encouraging state repression. Certainly, autocratic linkages may as well increase co-optation or legitimation. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I will highlight state repression because I contend that state repression increases thanks to dense ties and cross-border flows between autocratic regimes because of specific causal mechanisms. As Kendall-Taylor, Lindstaedt & Franz (2019, p. 245) explain: "Rising ties among autocracies has the potential to facilitate authoritarian efforts to sustain their repressive systems of rule".

Following, I will highlight the research on the topic of the international factors of state repression. I say 'international factors' and not 'autocratic linkages' because it has suffered from a similar democratisation bias as identified in the literature on regime diffusion: it has been established that linkages with the West decrease state repression.

In Levitsky & Way (2010, p. 46), the authors argue that the West increasingly seeks to influence other regimes when it takes notice of government abuses of power during times of crisis and that linkages enable such influence. However, beyond legal obligations, non-governmental organisation activities and Western media shaming, a systemic analysis of international factors determining state repression is lacking (Hill & Jones, 2014, pp. 664, 669, 678). Factors such as bilateral economic interdependence and diplomatic cooperation are mostly overlooked. Nevertheless, Hill & Jones (2014, p. 676), argue that international Western factors such as foreign direct investment, NGO activities and international restraints from treaties influence repression. Particularly, they find that presence of Western NGOs is a strong predictor of levels of torture and political imprisonment.

I argue that the opposite is also true: linkages with autocratic regimes increase state repression. Owing to the blunting effect of counter-hegemonic forces, as introduced by Levitsky & Way (2010, pp. 41, 50), autocratic linkages may weaken the effects of Western leverage and linkage. In that sense, cooperation and ties between authoritarian regimes may prevent or diminish the exact factors which Hill & Jones (2014) argue to be positively related to state repression.

As aforementioned, however, there are specific and more direct causal mechanisms that explain the autocratic linkages - state repression relationship. Put simply, autocratic linkages increasingly enable domestic leaders to learn from and collaborate with external regimes. As Koesel & Bunce (2013) explain, through networks of cooperation, autocratic regimes counsel other leaders to take preemptive measures of repression when dissent towards the incumbents increases. Essentially, because autocratic leaders understand the transnational nature of political dissent and protest, they assume the worst and act accordingly (p. 759). Powerful autocratic regimes like Russia and China have deliberately shared technologies and policy advice during the Colour Revolutions to, for example, obstruct the free flow of information and restrict NGO presence in Belarus and Kazakhstan, but also Venezuela, Egypt and Zimbabwe (among others), to prevent further diffusion of the revolutions or protests (pp. 759-761).

Put similarly, Weyland (2010) argues that, in the same way that popular mobilisation can diffuse among neighbouring countries, so too can strategies of repression. I term this concept "the state repression neighbourhood effect". Typically, authoritarian governments anticipate waves of contention, by inspiring and imitating other nearby regimes. In his words, regimes seek to immunise their regimes against the contagion of local revolutions by purposefully increasing levels of authoritarianism. Because of the proactive stance the regimes take, this goes further than the mere interruption of transnational diffusion of popular mobilisation (p. 1169). Though Weyland (2010) highlights geographic proximity as the strongest contributor to the spread of repression strategies, he adds that flows of information and similar cultures among distant authoritarian states also play a part in the diffusion (pp. 1165-1170).

Though strategies of concession, being more closely related to the pillar of cooptation than repression (De Vogel, 2021, p. 28), may also spread among autocratic states during times of contention (Weyland, 2010, p. 1169), I argue that repression in particular will diffuse more easily, owing to the inner workings of state repression.

Namely, state repression is a costly and hard to implement strategy for regime stability, but autocratic linkages can make it cheaper and easier. Olar (2019, p. 3) clarifies, arguing that the uncertain effects of repression on dissent, as well as its high costs, force autocracies to acquire knowledge about strategies of repression from outside sources. Similarly, Tansey et al (2017) argue that, when the stability of authoritarian regimes is challenged, dense linkages between authoritarian regimes should lead to more supportive external involvement, in terms of diverting Western pressures, and assisting monetarily or supplying weapons, than weak linkages (p. 1242). In that regard, the underlying mechanism of how autocratic linkages affect state repression is twofold:

First, autocratic linkages decrease the punitive international political and economic costs of state repression. When autocratic regimes seek to repress the mass mobilisation of dissent, external actors - usually Western powers - strive to sanction or otherwise punish the regime to prevent or restrain the repressive actions (Wood, 2008; Linebarger, Nichols & Enterline, 2019; Bawden, 2013). Through Western linkage and leverage, the cost of authoritarianism, and with it, state repression, is increased (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 50). Autocratic linkages, however, help decrease such costs by either diverting them or blocking them altogether. In their analysis of Saudi Arabia's responses to the 2011 anti-government

protests and uprisings of the Arab Spring, Tansey et al (2017) illustrate that King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia, among other Arab allies, persuaded the United States in limiting the sanctioning of Hosni Mubarak, president of Egypt, when public protests against him intensified (p. 1243).

Second, autocratic linkages increase opportunities for external autocratic regimes to directly sponsor the costs of state repression, or even directly intervene militarily. Existing research on this topic has highlighted the role of Saudi Arabia and Russia in supporting autocratic incumbents abroad with direct consultation, economic and military aid, and weapons sales (Chyzh & Labzina, 2018, p. 312). The literature also emphasises that this occurs in widely varying degrees: the assistance may increase the autonomy and capabilities of the incumbent through financial aid, but in extreme situations, soldiers and weapons may be provided to support repressive action (Vanderhill, 2013, pp. 21-22). Illustratively, Chyzh & Labzina (2018, p. 319) find the involvement of Russia during the 2013 anti-government protests in Ukraine guaranteed the compensation for the costs of repression, and Vanderhill (2013, p. 21) notes that Saudi Arabia and Iran sent multiple battalions to Bahrain and Syria directly, in efforts to support the government's repression of protest.

However, such cases of clear and direct military assistance are rare (Vanderhill, 2013, p. 21). Therefore, I contend that autocratic linkages can influence the cost-benefit analysis of state repression, more so than that they can be regarded as obvious and direct strategic, and usually military, support for the recipient state. Consistent with Tansey et al (2017), I argue that linkages produce windows of opportunity for external autocrats, as well as the domestic incumbents, to construct new policies and strategies for state repression. Therefore, foreign military intervention is beyond the limits of what makes up an autocratic linkage. In the next sections, it will be further clarified what constitutes an autocratic linkage, and what does not.

Nevertheless, I argue that different types of linkages can have different effects on state repression. This thesis builds on Tansey et al (2017)'s operationalisation of autocratic linkage, which has been formulated through economic, social and political linkage indicators as proxy measurements of a country's general linkage levels. In their paper, they put less emphasis on the individual explanatory powers of each linkage-type, as they note not to be interested in the independent effects of each (p. 1236). They do not draw conclusions from individual linkage-types, but rather, they do so by combining the effects of each indicator.

I argue that their measures can nevertheless be measured independently from one another and that conclusions can be drawn from each linkage-type in its own right. As we have

seen, some state repression strategies may need dense and well-established linkages to diffuse. A political or diplomatic linkage may facilitate deeper autocratic learning directly between autocratic regimes. In its most basic sense, diplomacy considers the coming together of country representatives to discuss, among other things, domestic and international security. Diplomacy enables elites to gain information about active dissent in other countries, and how that regime uses repression to combat it. For instance, during the Arab Spring, the Syrian regime held the line against mobilised dissent, thanks to well-established diplomatic ties and strategic alliances with Iran and Hezbollah (Heydemann, 2013, pp. 62-63).

An economic linkage in terms of autocratic trade, on the other hand, could have more indirect and less obvious effects. Economic interdependence and increased state capacity have been highlighted in research in that regard, as they may increase the political influence of external elites on state repression, and alleviate the negative effects of Western sanctioning in response to state repression, respectively (Vanderhill, 2012, p. 8).

Autocratic cross-border flows and ties in a dimension of migration could affect state repression in similar ways. Tsourapas (2021) contends that autocracies adapt to globalisation and growing cross-border movements with increased domestic and transnational state repression. This could also hold when the migration flows are between autocracies, as Wright & Moorthy (2018) argue and find that fleeing immigrants positively affect state repression because of changes to the political status quo in the host state. However, Wright & Moorthy (2018) argue from the perspective of fleeing migrants, which is what makes this element of autocratic linkage especially interesting. Migrants may be leaving autocracies because of increasing repression, only to find themselves in another autocracy that will increase repression because of their relocation. Thus, reverse causality might be at play, to which a solution will be proposed.

It is important to note that I argue that autocratic linkages may increase state repression, regardless of the level of current dissent or internal conflict. Most of the arguments made previously are built on the assumption that the incumbent regimes are facing protest or mobilisation of some sort. However, autocracies share state repression strategies, and preemptively increase state repression, during times of non-contention, too. This is closely related to the fact that autocratic regimes are proactive in their survival strategies, as conflict is an intrinsic attribute of authoritarianism (Olar, 2019, p. 11). Arguably, in most basic terms, a regime's main policy objective is to survive, which concerns preparing well for threats that

have not yet been materialised (Nordås & Davenport, 2013, pp. 937-938; Krick, 2020). Autocratic regimes share previous experiences with contention and share information, skills and resources on how to proactively manage it. The consideration of the pros and cons of repression is changed domestically, when autocrats learn about old successes or failures of repression strategies in other countries (Olar, 2019, p. 12). Autocratic linkages enable and advance such knowledge sharing.

Scope of research

The central question that this thesis seeks to answer is: **How do autocratic linkages affect state repression?** Following the discussion of the existing literature, I hypothesise that **autocratic linkages increase state repression**.

In simple terms, autocratic leaders weigh the benefits against the costs when contemplating the implementation of new coercive action: "almost without exception, benefits increase repression while costs decrease it" (Davenport, 2007, p. 488). I argue that autocratic linkages provide both a decrease in the costs and an increase in the benefits. On the cost side, cross-border flows and ties with other autocratic regimes reduce the high price of repression in terms of equipment and troops, but also in terms of buying off or blocking domestic elites and international actors who oppose repressive action. On the benefits side, the effectiveness of state repression is increased through knowledge sharing between the regimes. Put differently, through autocratic linkages, regimes on the 'sending' end of the linkage can teach, sponsor, and, very occasionally, even impose state repression campaigns, strategies or policy. Regimes in the 'receiving' position can learn, imitate and be provided with state repression resources, campaigns, strategies or policy through the channels facilitated by autocratic linkages.

As we can no longer assume that countries are moving toward democracy, or that democracy is the end-state of all regimes, I seek to overcome the democratisation bias of the existing literature by building on Tansey et al (2017)'s framework of autocratic linkages. Little is known about the effect of cross-border ties between non-democratic regimes (Kendall-Taylor, Lindstaedt & Franz, 2019, p. 245), and thus, this thesis will isolate state repression, being a defining feature of autocratic regimes, and a determinant of their stability. Additionally,

Hill & Jones (2014) argue that international factors of state repression ought not to be downplayed, but rather, further researched (p. 678).

Methods and operationalization

Regression analysis

To test the hypothesis, I will conduct a multiple regression analysis. This will model the relationship between multiple independent variables and one dependent variable. A large-N approach will thus be employed, allowing for generalisability and statistical control. In fact, almost all research on the determinants of state repression has been conducted through statistical and large-N methods (Hill & Jones, 2014, p. 661). The sheer availability of data on state repression, as well as autocratic linkages, enables the proper analysis of the relationship between the two variables quantitatively.

As will become clear in the next section, in which autocratic linkages and state repression will be conceptualised and operationalised, the variables each have multiple indicators. This allows for the isolation of the effects of particular kinds of autocratic linkages (for instance, diplomatic ties) on particular types of state repression (for instance, repression through physical means). First, as for autocratic linkages, existing research has highlighted that some linkage-types may confound the relationship between other linkages and state repression (Hill & Jones, 2014, p. 676) and that the insertion of multiple linkage-types into the model may cause multicollinearity (Tansey et al, 2017, p. 1236). Therefore, I will create separate models for each type of autocratic linkage. This will directly contribute to the analysis of each autocratic linkage-type in its own right, as I previously argued that different conclusions may be drawn from each. Second, I will also statistically aggregate and disaggregate particular types of state repression, as it enables a deeper analysis of state repression as a broad concept. Existing research has noted the complexity and multidimensionality of state repression (deMeritt, 2016). One type of state repression is not the other, and across countries, many different strategies are employed. Therefore, autocratic linkages may affect state repression in particular ways.

Autocratic linkages

As noted before and established by Tansey et al (2017), autocratic linkages will be conceptualised as the density of ties and cross-border flows between non-democratic regimes (p. 1224). As these can be of economic, social, political and geographic nature, they have been operationalized as indicators of 1.) *trade*, 2.) *migration*, 3.) *diplomatic ties* and 4.) *geographic proximity* (p. 1227). The relevant data will be directly taken from Tansey et al's (2017) *Ties to the Rest* data set[1]. Importantly, this data has been derived from country-dyad sources, which facilitated the labelling of each of the two linking countries by regime type, which, in turn, enabled the differentiation between democratic linkages and autocratic linkages[2].

Importantly, following Tansey et al (2017, p. 1228), for each autocratic regime in a year, indicators have been created for both the *total amount of linkages*, and the *average amount of linkages* to other autocratic regimes. The total or sum of linkages relates to the 1.) volume of trade with other autocratic regimes in US$, 2.) the number of people migrating between them, 3.) the number of diplomatic exchanges and 4.) the distance to other autocracies in kilometres. The average or mean of linkages is then produced by taking the sum of linkages and dividing them by the number of autocracies in the world, minus one. The indicators, in totals and averages, will be standardised to control for the country's size and wealth: trade will be divided by the country's GDP, and the indicators for migration and diplomatic exchanges by population size. As geographic proximity is not determined by a country's size and wealth, it will not receive this treatment.

The total-average distinction is important to recognize changes in the level of autocratic linkages related to the amount of autocracies in the world. The number of autocratic regimes over time is not fixed, and therefore, regimes will undoubtedly have a higher total number of linkages with autocracies when there are simply more autocracies to link with. For this thesis, I will employ both types of indicators in my hypothesis testing, as Tansey et al (2017, p. 1228) argue that the two approaches are different, though complementary, ways of understanding variation in autocratic linkages over time.

[1] Information on the indicators and other variables can be found in the appendix. This will include variable names, sources and descriptions.

[2] Tansey et al (2017) use Geddes et al (2014) regime data to categorise each country to a regime type. All indicators used for other regime type-based variables (for instance, the proportion of autocratic regimes in a given year) will also be based on this categorisation.

Critically, the fourth indicator, geographic proximity, will be included in all other models as a control variable, rather than getting a model for itself. This is because, as Tansey et al (2017, p. 1232) and Weyland (2010, p. 1165-1170) explain, the distance autocratic regimes have to one another pre-exists and conditions all other types of linkage. Nevertheless, also in harmony with Tansey et al (2017), I argue that it is still an indicator of autocratic linkage by itself, because it may still affect state repression independently of other linkages, owing to the state repression neighbourhood effect, discussed previously. This requires geographic proximity to other autocracies to be included as a control variable.

State repression

State repression is most often conceptualised as the use or threat of coercion or deterrence applied by governments against opponents or potential opponents, to increase the cost and/or decrease the effectiveness of specific activities or beliefs that are seen as challenging to the government (Henderson, 1991, p. 121; Stohl & Lopez, 1984, p. 7; Davenport & Inman, 2007, p. 620). With this conceptualisation, repression can take many different forms, but violations of the *physical integrity of the person* seem to be highlighted in research, relating to disappearances, killings, political imprisonment and torture. This is a 'new genre' of state repression according to Henderson (1991, p. 121), as it has been imagined next to the more established conceptualisations of state repression, in which the focus is on constraints of civil and political rights. Davenport & Inman (2007, p. 620) mention such *First Amendment-type rights* in which violations occur, for example, in terms of restrictions on free speech or assembly and government invasions of privacy.

The *Varieties of Democracy* (V-Dem) Dataset contains comprehensive data on civil liberties and the constraints thereof, including the physical integrity of the person, operationalized as a 'physical violence index', and First Amendment-type rights, operationalized as 'political' and 'private liberties indices' (V-Dem Codebook v12, 2021, pp. 296-298). Whereas the physical integrity index is based on expert assessments on the freedom from torture and political killings, the next two indices are based on media censorship, freedom of expression, and freedom of movement. I will reverse each of the indices, which are in 0-1 scales, because these indicators are based on the freedom from state violence and the freedom from constraints of liberties by the government. When reversed, the indices will represent repression on a 0-1 scale.

The V-Dem dataset has already aggregated the indices of physical violence and private and political liberties into a 'civil liberties index', which, after also being reversed, will be used as my main indicator for state repression. However, because I seek to break up state repression as a concept due to its multidimensionality, I will not only model autocratic linkages with this aggregated variable but also the indicators of which it consists. Despite that, because the existing literature often conjoins the political and private liberties as the First Amendment-type rights (or the repression thereof), and because they are strongly correlated (r=0.754, p=<0.01), I will take their averages as a single measure, called non-physical repression. Taken together, I am then left with three state repression variables, namely: 1.) *state repression* in general terms, 2.) *physical repression* and 3.) *non-physical repression.*

Controls

Critically, I will control for alternative explanations of the autocratic linkage and state repression relationship. Based on the existing research on the predicting factors of state repression and autocratic learning in a more general sense, the following section will discuss confounding or otherwise extraneous variables which will be controlled for in the analysis.

Generally speaking, important variables that existing research has underscored to be of strong predictive power for state repression include population size, levels of development in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (in terms of absolute GDP and GDP growth), levels of dissent and ongoing internal conflict[3] (Davenport & Armstrong, 2004, p. 540; Hill & Jones, 2014, p. 662; Poe, Tate & Keith, 1999, p. 306). Even though the two mentioned last have been identified to be inextricably joined with state repression, having a reciprocal relationship (Peterson & Whilström, 2015), I argue that state repression will be increased regardless of the level of political dissent or interstate conflict. This requires their addition as control variables.

Next, I will control for both the proportion of autocratic regimes in the world and the cross-border flows and ties from democratic countries to the autocracies. This will guarantee that the established relationship between autocratic linkages and state repression is not related to the effects of increased levels of authoritarianism in the world or to the effects of democratic

[3] Data on population size, GDP per capita (in constant 1990 USD) and GDP change have been retrieved from Teorell (2015) following Tansey et al (2017). Data on active levels of political dissent (in number of anti-government strikes, protests or riots comprising more than 100 participants) have been retrieved from Banks (2002) following Nordas & Davenport (2013). More information on the variables can be found in the appendix.

linkages, respectively. In regards to the former, Tansey et al (2017, p. 1229) find that autocratic linkages have increased over time, even when the proportion of autocracies has decreased. Controlling for the proportion of autocracies, therefore, enables me to analyse the effects of autocratic linkage detached from the effects of the level of authoritarianism in the world. Regarding the latter, it will be important to consider the levels of multicollinearity. Though democratic linkages are independent of autocratic linkages, they may nevertheless be collinear in problematic ways.

Additionally, I will control for the autocracies' total and average geographic distance to other autocratic regimes. As mentioned previously, this indicator of autocratic linkage can affect the influence of other autocratic linkages when it comes to autocratic learning. Existing literature has theorised that autocratic regimes can learn from one another, regardless of geographic proximity (see, for example, Koesel & Bunce, 2013). Therefore, controlling for this variable allows me to identify whether what the literature says is correct, or whether the other autocratic linkages are too dependent on being in the vicinity of other autocratic linkages to affect state repression on their own. Introducing autocratic distance as a control variable also enables the measurement of autocratic distance as a factor of state repression in its own right.

Importantly, though the density of autocratic linkages can be constituted by a few strong linkages or many insignificant ones, Tansey et al's (2017) indicators are not discriminatory. As mentioned before, some mechanisms of the diffusion of state repression, such as the copying of entire government organisations or direct military assistance in times of contention, may only work properly with denser bilateral exchanges. Nevertheless, Tansey et al (2017) argue that it is not worth distinguishing between few strong linkages and many weak ones, as they equally facilitate autocratic learning.

Similarly, the indicators do not differentiate between linkages with economically, politically or military powerful partners and weaker partners in that regard (Tansey et al, 2016, p. 2). Though this contrasts with the ideas brought up in the literature on counter-hegemonic forces or black knights, Tansey et al (2016, p. 2) argue that this is somewhat implicitly accounted for, as stronger powers will inherently produce denser linkages to other regimes. Nevertheless, I will control for the effects of each of the linkages with Russia and China. As explained before, literature on these *black knights,* or hegemonic authoritarian powers, has already been able to establish that autocratic regimes emulate and receive state repression strategies from these countries (Tolstrup, 2014). This thesis attempts to highlight the

widespread nature of state repression being shared through autocratic linkages, and therefore, disjoining the effects of autocratic linkages with Russia and China and other autocratic linkages enables the analysis of global autocratic linkages in a more appropriate manner.

Table 1. Multiple linear regression of autocratic linkage and state repression

	State repression					
	Sum diplomatic linkages	**Sum migration linkages**	**Sum trade linkages**	**Mean diplomatic linkages**	**Mean migration linkages**	**Mean trade linkages**
Constant	0.267*** (0.030)	0.251*** (0.029)	0.233*** (0.028)	0.270*** (0.029)	0.304*** (0.029)	0.242*** (0.029)
Autocratic linkage	0.206*** (0.051)	-0.211*** (0.027)	-0.037 (0.026)	0.065*** (0.034)	-0.195*** (0.028)	0.017 (0.031)
Democratic linkage	-0.313*** (0.052)	0.054* (0.025)	0.019 (0.033)	-	0.039 (0.028)	-0.048 (0.033)
Black knight linkage	-0.032 (0.020)	-0.036* (0.017)	-0.152*** (0.046)	-0.184*** (0.032)	-0.040* (0.020)	-0.187*** (0.047)
Proximity linkage	0.045 (0.029)	-0.053 (0.027)	0.0003 (0.027)	-0.025 (0.024)	-0.047 (0.024)	-0.015 (0.025)
Proportion autocracies	0.328*** (0.032)	0.385*** (0.030)	0.367*** (0.029)	0.363*** (0.026)	0.335*** (0.026)	0.369*** (0.027)
GDP per capita	-0.008 (0.025)	0.046 (0.032)	-0.021 (0.030)	-0.050* (0.026)	0.043 (0.033)	0.008 (0.029)
GDP growth	-0.076*** (0.023)	-0.077*** (0.022)	-0.068** (0.022)	-0.082*** (0.023)	-0.075*** (0.022)	-0.072** (0.023)
Internal conflicts	0.180*** (0.021)	0.183*** (0.020)	0.201*** (0.021)	0.186*** (0.021)	0.184*** (0.020)	0.206*** (0.021)
Population	0.084*** (0.022)	0.086*** (0.022)	0.098*** (0.023)	0.087*** (0.022)	0.082*** (0.023)	0.086*** (0.024)
Mobilised dissent, dummy	0.082*** (0.024)	0.101*** (0.023)	0.074** (0.024)	0.084*** (0.024)	0.096*** (0.023)	0.074** (0.024)
R^2	0.188	0.201	0.173	0.185	0.196	0.171
Adj. R^2	0.183	0.196	0.168	0.180	0.191	0.166
N	1857	1872	1872	1857	1870	1826

Note: Standardised OLS regression coefficient β with standard error SE.
****p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05*

Table 2. Multiple linear regression of autocratic linkage and physical repression

	Physical repression					
	Sum diplomatic linkages	**Sum migration linkages**	**Sum trade linkages**	**Mean diplomatic linkages**	**Mean migration linkages**	**Mean trade linkages**
Constant	0.415*** (0.036)	0.436*** (0.036)	0.425*** (0.034)	0.437*** (0.035)	0.453*** (0.036)	0.426*** (0.035)
Autocratic linkage	0.103* (0.051)	-0.205*** (0.027)	-0.041 (0.026)	0.009 (0.034)	-0.199*** (0.028)	-0.012 (0.030)
Democratic linkage	-0.262*** (0.052)	-0.053* (0.025)	0.025 (0.032)	-	-0.049 (0.028)	-0.021 (0.032)
Black knight linkage	-0.046* (0.020)	-0.008 (0.017)	-0.371*** (0.045)	-0.205*** (0.032)	-0.006 (0.020)	-0.400*** (0.056)
Proximity linkage	0.050 (0.029)	-0.020 (0.027)	0.027 (0.027)	-0.026 (0.024)	-0.032 (0.025)	0.011 (0.024)
Proportion autocracies	0.202*** (0.032)	0.210*** (0.030)	0.191*** (0.029)	0.229*** (0.026)	0.202*** (0.026)	0.200*** (0.027)
GDP per capita	-0.246*** (0.025)	-0.156*** (0.032)	-0.240*** (0.029)	-0.284*** (0.026)	-0.166*** (0.033)	-0.217*** (0.029)
GDP growth	-0.051* (0.023)	-0.056* (0.022)	-0.036 (0.022)	-0.055* (0.023)	-0.053* (0.022)	-0.039 (0.022)
Internal conflicts	0.148*** (0.021)	0.156*** (0.020)	0.173*** (0.020)	0.150*** (0.021)	0.160*** (0.021)	0.177*** (0.020)
Population	-0.020 (0.022)	-0.016 (0.022)	-0.006 (0.022)	-0.020 (0.022)	-0.016 (0.023)	-0.012 (0.024)
Mobilised dissent, dummy	0.060* (0.024)	0.052* (0.024)	0.069** (0.023)	0.059* (0.023)	0.060* (0.024)	0.064** (0.023)
R^2	0.211	0.212	0.218	0.217	0.209	0.223
Adj. R^2	0.206	0.207	0.213	0.213	0.204	0.218
N	1857	1872	1872	1857	1870	1826

Note: Standardised OLS regression coefficient β with standard error SE.
****p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05*

Table 3. Multiple linear regression of autocratic linkage and non-physical repression

	Non-physical repression					
	Sum diplomatic linkages	**Sum migration linkages**	**Sum trade linkages**	**Mean diplomatic linkages**	**Mean migration linkages**	**Mean trade linkages**
Constant	0.183*** (0.032)	0.149*** (0.032)	0.129*** (0.031)	0.180*** (0.032)	0.233*** (0.032)	0.142*** (0.032)
Autocratic linkage	0.221*** (0.051)	-0.177*** (0.027)	-0.027 (0.026)	0.088** (0.033)	-0.158*** (0.027)	0.031 (0.031)
Democratic linkage	-0.278*** (0.051)	0.107*** (0.024)	0.013 (0.033)	-	0.086** (0.028)	-0.054 (0.032)
Black knight linkage	-0.019 (0.020)	-0.045** (0.017)	-0.007 (0.045)	-0.143*** (0.032)	-0.053** (0.020)	-0.040 (0.047)
Proximity linkage	0.031 (0.028)	-0.064** (0.027)	-0.017 (0.027)	-0.022 (0.024)	-0.049* (0.024)	-0.028 (0.024)
Proportion autocracies	0.345*** (0.032)	0.417*** (0.030)	0.403*** (0.029)	0.375*** (0.026)	0.351*** (0.025)	0.399*** (0.027)
GDP per capita	0.125*** (0.025)	0.148*** (0.031)	0.105*** (0.029)	0.088*** (0.026)	0.149*** (0.032)	0.132*** (0.029)
GDP growth	-0.077*** (0.022)	-0.075*** (0.022)	-0.074*** (0.022)	-0.083*** (0.022)	-0.074*** (0.022)	-0.078*** (0.022)
Internal conflicts	0.167*** (0.021)	0.166*** (0.020)	0.182*** (0.020)	0.173*** (0.020)	0.165*** (0.007)	0.186*** (0.020)
Population	0.127*** (0.022)	0.129*** (0.022)	0.138*** (0.022)	0.132*** (0.022)	0.122*** (0.000)	0.127** (0.024)
Mobilised dissent, dummy	0.145*** (0.023)	0.166*** (0.023)	0.139*** (0.023)	0.147*** (0.023)	0.165*** (0.023)	0.136*** (0.024)
R^2	0.192	0.213	0.178	0.188	0.205	0.174
Adj. R^2	0.188	0.208	0.173	0.183	0.201	0.169
N	1857	1872	1872	1857	1870	1826

Note: Standardised OLS regression coefficient β with standard error SE.
****p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05*

Results

In its most general sense, the results of the multiple regression analysis indicate an ambivalent relationship between autocratic linkages and state repression. Evidently, the findings do not support my broad hypothesis. Unlike expected, autocratic linkage across the four indicators does not seem to produce a uniform effect on the different types of state repression when controlling for confounding or otherwise extraneous factors. However, more specific conclusions are to be drawn by looking at the autocratic linkage - state repression models individually.

First, the independent coefficients for trade, migration, diplomacy and geographic proximity do not differ very much across the three types of state repression. For that matter, no differences are to be found in the direction of the effect (that is, negative or positive coefficients) of statistically significant regression coefficients across the different types of state repression. The coefficients for autocratic linkage are also considerably larger or smaller across the statistically significant models. In other words: state repression in the general sense is not affected by the autocratic linkage indicators in different ways than physical repression or non-physical repression. Two minor exceptions can be made here. The first is the model for physical repression and the diplomatic linkage-type in its averaged form, which unlike the other type of repression, has an insignificant result. The second is also related to the model of physical repression, but for the sum of the diplomatic linkages: the significance has slightly decreased and the coefficients are smaller.

Nevertheless, this is quite an interesting find in itself. Different strategies of state repression, namely the violations of physical integrity rights and infringements of First Amendment-type rights, can be bundled together considering the influence of autocratic cross-border flows and ties. In a sense, this goes against the previously discussed multidimensionality of state repression, and the theorised possibility that repression types may be affected differently by autocratic linkages.

Second, the coefficients for each linkage-type have not changed direction when averaging the total amount of linkages. This was expected, as this corresponds to the complementary nature of the two measures. Having said that, the standardised coefficients do decrease in size when

the mean measure is taken. Taking into account the number of autocratic regimes in the world, therefore, does decrease the effect of autocratic linkages on state repression. This makes sense as my control variable for the proportion of autocratic regimes does very well across all models in explaining state repression. Note that this measure has consistent coefficients that have statistical significance at the 0.001 level.

Third, and most interestingly, conclusions can be drawn from each linkage indicator dimension in its own right. This will be done in the section that follows. Though the disaggregation of state repression did not lead to any new insights, the distinct autocratic linkages types appear to have staggeringly different effects on state repression.

To an extent, these results are in line with what I theorised. I expected variation to be present between the effect sizes or statistical significance of the different dimensions of autocratic linkage. I previously brought up the example of how diplomatic linkages may facilitate deeper and more obvious autocratic learning than a trade or migration linkage, simply owing to the nature and intricacies of diplomacy in relation to autocratic diffusion. Every increase of one standard deviation in total diplomatic exchanges increases state repression, physical repression and non-physical repression by 0.206, 0.103 and 0.221 standard deviations, respectively. The total level of diplomatic linkage did very well with respect to the other factors of state repression, too. Overall, it has similar explanatory power to the proportion of autocracies in the world and existing domestic conflict, which existing literature has highlighted as great determinants of state repression. The average level of diplomatic linkage did not do as well but was nevertheless a significant contributor to state repression and non-physical repression. Bear in mind that this averaged measure presented multicollinearity (VIF > 10) with average democratic diplomatic linkages, which led me to remove it from the analysis at the cost of some statistical significance. Notably, these findings hold when controlling for the democratic and black knight counterparts of the diplomatic linkage and the proximity to other autocracies, from which we can conclude that autocratic learning in terms of state repression happens on a global scale through diplomacy.

Moreover, I argued that geographic proximity also has independent effects. Though not many of the coefficients are statistically significant within the given models, there are important exceptions to be made. The models for non-physical repression, in which autocratic distance was included as a control variable for the total and average migration between the autocratic

regimes, produce significant negative coefficients. Furthermore, when given its own model with the other autocratic linkages as control variables and general state repression as the dependent variable, to be found in the appendix, the average and total distance autocracies have to one another also results in significant negative associations. Therefore, we can conclude that the higher the average or total distances between autocracies, the less state repression occurs within autocracies when accounting for their diplomatic ties, migration flows and trade. And vice versa, in accordance with Weyland (2010), the closer autocracies are to one another, the higher state repression is to be expected.

Conversely, some findings are not in line with my theoretical predictions. Foremost, it was expected that state repression would increase with increased autocratic trade. Though I argued that the effects of trade would be relatively indirect and less obvious, the indicators for both total and average trade between autocratic regimes did not present any statistically significant coefficients. No relationship is therefore found between autocratic trade and state repression. Thus, though in theory it may make sense that trade between two autocracies causes increased levels of state repression, when tested statistically it does not hold.

Furthermore, curiously, migration between autocratic regimes is negatively associated with state repression. The inflow of migrants from other autocratic regimes does not lead to increased state repression, yet, it leads to significantly lower levels of state repression. Though, reverse causality may be at play in the autocratic migration-state repression relationship, because state repression may lead to more migration, as citizens choose to leave their country for nearby countries with less repressive regimes. As a solution to this endogeneity problem, I have created new models which use a lagged version of the independent variables, to be found in the appendix. However, these new models with a one year lag do not change the direction of the effect of the migration linkage, nor do they affect the size of effect very much. The significance of the negative association seems to hold.

This begs the question: does autocratic migration lead to decreased state repression after all? I argue that the identified relationship is spurious. The explanation is related to the fact that the measure for migration linkage is based on the total movement of people across the border to and from autocratic countries. Essentially, it does not differentiate between immigration or emigration. Keeping that in mind, according to theory, repression would increase thanks to autocratic immigration because of changes to the hosting polity's status quo. However, I argue, a decrease in repression could occur in the country where emigration occurs, as existing or

previous repression strategies have been deemed successful by the regime. After people flee the country in fear of repression to nearby regimes (often also authoritarian, hence it increases the autocratic linkage), the regime decreases repression knowing that mobilisation has been made less likely. Migration between autocratic regimes then does not cause lower levels of state repression, rather, the decrease of state repression is natural.

Conclusions and recommendations

This thesis started by highlighting the current increasing levels of authoritarianism in the world, and with it, the expanding diffusion of authoritarian norms and ideals as autocratic regimes cooperate. State repression as a main feature of authoritarianism has been argued to increase as autocracies become more interdependent and work closer together. However, existing studies have failed to respect the resurgence of authoritarianism, merely underscoring democracy as a predictor of low levels of state repression. In that regard, this thesis uses Tansey et al (2017) framework that emphasises how autocratic regimes are interlinked to research the consequences of increasing authoritarian cooperation and interconnectedness for state repression while respecting the latter's multifacetedness.

Therefore, I noted the possibility for state repression to be affected in different ways by autocratic linkages, considering the differences between physical repression and non-physical repression. Nevertheless, I found that there were no considerable differences between these dependent variables when held against autocratic linkages. The increasing interconnectedness of authoritarian regimes does not lead to more or less physical repression than non-physical repression, and our general measure for state repression was not considerably different either.

Additionally, the framework included four dimensions that could be aggregated and left separate, and I expected state repression to increase regardless of that. From the regression analysis, I concluded that autocratic learning is a more intricate process when it comes to state repression and that autocratic linkage, as used here in its most general conceptualization, does not adhere to those intricacies. Nevertheless, once autocratic linkage is considered in more specific types, we find autocratic learning does occur through some linkage dimensions. Whereas trade linkages do not function as conduits of state repression strategies, or windows of opportunity for increasing state repression in other ways, diplomatic exchanges and the geographic distance between autocratic regimes, can be considered relevant linkages for

autocratic learning. Against my expectations, autocratic linkage in terms of migration flows between autocratic regimes is negatively associated with state repression.

Admittedly, some of these findings may have been the result of a not perfectly suitable theoretical framework of autocratic cooperation and interconnectedness for research on state repression. Though the framework proved fruitful for Tansey et al (2017)'s analysis of regime survival, this thesis presented findings that were inconsistent with existing theory on state repression to a certain extent. Future research on the international dimension of state repression should therefore seek to create a framework of autocratic cooperation and interconnectedness that is directly relevant to the topic of repression.

My findings have significant implications for researchers working on autocratic diffusion and state repression, and for those living under authoritarian regimes in a globalising world, who have had to face decreasing levels of freedom. Up until now, this topic of research was considered to be relatively underdeveloped, especially given the resurgence of authoritarianism. In that regard, the observations discussed above will help in forecasting future increases in the level of state repression in authoritarian regimes. Though this research has constituted mostly pessimistic prospects for a majority of the world population who live under repressive regimes, gaining an understanding of the underlying mechanisms of repression should be considered a first step toward improvements of freedom.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Variables with descriptions and sources

Variable	Description and sources
State repression	The use or threat of coercion or deterrence applied by governments against opponents or potential opponents, to increase the cost and/or decrease effectiveness of specific activities or beliefs that are seen as challenging to the government. Low to high (0-1) scale, country-year data. Measure taken and reversed from V-Dem dataset: 'civil liberties index': *"Civil liberty is understood as liberal freedom, where freedom is a property of individuals. Civil liberty is constituted by the absence of physical violence committed by government agents and the absence of constraints of private liberties and political liberties by the government."* (V-Dem Codebook, 2022).
Physical repression	Subtype of state repression, related to physical integrity rights of the person, specifically includes political killings and torture by the state. Low to high (0-1) scale, country-year data. Measure taken and reversed from V-Dem dataset: 'physical violence index': *"Physical integrity is understood as freedom from political killings and torture by the government."* (V-Dem Codebook, 2022).
Non-physical repression	Subtype of state repression, related to 'First Amendment-type rights' or political and private liberties. Low to high (0-1) scale, country-year data. Measures taken, aggregated and reversed from V-Dem dataset: 'political civil liberties index' and 'private civil liberties index': *"Political liberties are understood as freedom of association and freedom of expression"* and *"Private liberties are understood as freedom of movement, freedom of religion, freedom from forced labour, and property rights."*(V-Dem Codebook, 2022).
Autocratic diplomatic linkage & democratic and black knight counterparts	A country's total or average number of diplomatic envoys in any shape or form sent to and received from all autocracies (autocratic linkage), all democracies (democratic linkage) or Russia and China (black knight linkage) in a year, in proportion to the country's population. Retrieved from Tansey et al (2017), who constructed this measure using the Correlates of War dataset

	on Diplomatic Exchange (2006) for diplomatic exchange data and Teorell (2015) for population data (Tansey et al, 2016, p. 5).
Autocratic migration linkage & democratic and black knight counterparts	A country's total or average number of outgoing and incoming migrants to and from all autocracies (autocratic linkage), all democracies (democratic linkage) or Russia and China (black knight linkage) in a year, in proportion to the country's population. Retrieved from Tansey et al (2017), who constructed this measure using the World Bank's Global Bilateral Migration Database (2011) for migration data and Teorell (2015) for population data (Tansey et al, 2016, pp. 4-5).
Autocratic trade linkage & democratic and black knight counterparts	A country's total or average volume of trade in US Dollars exchanged with all autocracies (autocratic linkage), all democracies (democratic linkage) or Russia and China (black knight linkage) in a year, in proportion to the country's GDP. Retrieved from Tansey et al (2017), who constructed this measure using the Correlates of War Bilateral Trade Dataset (2009) for trade data and The Madison Project (2013) for GDP data (Tansey et al, 2016, p. 4).
Autocratic distance or geographic proximity linkage	A country's total or average distance in kilometres to all autocracies in a year. Retrieved from Tansey et al (2017), who use Weidmann, Kuse, & Gleditsch (2010) figures (Tansey et al, 2016, p. 5).
Proportion autocracies	Proportion of autocratic regimes in a year. Retrieved from Tansey et al (2017), who use Geddes et al (2014) (Tansey et al, 2016, p. 6).
GDP per capita & GDP growth	A country's Gross Domestic Product per capita in constant 1990 US Dollars, retrieved directly from Teorell (2015), and its annual growth rate, computed by dividing the difference between that year's GDP and the GDP a year prior by the prior year's GDP.
Internal conflicts	A country's total number of ongoing internal and internationalised armed conflicts in a year. Retrieved from Tansey et al (2017), who use the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (2002) (Tansey et al, 2016, p. 6).

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Population	A country's total population, taken directly from Teorell (2015).
Mobilised dissent, dummy	A country's active levels of political dissent, in number of anti-government strikes, protests or riots comprising more than 100 participants), retrieved from Banks (2002) following Nordas & Davenport (2013). Dummy variable used, as total number did not present any significant coefficients.

Appendix 2: Multiple linear regression of autocratic distance linkage and state repression

	State Repression	
	Sum distance linkage	**Mean distance linkage**
Constant	0.247***	0.290***
	(0.028)	(0.029)
Autocratic distance	-0.055*	-0.053*
	(0.027)	(0.024)
Autocratic trade	-0.003	0.008
	(0.021)	(0.023)
Autocratic migration	-0.215***	-0.203***
	(0.028)	(0.028)
Autocratic diplomacy	-0.021	-0.034
	(0.025)	(0.025)
Proportion autocracies	0.392***	0.354***
	(0.030)	(0.026)
GDP per capita	0.088**	0.078**
	(0.029)	(0.029)
GDP growth	-0.089***	-0.087***
	(0.023)	(0.023)
Internal conflicts	0.179***	0.180***
	(0.021)	(0.021)
Population	0.082***	0.081***
	(0.022)	(0.022)
Mobilised dissent, dummy	0.104***	0.099***
	(0.024)	(0.024)
R^2	0.197	0.194
Adj. R^2	0.193	0.189
N	1858	1858

Note: Standardised OLS regression coefficient β with standard error SE.
****p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05*

Appendix 3: Multiple linear regression of autocratic migration linkage lagged by 1 year and state repression

	State Repression	
	Sum migration linkage	**Mean migration linkage**
Constant	0.260 (0.029)	0.312 (0.030)
Autocratic linkage (Lag)	-0.214*** (0.028)	-0.198*** (0.028)
Democratic linkage (Lag)	0.057** (0.025)	-0.041 (0.028)
Black knight linkage (Lag)	-0.034* (0.017)	-0.038 (0.020)
Proximity linkage (Lag)	-0.044 (0.025)	-0.038 (0.005)
Proportion autocracies (Lag)	0.352*** (0.026)	0.318*** (0.026)
GDP per capita (Lag)	0.054 (0.032)	0.051 (0.000)
GDP growth (Lag)	-0.068** (0.022)	-0.066** (0.022)
Internal conflicts (Lag)	0.183*** (0.021)	0.184*** (0.021)
Population (Lag)	0.089*** (0.022)	0.085*** (0.023)
Mobilised dissent, dummy (Lag)	0.119*** (0.024)	0.116*** (0.024)
R^2	0.192	0.187
Adj. R^2	0.188	0.183
N	1871	1871

Note: Standardised OLS regression coefficient β with standard error SE.
****p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05*