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Analyzing Democratization with a Social Network Approach

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Abstract

External factors of democratization are variables on the international level which are assumed to influence democratization within countries. It is plausible to describe some of these factors as relational concepts. From this relational perspective, methods of social network analysis can contribute to the understanding of changes in the level of democracy in countries around the globe.

First, the terms *regime*, *democracy*, and *democratization* are clarified. Second, explanations of democratization are presented as internal and external factors. Third, the basic ideas and principles behind the quantitative analysis of social networks are sketched. Fourth, a list of external factors of democratization with a genuine relational character is identified and discussed. Fifth, the possibility to analyze relational external factors using methods from social network analysis is outlined.

Keywords: social network analysis, democratization, external factors, diffusion

1 Introduction

Recent events in Egypt, Libya, and other North African countries have brought issues of democratization and regime change once again to the fore of global discussion. Through these struggles with uncertain outcomes, mass protests, and negotiations between governments and opposition forces, the event–like character of regime changes has become visible. Besides studying regime changes as events (see for example Bratton and van de Walle 1997), political scientists have dedicated much energy to the study of regime types, such as levels of democracy. This paper follows the second perspective and focuses on explanations of levels of democracy.

More specifically, a country's political regime as well as national democratization processes are usually explained using either variables from the international or the national level. One can refer to them as external and internal factors (Weiffen 2009, 46–60). Where internal factors have proven to dominate explanations of democatization (e.g. Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Linz and Stepan 1978), external factors have also been discussed and applied in explanations through the decades (e.g. Erdmann and Kneuer 2009; Levitsky and Way 2006; Whitehead 1991). Methodologically, external factors are usually conceptualized as attributes of a certain state or international organization. A relational perspective has rarely been adopted. As an alternative, such a perspective conceptualizes external factors as relations between pairs of entities which cannot be attributed to one single entity alone (Emirbayer 1997). The goal of this paper is to outline such a relational approach to international explanations of levels of democracy and to sketch feasible applications for future work. The paper is intended as a conceptual one and will be the basis for future network analyses.

In this paper, I argue that several external factors which are often used to explain democratization are relational concepts by their very nature or in the way they are commonly linked with democratization. I cover trade and capital flows, international integration through IGOs, the bilateral exchange of diplomats, diffusion via geographic proximity, and international NGOs. In addition, I formulate the hypothesis that democratization results from the diffusion of democracy through political networks via paths provided by some of these external factors.

Furthermore, I present one possibility for studying external factors of democratization with a relational perspective based on social network analysis. Stochastic actor–based models for network dynamics (such as SIENA) allow for differentiating selection and influence mechanisms (Steglich et al. 2010). With country dyads as the unit of analysis, the possible impact of an existing diplomatic tie between two countries on the process of their regime types

becoming more similar over time can be treated as an influence mechanism. A selection mechanism would be at work if initially unconnected countries which have similar regimes tend to choose each other as diplomatic partners over time. Both mechanisms must be distinguished to provide a comprehensive explanation of why countries with similar regimes tend to be diplomatic partners (see Neumayer 2008).

As for the theoretical background of democratization, this paper follows the comprehensive presentation in Weiffen (2009). Where her findings utilize OLS–regression and case studies in order to unite internal and external factors in one explanation, this paper emphasizes relational aspects of external factors and suggests the usage of social network analysis. Quantitative social network analysis has not been applied so far in order to explain national levels of democracy or democratization with external factors. Studying the spatial diffusion of democracy would be another relational take on explaining democratization. However, its application is usually limited to diffusion because of geographic proximity or contiguity (see for example Gleditsch and Ward 2008). SIENA applications on inter–state networks are still rare. An explanation of democratization or democracy levels based on SIENA has not as of yet appeared as a publication or working paper on the comprehensive overview of the project's website.[1]

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: In section 2, democracy is defined in a procedure–oriented way based on Robert Dahl's concept of "polyarchy" (1971). The concept of regime is introduced as well. Section 3 discusses different explanations of democratization differentiating between external and internal factors. As suggested by Weiffen (2009), globalization is used to bridge the gap between these two explanatory approaches. The fundamentals of social network analysis are summarized in the fourth section. In section 5, I sketch a possible application of SNA for explaining democratization with external factors. The example addresses the question of whether influence or selection mechanisms are the driving forces behind the finding that countries with similar regimes tend to have diplomatic ties with each other.

2 Talking about regimes

The root concept of political science for defining democracy is the political regime and democracy is one possible regime type. In this paper, democracy is defined in a procedure–oriented way. Democracy is understood as representative democracy in the context of modern states putting aside direct–

[1] `http://www.stats.ox.ac.uk/~snijders/siena/`

democracy or democratic experiences in city states of ancient Greece.[2]

2.1 Defining the concepts regime and regime change

> "A regime determines who has access to political power, and how those who are in power deal with those who are not."
>
> Fishman (1990, 428)

Regime, as defined by Robert Fishman (1990), needs to be carefully distinguished from *state* or *government* (see Lawson 1993).[3] In other words, the rules and procedures of a specific regime define access to political power, the relations between members of the ruling elite, and the relationship between the rulers and the ruled (Merkel 2010, 63–63). A *political regime* as described so far must also not be confused with *international regimes*, such as the Bretton Woods System (Krasner 1983).

The term *regime change* describes the event when the character of a regime fundamentally changes from one regime type to an other. In other words, regime changes are fundamental changes in the rules and procedures which define and limit the possibilities of rulers in their application of means of power.

2.2 Defining democracy

Robert Alan Dahl (1971, 1989, 1998) identified the two elements *contestation* — competition between political parties and candidates for votes — and *participation* — the vast majority of the adult population is entitled with full suffrage and passive right of vote — as the two elementary dimensions of democracy. A codified list of institutional guarantees helps to further elaborate both dimensions and allows to empirically determine their prevalence for a specific case. In its original version Dahl's list contained the following eight items (Dahl 1971, 3):

1. Freedom to form and join organizations
2. Freedom of expression
3. Active right to vote

[2] For an exhaustive overview of different meanings of democracy today and throughout history see Sørensen (1998, 10ff.) and Held (1987).

[3] Whereas *state* refers to the structures and institutions that build the framework for a regime, the term *government* describes the individuals who constitute the government of a specific political system. In general, it is expected that governments change more frequently than regimes. "State" is the most stable concept out of the three.

4. Passive right to vote (eligibility for public office)[4]
5. Right of political leaders to compete for support and for votes
6. Access to information from multiple sources (Alternative sources of information)
7. Free and fair elections
8. Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preferences

Dahl (1971) further coined the term *polyarchy* and its distinction from *democracy*. Democracy is understood as an ideal type which, by definition, cannot be achieved in reality. In contrast, a polyarchy is a real type which specific countries can achieve. Using real types, regime characteristics are comparable between both different countries and points in time.[5] For a country to achieve polyarchy–status, a threshold on both of the two dimensions contestation *and* participation needs to be crossed. Dahl's concept of polyarchy vs. democracy has shaped the way democracy and democratization has been studied even today, especially in Comparative Politics.

Summarizing the definitions of democracy most commonly used in comparative studies into a preliminary definition, Brigitte Weiffen (2009, 24) identifies the following elements or dimensions. First, political competition and contestation in Dahl's sense must be present to a certain degree. This includes the regular holding of elections and full suffrage. Second, for a government to be effective it needs protection against non–constitutional veto powers. Third, citizens should enjoy protection against non–legal action of state officials and elected personnel. Fourth and last, protection of the formal institutions against abuse and elimination through elected rulers need to be in place. The second, third, and fourth point entail the concept of *rule of law* or *Rechtsstaatlichkeit*[6] combined with principles of *due process*

[4] Dahl's original formulation in brackets

[5] For the differentiation between ideal types (Idealtypus) and real types (Realtypus) see Max Weber (2002, 3). An ideal type is the idealized version of a concept against which empirical cases are examined in their shortcomings and hence compared with other cases. Real types, by contrast, are defined and operationalized in such a way that any empirical case clearly falls under its definition or does not. Real types by definition can be found in reality.

[6] "A Rechtsstaat meant that the government and the state apparatus would be subject to the law, that areas of discretionary power would be defied and increasingly limited, and that citizens could turn to courts to defend themselves against the state and its officials. The modern Rechtsstaat is fundamental in making democratization possible, since without it citizens would not be able to exercise their political rights with full freedom and independence" (Linz and Stepan 1997, 19).

of law. Altogether, they guarantee civil rights to protect individual freedom against the state.

3 Explaining democratization

Political scientists have identified many variables which appear to influence or explain democratization and regime change towards democracy. Many of them can be summarized as internal factors because they refer to variables and mechanisms *within* the country under study (for a typology of these variables see table 1). Research on the Second and Third Wave of Democratization focused on these influences in particular (Huntington 1991).[7]

In contrast, variables on the international level were generally attributed less importance. Only few political scientists addressed these international independent variables at all (see table 2). Only since the 1990s did these external factors receive broader recognition by comparativists and, more frequently, in International Relations (IR) publications. In general, in order to explain regime change within countries, internal factors were attributed much more explanatory power than international ones.

As a theoretical starting point, this paper assumes that internal factors alone fail to explain the full story and that both internal and external factors do have independent effects on the regime type and probability of a regime change in a specific country (see Gleditsch and Ward 2008, 279). Results from diffusion–studies support this argument. For example, Starr and Lindborg (2003, 504) reject the null hypothesis that, in a global perspective, regime changes are Poisson distributed random events. In addition, they find evidence for the argument that regime changes do increase the probabilities of similar future regime changes in other countries. This backs

[7] Huntington (1991) describes the historical expansion of democracy around the globe as being distinguishable into three separate waves. He defines a wave of democratization as a time period during which more countries experience a regime change towards democracy than a change in the other direction (1991, 15). The First Wave from 1828 to 1926 gained its momentum from the Declaration of Independence of the United States and the French Revolution. The Second Wave started 1943 and went on until 1962. Starting in 1974 with the end of the nondemocratic regime in Portugal, the Third Wave consists of regime changes towards democracy and political liberalization processes in Southern Europe, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa (see 1991, 16). The onset of a fourth period of intensive democratization is commonly dated at about 1990. Huntington speaks of a "second phase" of the Third Wave (1991, 44). Others introduced a fourth wave starting at about the end of the Cold War to cover the large numbers of political liberalization processes and democratizations after 1989. Due to these large numbers and the extensive global spread the fourth wave is also referred to as "Freak–Wave" (see Doorenspleet 2005; Schmidt 2008, ch. 25). For a methodological and substantial critique of Huntington's waves see Zimmerling (2003).

Table 1: Internal influences on democratization

Structure		**Actors**
historical–cultural	***Socioeconomic***	
Religion	Economic development	Elites
Ethnic composition	Education	Organizations
Colonial heritage	Information and communication	Masses
	Class structure	
	Income distribution	
	Political Culture	
	Trends of economic activity	

Adapted from Weiffen (2009, 52)

the argument that the international context and external factors should be included in analyses and explanations of national regime changes and levels of democracy.

3.1 Internal and external factors

Internal and external factors can be linked to structural and actor–oriented approaches (Weiffen 2009, 45–61). Explanations of regime change can thus be broadly divided into four groups differentiated by two dimensions; internal vs. external and structural vs. actor–oriented. For internal factors, the major structural approach can be summarized as modernization theory. Actor–oriented approaches using internal factors interpret regime changes as events and historic processes which are strongly shaped by individuals, organizations and institutions on the national level (Linz and Stepan 1978; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Przeworski 1988; Przeworski et al. 1996). Some authors emphasize the distribution of power between government and oppositional forces (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Weiffen (2009, 52 and 61–66) interprets structural factors, e.g. those known through modernization theory, as explanations of *levels of democracy or democratization*. In contrast, the actor–oriented approach is given its own merits in focusing and explaining *regime changes understood as events*. Internal factors entail variables which served as predictors in mainly two influential explanations of democratization: modernization theory which had its heydays in the 1960s

Table 2: External influences on democratization

	Structure	**Actors**
Economic	Economic liberalization	Int. fin. institutions
	Trade and capital flows	
Political	Diffusion	International organization
	International integration	States
	Developmental aid	
	External threat	
Social	Media and Communication	NGOs

Adapted from Weiffen (2009, 61)

and actor–oriented approaches which become increasingly popular during the 1970s.

Modernization theorists like Lipset, Rustow, or Huntington regarded socioeconomic development as *the* major factor leading towards democracy in a specific country (Lipset 1959). In fact, both were seen as different dimensions of a comprehensive modernization process. Besides economic growth, socioeconomic variables such as education, the formation of a broad middle class or a more egalitarian income distribution (see the middle column in table 1) have been introduced by various modernization theorists as intervening variables linking economic development with democracy in a causal chain.

Internal actor–oriented approaches have dominated explanations of democratic transitions since the 1970s. Its followers emphasize that regime changes are events which depend on the actions of individuals. A popular explanation focuses on the conflict between members of the elite of the autocratic regime and followers of an opposition demanding democratic reforms. Whether political liberalization processes will be initiated and eventually result in founding elections of a new democratic regime depends on the relative strength and willingness to negotiate of both opposition and non–democratic rulers. In more recent publications the importance of mass protest for initiating political liberalization and democratic transitions has been stressed and supported with empirical evidence from sub–Saharan cases (Bratton and van de Walle 1997).

3.1.1 External factors

At least three different research traditions with references to explanatory variables from the international level can be distinguished in spite of the overall dominance of internal explanations since the 1970s.

First, many *case studies* try to work out international influences on political liberalization attempts in single countries. Usually, the authors of these studies assume that international influence from former colonial powers on their former colonies is important. Research contrasting the successful liberalization in Benin with the unsuccessful liberalization attempts in the neighboring country Togo gives a good example of how this first group of regime change studies refers to the international level. Nwajiaku (1994), Decalo (1997), and Houngnikpo (2001) emphasize the international influence of France. They conclude that Togo's dictator Gnassingbé Eyadéma received stronger support from France than Benin's ruler Matthieu Kérékou, which allowed the Eyadéma-Regime to finally suppress and survive national liberalization attempts during the early 1990s.[8]

A second branch of the regime change literature consists of *large–n quantitative studies* usually looking closely at one world region only. While internal factors are treated as the dominating factors, some references to external ones are made. For sub–Sahara Africa Bratton and van de Walle's work is a frequently cited example (see Bratton and van de Walle 1997). The authors follow an institutionalist paradigm and favor domestic over international approaches in order to explain regime changes towards democracy. They defend this choice by pointing out that external factors always have to be mediated within the national context (Bratton 1997; van de Walle 2002, 74). The stability and consolidation of existing African democracies is, according to their view, not affected by the international context either and the commitment for democracy of Western countries is overestimated (see Bratton and van de Walle 1997, 241–242). However, the authors do not hold to this position strictly. For example, they do acknowledge the importance of the international setting for sustaining an institutional framework for democracy — such as political elections. In addition, they acknowledge that political liberalization in Africa since the 1990s happened under heavy international pressure for liberalization (see Bratton and Mattes 2001).

Third, Schmitter, O'Donnell, Whitehead, Mainwaring, and Huntington, in spite of their general focus on internal factors, did not and do not fully agree on describing the international context as of secondary or insignificant importance. In their early milestone "Transition from authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspective" (O'Donnell et al. 1991), Philipp Schmitter

[8] Heilbrunn (1993) challenges this view and gives credit to Benin's stronger civil society instead.

explained the incidence of regime change in authoritarian regimes primarily with variables from the national context. Yet, in later works he puts more weight on the explanatory power of variables from the international level (Schmitter 2010). Laurence Whitehead (1991, 1996) positioned himself early against the dominant view among his co–authors of the "Comparative Perspective" and emphasized the significance of the international context for explanations of the evolution and result of transitions. Samuel Huntington (1991) took a similar position by stating that regime changes tend to be initiated by international factors.

3.1.2 Bridging the gap between internal and external factors

In summary, attempts to explain regime changes and especially transitions to democracy with external factors have been discussed since the 1990s and lately, they have received increasing attention. On a global scale, national regime levels and the occurrence of regime changes are not randomly distributed in time and space and, in terms of probability, they do not appear to be independent of one another either (Starr and Lindborg 2003, 283; see Gleditsch and Ward 2008, 279).

Globalization appears as a likely explanation and analytic tool to understand external factors and to combine them with internal factors into a general explanatory approach (Weiffen 2009, 58). External factors can be analytically structured according to a common distinction between political, economic and social aspects of globalization (see the first column in table 2). The explanatory strength of external factors on democratic developments in relation to internal ones should increase along with the increasing level of globalization. This argument is empirically supported by the well–known correlation between economic development and democracy, which is found for country–years as the unit of observation from the beginning of the Third Wave until today. Exemplified for the year 2005, the natural log of GDP per capita is closely related with Freedom House's country scores for Political Rights and Civil liberties (figure 1; Pearson's r $\sim$ 0.53; fitted values result from a simple linear regression). While the overall picture of this scatter plot seems to support general modernization ratio, there are obvious outliers. These outliers can be found on similar scatter plots for earlier years and with different indicators for the two variables, e.g. alternative measures for democracy. Weiffen (2009, 55) interprets these outliers as countries which did not and do not follow the modern rational laid out above. They are either democratic under–performers given their average per capita income — such as Singapore and various countries from

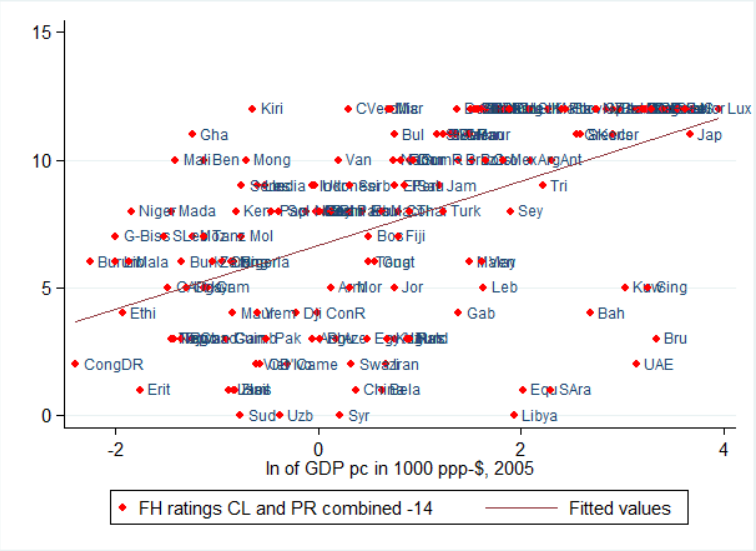

Figure 1: Bivariate relationship between FH–scores and lnGDP

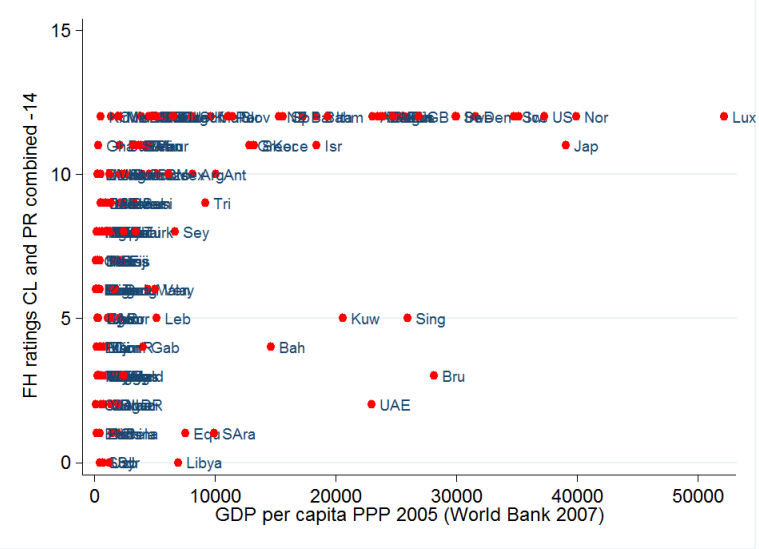

Figure 2: Bivariate relationship between FH–scores and GDP

the Gulf region[9] — or are surprisingly democratic given relatively limited socioeconomic potential. The second group cannot easily be spotted in figures 1 or 2 and consists mainly of East and Central European states which were successfully democratized after the end of the Cold War. Altogether, Weiffen interprets these departures from the ideal modernization path as results of international explanatory factors and assumes a shift in their importance in relation to internal factors as globalization extends (Weiffen 2009, 66).

Most important, an explanation of regime levels and regime changes taking both internal and external factors into consideration seems to be the approach of choice and preferable to exclusively relying on either of the two.

4 Social network analysis

A basic *network* can be defined as

> "(...) a collection of points joined together in pairs by lines. In the jargon of the field the points are referred to as [*actors*; smo], *vertices*, or *nodes* and the *lines* are referred to as [*ties* or; smo] *edges*" (Newman 2010, 1).

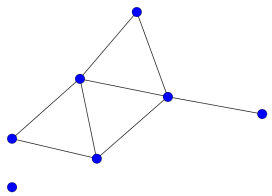

Figure 3: Small network composed of seven vertices and eight edges

The term *network analysis* is used in this paper to refer to the application of a set of quantitative tools developed for formal description and analysis of vertices, their connections with each other, the overall structures of these edges and vertices combined, and the positions of specific vertices within these structures.[10]

The formal conceptualization of networks is mathematically grounded on graph theory and set theory (see Wasserman and Faust 2008, 67–166).

[9] Figure 2 shows these outliers nicely; the GDP–variable is not logged in this plot.

[10] Methods of network analysis are comprehensively summarized in Wasserman and Faust (2008), Carrington et al. (2009), and Snijders (2011).

Methodologically, the applicants of network analysis can be expected to focus heavily on relations in their descriptions and explanations of the world (Emirbayer 1997). What really matters in the world are not the *attributes* of individual objects (e.g. asking Peter how many friends he has) but the *relations* between entities (e.g. determining friendship as involving at least two people and asking them whether they are friends with each other). Network analysis can be regarded as a set of methods or as a way to conduct research and is not limited or predisposed to any specific field of interest, such as physics, computers or the social realm of humans.

Social network analysis (SNA) entails the application of formal network analysis to the realm of social science. Besides formal, quantitative SNA a qualitative take on networks exists but is not covered here due to the general quantitative orientation of this paper (see for example Hollstein 2010). It is important to stress SNA's formal conceptualization of networks and not to confuse this with a more heuristic, non–formal concept of networks which is found, for example, in many studies on regional competitiveness and innovation (cf. Christopoulos 2008). Altogether, contemporary SNA can be defined by the following characteristics (Freeman 2004, 3):

1. "Structural intuition is central and leads to the emphasis of relations"
2. "Systematic collection of relational data"
3. "Visualization of networks is used for descriptive and analytic purposes"
4. "Application of models from mathematics and computer science"
5. "SNA does not monopolize the use of networks as a concept or the application of SNA methods on the social domain either"
6. Additionally, the "study of the *flows* through the network" (Kadushin 2005, emph. added) allows for focusing on "resources, goods, and even positions [, that] *flow* through particular figurations of social ties" (Emirbayer 1997, 298, emph. added).

5 Studying democratization with a social network approach

In section 4 of this paper, I identified the *emphasis on relations* as a central characteristic of SNA. In this section, I claim that many external factors of democratization are based on or can be understood as relations. Connecting these arguments, I suggest SNA as a plausible approach to comparatively

study these external factors of democratization processes because of their relational aspects.

First, looking at the external factors discussed so far, the ones with a relational character will be identified (see table 3). Second, the arguments for the suitability of a relational perspective will be presented for each of these factors. Third, one specific SNA application will be exemplified in section 5.2.

5.1 Choosing external factors for a relational analysis

A *relation* cannot be attached to a single object or actor but is linked to the at least two objects or actors which it connects. If a relational concept is used as a variable in a quantitative research design, its unit of observation is in general not an individual such as a single person, a single social entity — for example a state — or a single object but always several individuals, social entities or objects — usually pairs of them. Friendship, for example, is often relationally perceived as something going on between two people (cf. Davis 1970; Pearson and West 2003). In contrast, *attributes* are the characteristics of individuals or single objects. One could think of the variable "household size" as such an attribute measured for households as units of analysis and referring to the number of people living in a household.

Many aspects of reality could be conceptualized either as an attribute — e.g. number of friends — or as a relation — such as friendship between pairs of individuals. Of course, the two perspectives imply differences in defining, measuring, and thinking about these concepts. The discussion of whether a relational perspective or a "substantialist perspective" is the more appropriate social science approach in general will not be addressed in this paper (cf. Emirbayer 1997, 282 ff.).

Among the various external factors influencing democratization processes which Weiffen (2009) identifies, several can be studied as relations (see table 3). *Trade and capital flows* entail a genuine relational perspective since they constitute flows between economic entities or on an aggregated level between countries. It is not only important what and how much a country trades internationally but also with whom it trades and interacts. *International integration through IGOs* connects, on the one hand, states with each other through their memberships in IGOs. On the other hand, states are directly connected to the organizations they are a member of. Both types of connections cannot reasonably be linked to a single state or a single organization but constitute characteristics of pairs of them. *Diplomatic relations* between states also are relational by definition, since it is a case of two states exchanging diplomatic representatives or at least one state sending such a representative to an other state. The bilateral exchange of

Table 3: List of external factors with a relational content

Trade and capital flows A relational perspective is genuine to the concept of *flow*. It is of importance with whom a state trades and who receives capital flows from whom.

International integration through IGOs States are influenced through their membership in IGOs. Joint membership in the same organization is a relational attribute of a pair of states.

Exchange of diplomatic representatives Relations consist of the bilateral exchange of diplomats.

Convergence and Diffusion States are more likely to be similar to each other or influence each other in many aspects if they are close to each other in space or within meaningful social networks.

NGOs The impact of NGOs on national democratization processes is influenced by inter–organizational competition and strategic interaction as well as by intra–organizational aspects. Both inter– and intra–organizational aspects entail a relational perspective because they focus on the interaction of different kinds of actors and their relations.

Developmental aid Developmental aid connects the receiving country with its donors and constitutes a flow.

External threat One state threatening another entails by definition a relational perspective.

External factors based on Weiffen (2009, 61)

diplomatic representatives links two states as sending and receiving country. A different argument is made about the impact of *non–governmental organizations* (NGOs) on national democratization processes. It has been suggested that competition between different democracy–promoting NGOs as well as intra–organizational aspects of a specific democracy–promoting NGO (e.g. power struggles) influence democratization within countries. Several of these external factors with a relational character will be presented as different aspects of a *political diffusion mechanism* in subsection 5.1.5.

This paper will not address developmental aid and external threat in detail. In principle, *developmental aid* could be treated as relational for similar reasons that capital flows are. *External threat* is a directed relation with one country threatening another one. However, examples of successful democratizations induced by force are rare.

5.1.1 Trade and capital flows

International trade and capital flows between countries have been used for explaining variables for democratization within countries since the early days of modernization theory. International trade and capital flows are assumed to induce economic prosperity and thereby support a multidimensional modernization process which consists among other elements of industrialization, urbanization, specialization and rising education levels. Together, these internal factors initiate the evolution of a broader middle class and lead to more social equality. Out of this new middle class, demands for political influence are increasingly articulated. Altogether, these trends and the demand for political influence are assumed to lead to more openness, political liberalization and finally democratization (Lipset 1959; see Bhagwati 2004, 92ff.).

A second causal chain theoretically links economic openness with increasing international competition between states for investors, which produces incentives for good or better governance and may result in a higher quality of rule of law (Weiffen 2009, 104).

Advocates of the "Kantian Peace"[11] have been assuming a reciprocated influence between democracy and economic interdependence (Russett 1998; see Weede 2005, 28–57). Economic interdependence is seen to be supportive of national democratization processes because trade agreements frequently contain demands for a democratic commitment such as treaties between the

[11] With "Kantian Peace" the claim is made that democracies do not fight each other and that global peace can be achieved through more and more states becoming democratic, economic interdependence of states, and social interdependence of states through memberships in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) (Russett and Oneal 2001; Ward et al. 2007; see Weede 2005).

EU and countries asking for access to the common EU market. On the other hand, democracies are supposed to feel less threatened by other democracies than by states with a different regime type and therefore engage more often in trade relations with each other.

Many of the arguments presented so far point out that international economic integration leads to an increase in international interaction and exchange which allows for the spread of information, norms, and ideas (Weede 2005, 20). This can be seen as the basis of a political diffusion argument which will be presented in subsection 5.1.5 of this paper.

Weiffen (2009, 107ff.) summarizes empirical findings on and theoretical clues about the relationship between trade and democracy. Altogether, she concludes that this potential causal effect needs to be addressed more specifically. She discusses, for example, differentiating between various types of capital flows and products being traded, and the specific context of rent–seeking, oil–exporting countries (see Dunning 2006; Weiffen 2008). This extensive literature discussion and Weiffen's own empirical findings need not be reproduced here. It suffices to say that it seems fruitful to look at the potential causal relationship between trade and democracy focusing on relations.

It has been suggested that one has to take into account which other states and economic partners a focal state economically interacts with, in order to learn something about the trade–democracy relationship (Weiffen 2009, 108). Following this suggestion, one leaves an attribute–oriented view on trade behind and enters the relational arena, in which not only economic activity is measured but it is of importance between whom trade and capital flows are present and between whom they are not. Such a relational approach has in parts already been applied. At the aggregate level and looking at actor attributes only, receiving foreign capital has no statistical significant effect on democratic transitions within the receiving country. However, in democratic countries it does seem to support further democratization and consolidation of democracy. This general picture changes if capital flows are disaggregated into different types of flows — e.g. according to varying volatility — and if regime attributes of the sending and the receiving country are controlled for in multiple regression models (Bayulgen and Ladeweig 2005; cf. Bayulgen and Ladeweig 2007).

In summary, trade and capital flows are relational concepts by definition. Trade and capital flows link economic partners and cannot be wholly attributed to either of them alone. Intuitively, it seems to be important *with whom* a country is engaged in economic exchange. Findings from Bayulgen and Ladeweig (2005) underline the necessity for such a relational perspective. Altogether, the potential relationship linking trade and financial flows

with democratization has important relational connotations which should be addressed in future research on this topic.

5.1.2 International integration through IGOs

The membership of states in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) is theorized to positively influence democratization within these member states (Russett et al. 1998, 447). The argument here is not about IGOs being independent actors that promote democracy in single states (see Russett 1998). Instead, the argument is about international interdependence of states through joint IGO memberships.

Various IGOs make the maintenance of certain democratic standards an important condition for their members such as various regional organizations like the EU or South America's Southern Common Market MERCOSUR (see Gleditsch and Ward 2008, 294). Regime changes away from democracy are expected to become less likely in states with many IGO memberships because of the higher costs of these changes due to jeopardizing the membership status. In particular, political leaders of young democracies seem to benefit significantly from their countries' IGO memberships. They constitute an effective way to signal one's commitment to democratic norms (Pevehouse 2002, 613–615). Since not all IGOs request and enforce democratic norms among member states, it is not enough to calculate the strength of this effect based on the number of IGO memberships alone. One would have to give different weight to different types of IGOs instead (Weiffen 2009, 114).

So far, the impact of IGO memberships on countries' levels of democratization could theoretically and empirically be addressed by focusing on actor attributes alone — e.g. the number of IGO–memberships of a specific state. However, there is the International Relations (IR) constructivist argument that some IGOs spread democratic norms internationally (see Adler and Barnett 1998; Russett 1998). Among this group of IGOs are, for example, the United Nations with its various subsections. If one sees IGOs not only as promoters of democratic norms but as transmitters of norms in general and democratic norms specifically, one has already started to commit oneself to a relational perspective. The overall structure of relations between a group of actors — which contains direct and indirect links — is related to and influences "similarity of interests and mutual understanding" (Dorussen and Ward 2008, 192). It seems plausible that direct and indirect links through IGOs between states contribute to the explanation of the Kantian Peace (Dorussen and Ward 2008).

Summing up, the perspective presented here treats IGO–memberships as channels through which states communicate and share norms, such as

democracy. The mechanism by which states influence each others' regime type through these connections can be conceptualized as a political diffusion mechanism. The discussion on diffusion is continued in subsection 5.1.5 of this paper since it brings together several of the external factors described so far.

5.1.3 Bilateral exchange of diplomatic representatives

International diplomacy is, to a large extent, based upon the exchange of recognized diplomatic representatives between pairs of states.[12] Through its diplomats, a state receives information about other states and is able to communicate with foreign political elites and societies.

Multivariate regression results indicate positive partial correlations of regime similarity and the probability of a pair of states to have direct diplomatic relations. Geographic distance and bilateral trade were added as additional independent variables in these regression models (Neumayer 2008, 235). Leiby and Butler (2005) present similar findings. However, the direction of influence between two countries' regime similarity and the presence or absence of diplomatic ties between them is not clear. It also seems plausible to expect two countries to have similar regimes, if they are well–connected through diplomatic relations.

5.1.4 Nongovernmental organizations

Schmitz (2004, 419–421) suggests two research agendas focusing on NGOs as external factors of democratization. Both alternatives emphasize relations. First, he points to the need for opening the black box of democracy promoting NGOs to better understand their internal organizational structure, which might contribute to explanations of their action and their effectiveness in promoting democracy. This entails the study of different sub–organizational actors and their relations, for example, volunteers, executive directors, elected personal with management functions et cetera. This research task could be empirically approached by collecting complete intra–organizational network data on the internal actors of a few NGOs and certain relations among them such as trust, communication, or friendship (cf. Borgatti and Foster 2003).

Second, Schmitz asks for research analyzing the interaction between different NGOs, such as competition for resources and media attention. Inter–organizational relations and interactions can also be studied as networks.

[12] Singer and Small (1966) and Small and Singer (1973) provide a brief quantitative overview of the historical development of diplomacy.

Both tasks sketched by Schmitz address important real–life issues, are of academic relevance, and ask for relational approaches.

5.1.5 From convergence to political diffusion

If national policies in different countries become similar over time this is referred to as *convergence* (Holzinger et al. 2007, 16). Apart from that, the concept of *diffusion* is used in various ways. Holzinger et al. (2007, 14) distinguish a broad definition which refers to any form of transfer or geographic spread of a policy from a narrower definition. The latter defines diffusion as the "process by which an innovation is *communicated* through certain channels over time" (Rogers 2003, 5, emph. added). This paper adopts the narrower perspective which makes the presence of a specific interdependence or communication channel part of the definition. What exactly these channels are and which mechanisms they refer to — such as free decisions, hierarchical influences or adaption of an innovation by force — is not predefined. While convergence emphasizes the results of having similar policies in different countries, the diffusion perspective focuses on the processes of becoming more similar. Together, both concepts can be used to describe the spatial spread and the geographical distribution of ideas or specific policies in general and specifically of democracy.

Diffusion of democracy appears to be an influential predictor for democratization. Gleditsch and Ward (2006) find robust statistical relationships between a country's regime type and regime stability on the one hand and the extent of being surrounded by other democracies or presence of democratic regime changes on the other. Within regions, countries are likely to have similar regime types. In addition, the authors find evidence of a tendency towards greater regime similarity over time. Overall, this interpretation is backed by findings of Starr and Lindborg (2003, 511–515) who describe various neighbor effects. Countries experiencing a change in Freedom House rating are found to influence similar transitions in their neighboring countries.

Knowledge about democracy or successful democratization elsewhere can be conceptualized as the specific flow of an interstate network (cf. Kadushin 2005). The ties of these networks could be, for example, contiguity, geographic proximity or communicative proximity through media access and telecommunication infrastructure (Weiffen 2009, 110–113). Usually, this spread is seen as a process in space where a flow is more likely to exist between geographical contingent countries. The domino– or wave–metaphor is often used to visualize this influence mechanism (Gleditsch and Ward 2006; Starr 1991; Starr and Lindborg 2003).

Convergence through *political diffusion* constitutes a counterpart to clas-

sic geography–based diffusion. Since communication is not only facilitated by spatial proximity, it seems plausible to bring together the relationship of some of the relational external factors laid out above as different aspects of such a political diffusion process. The spread of ideas and communication between states can originate for example from economic interdependence (Weede 2005, 20), joint IGO–memberships (Adler and Barnett 1998; Dorussen and Ward 2008; Russett 1998) or exchange of diplomats (see Neumayer 2008, 235; cf. Leiby and Butler 2005). Such direct and indirect links facilitate communication between states and thereby constitute channels through which democracy is likely to spread.

To summarize this section, I argued for the relational conceptualization of several external factors of democratization. The following section will provide an example of how SNA can further the understanding of democratization by making this relational perspective explicit through methods and theory of network analysis.

5.2 Outlook on analyzing democratization with SNA

This paper has demonstrated that since the beginning of the Third Wave in the early 1970s, democratization has been explained with external and international factors. However, internal factors dominated most explanatory attempts. As the previous pages have demonstrated, some theoretically important external factors are relational by their very nature. Their definitions or their contribution to explaining democratization contain relational concepts and arguments. Although recently, external factors were re–conceptualized and brought back into global discussion (e.g. Erdmann and Kneuer 2009; Levitsky and Way 2005, 2006; Weiffen 2009), the relational aspects of many external factors have not been given much attention.[13]

Research of international influences on national regime levels and regime changes could benefit from an approach that strongly emphasizes relations. For this purpose, I suggest the usage of SNA for studying what I have called "political diffusion through network ties". In the following subsection, I will sketch a possible way of how SNA methods can be applied to study external factors and their relational aspects.

[13] One exception are studies of spatial diffusion of democracy which implicitly use a relational approach (e.g. Gleditsch and Ward 2006).

5.2.1 Diffusion of democracy in diplomatic exchange networks — separating selection from influence

Countries which have officially exchanged diplomatic representatives tend to have similar regimes (Leiby and Butler 2005; Neumayer 2008). Whereas Neumayer (2008), for example, uses regime similarity to explain the presence of a diplomatic tie in a randomly chosen country dyad, it also seems plausible to explain dyadic regime variables with whether or not a diplomatic ties are present. Rephrased in terms and concepts proposed by Steglich et al. (2010, 331), finding similarity of closely related people is very typical of a social network and has been referred to as "homogeneity bias" (Fararo and Sunshine 1964) or "network autocorrelation" (Doreian 1989).

Two causal mechanisms provide plausible explanations. First, as Neumayer (2008) argued, countries with similar regimes may have the tendency to exchange diplomats with each other. This so called "selection mechanism" (Steglich et al. 2010, 331) of similar actors choosing each other as partners has been used as an explanation of "homophily" in various social contexts (see McPherson et al. 2001). Second, as mentioned earlier, it may also be the case that countries which are closely related to each other via various network relations (e.g. diplomatic ties, trade, IGO–membership ...) tend to become similar in their regime types over time. This "influence mechanism" (Steglich et al. 2010, 331) describes the convergence of well–connected actors who are theorized to influence each other and comes close to what has been introduced as *political diffusion* in this paper.

In order to disentangle effects of these competing explanations, "network–behavior panel data" (Steglich et al. 2010, 332) — the network and the attributes of the actors need to be measured for several points in time — is needed. Data analysis for such a project has to study "complete network structures as well as relevant actor attributes (...) as joint dependent variables in a longitudinal framework where the network structure and the individual attributes mutually influence one another" (Steglich et al. 2010, 330). As for a suitable method, stochastic actor–based models for network dynamics fit the problem to be solved and the data concerned well (see Snijders et al. 2010; see Steglich et al. 2010; cf. Snijders 2011, 144–145). Programs to apply these methods are available through the statistical packages SIENA and RSiena[14].

The results promise answers on whether countries with similar regime types tend to create and maintain diplomatic relations with each other or whether states linked through diplomacy become more similar in their regimes over time. Democratization studies would thus gain a deeper insight

[14]See the SIENA project's website: `http://www.stats.ox.ac.uk/~snijders/siena/`

into the interplay of diplomacy and democracy. Valuable information can be expected on the effect of establishing diplomatic ties with a non–democracy as a means of democracy–promotion.

6 Conclusion

This paper, which has been devised as a conceptual one, argues for a relational approach towards explanations of levels of democracy with external factors. Methods of SNA can be applied to contribute toward this conclusion. In section 3, internal and external factors were presented as two parts of one comprehensive explanation of democracy, which do not exclude each other. Emphasizing relations in the context of external factors does not preclude any consideration of actor attributes, either. It has not been the author's intention to argue against any form of non–relational explanation of democratization. SIENA, the network method suggested for an application in the previous section, enables the combination of relations and actor attributes: both can be included as different kind of variables in the same analysis.

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