Defective Democratization: Prior Regimes and Civil Conflict

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Abstract:

Why do some states experience civil conflict following a democratic transition while others remain peaceful? We attribute the variation in new democracies’ propensity to experience civil conflict to characteristics of the previous authoritarian regime. We contend that the institutional legacy of the prior regime provides important clues to the likelihood of violence following democratic transitions. In particular, we argue that regimes transitioning from military rule are susceptible to political violence in the early stages of democracy due to their weak institutional infrastructure and the continued influence of the military in the new regime. We test our argument using pooled time-series cross-sectional data on all states between 1951 and 2004. Consistent with our expectations, we find that new democracies emerging from military rule are significantly more likely to experience civil conflict than states emerging from either single-party or personalist regimes. Our findings have important implications for democracy promotion programs, highlighting the dangers of democratization from military regimes, while recognizing that democratization is not always associated with violence and hence should not be abandoned as a foreign policy goal.