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Selectorate Theory and International Borders of Regime Ideology, Trade Patterns, Geo-strategical Location: Patterns of Cooperation and Distrust

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In 2024, a hopefully parsimonious explanation (Zimmermann, 2024) was presented for why the size of the selectorate is the key explanatory variable to democratization and democratic success, in comparison to autocracy and autocratization. Other intervening variables considered in a joint multicausal model were economic development, public goods production, and repression. Keeping your house in shape and protected is one aspect. Getting along with your neighbors comes next and is at least equally important. This can be studied abundantly worldwide right now. The trifold predictions of the democratic peace theory, i.e. no war between pairs of democracies, similarity of institutional norms, and no barriers to international trade hold only for a tiny minority of countries. Also market economies need not exist by definition in democracies, just as much as autocracies to a considerable extent can incorporate elements of a market economy. Can we make any predictions? Here some stocktaking is done for rudimentary explanatory sketches. We derive arbitrary weights as to their likely advantages for peace, economic freedom and democratic institutions under different conditions, their long-term success and eventual further crises.

Keywords: Economic interdependence, multipolar disorders, changes in the world economy and strategic options

How to proceed? The most stringent procedure is to start from the ultimate dependent variable: in this case, it is our two dependent variables:

- war and peace;
- economic development and growth.

Going backwards in the causal chain, the most likely candidates for explaining the various realms in the domestic sphere and international sphere are doing away with hindrances to trade and inventions. This implies open markets domestically, and even more so, given the enormous advantages of comparative costs: international free markets.

The other block of explanatory variables deals with the capabilities of being able to defend one's own country and to deter aggressive opponents, just as well as to maintain some form of control over regional domains, i.e. neighboring countries, as well as open access to absolutely necessary raw materials, such as rare earths and the materials for producing high-standard semi-conductors which are needed for AI. Economic development decides about the capability of defending one's own country and protecting associated friendly countries, as well as gaining access to those materials that are needed for further economic development.

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The recent visit of the CIA director John Ratcliffe to Moscow speaks to this, he replaces Steve Wittkoff and Jared Kushner in interlocutions with Putin. Apparently his message was to tell the Russians that they would never win the war in Ukraine. The best would be a military stalemate against the West and Ukraine defending her territory, and against other open societies, but with several times larger economic resources. Russia reaches only about 11 to 12% of the GNP of the European Union and 5% of NATO.

This does not mean that the Russian autocrat Putin would give in, especially hoping for some military gains during the winter and spring season on Ukrainian territory and maybe on other European territories nearby. He is being supported by enormous and very elastic supply lines from China and from Iran, and getting his own oil and gas shipped to his most reliable customers, not necessarily the ones paying the highest price. India, for instance, pays up to 15% less than the world market price, China even up to 20%.

Thus, economically Russia would be a loser, even if joined by her allies.

The other major finding is that democracies do not fight each other in international wars. There are military disputes, a minor form of war, such as fishing quarrels or disputes about territorial sub-units, but those do not occur at the level of larger warfare. Thus, democracies amongst themselves remain peaceful. There is this minor exception of Great Britain declaring war on Finland on December 6, 1941, being pressed by the Soviet Union, her ally in the Second World War.

The third major result here is that democracies themselves are most likely to be engaged in wars with autocrats, if autocracies are the dominant form of authority in their neighborhood. Israel is a classic example. The countries in the Second World War fighting over-expanding and invading Nazi Germany are another case. From this point of view, the recipe would be to have political regimes turn into democracies and be surrounded by democracies.

Right now, the world looks different, with autocracies roughly comprising close to two-thirds of the world's regimes, including two of the big powers, China and Russia. India, on the other hand, could be a big control factor as to the likely or unlikely foreign aggressive behavior of China. Irrespective of the biggest young population in the world and with, in part, highly educated segments, India seems to be stricken in her caste systems for a long time. As long as that prevails, discrimination in India and lack of full use of her resources are to be reckoned with. Right now China has the interest to weaken the resources of the United States, be it in Europe, in Middle Asia, or even more so as a consequence in Southeast Asia around Taiwan, while at the same time achieving an economic and political balance with the superpower still being the United States. In view of rare earths needed most on the part of the US and China lacking high-standard semi-conductors, security analysts speak of "mutually assured disruption" or a "balance of vulnerability".

The other major theoretical explanation is being prepared for warfare and military competition, first, through continued economic development and, second, through international arrangements to bolster the defensive position. The policies of the Trump government do undermine this charge enormously. Also, so far, they have not furthered democratic developments in countries they are interested in, be it in Latin America or in the Middle East, rather to the contrary.

Getting to the competitive race between the two superpowers: the still-dominant United States and the ascendant superpower China, China is likely to overtake the United States economically in nominal terms in the 2040s (not per capita), in spite of over-aging and the perennial banking crises, and to achieve military parity in the 2030s (sometimes even superiority) in areas where the United States is falling behind, such as

drone production and the use of artificial intelligence for military purposes. In power transition theory (Levy & Thompson 2010; Organski & Kugler 1980), this is the most dangerous time when there is an ascending superpower approaching parity or becoming the winner in such a race, economically and in military preparation. Classical examples are found around World War I and World War II, and in other historical incidents.

The question is whether the interdependence of national economies and peaceful communication amongst political leaders and agreements can control this dangerous period. Assume just a Chinese military attack on Taiwan and a world war looms large, or the retreat of America from protecting countries in Southeast Asia.

Bipolarity, as between the United States and communist Russia after WW II, was a clear stabilizing factor, with clear, defined spheres of influence in the east and in the west. *Multi-polarity* comes in as a third theoretical block or even more ones. An empirical finding here is that the world is not as ultra-stable as it used to be in the bipolar world, even though the period from 1815 till roughly 1900—the period after the Vienna Congress, dominated by a multipolar system—was a relatively peaceful one. The major changes occurred in revolutionary social movements, such as in France and continental Europe, Britain being the exception in 1832 and 1848.

Multi-polarity comes in in two ways. One is if you add Russia to the superpowers of America and China. This would not be a convincing argument, since Russia is economically totally dependent on China. China controls large portions of the economy in far Eastern Russia as well as the military supply of the Russian army. Further military supply comes from Iran, and part of the burden is paid by Russian exports in oil and gas much under the world market price in order to stabilize this unbalanced trade.

Also concerning Russia, the Chinese have a long memory as do the Japanese people. For China, the unequal *Amur treaties* meant the loss of 1 million square km (the equivalent of France with overseas territories and Germany together). For Japan, Southern Sakhalin and the entire Kuril archipelago ceded after WW II comprise roughly 50,000 square km, not to mention lack of basic sympathies between all three peoples.

What about Europe in whatever political shape, EU or another setup? Sharing of military resources and commands and budgetary resources are the key issues and is absolutely mandatory. There seems to be a time stretch for such acts as long as the balance between the two superpowers holds and Russia is controlled in its territorial and ideological aggressiveness. Even then, however, Europe will depend on the sharing of American resources. Yet, her deterrent resources would be considerably enlarged.

The four areas mentioned in the title of this article: selectorate theory, international borders of regime ideology, trade patterns, and geo-strategical location address the major areas to watch closely to be on safer grounds in prediction and to be forewarned. Patterns of cooperation and trust or distrust are influenced by all four theoretical and empirical domains. Selectorate theory is addressed elsewhere (Zimmermann, 2024) the major point being that a larger selectorate would make it more difficult to go for warfare straight away.

These are just the two dominant channels of influence mentioned in theorizing on the democratic peace (Russett & Oneal, 2001): *structural* features of making decisions in wider and more open selectorates and institutional and behavior *norms* shared by respective populations in democracies. The selectorate comprises those influential people who decide on the likely candidates for leadership either in a politburo, or by singularly acting dictators or by candidates from larger population segments.

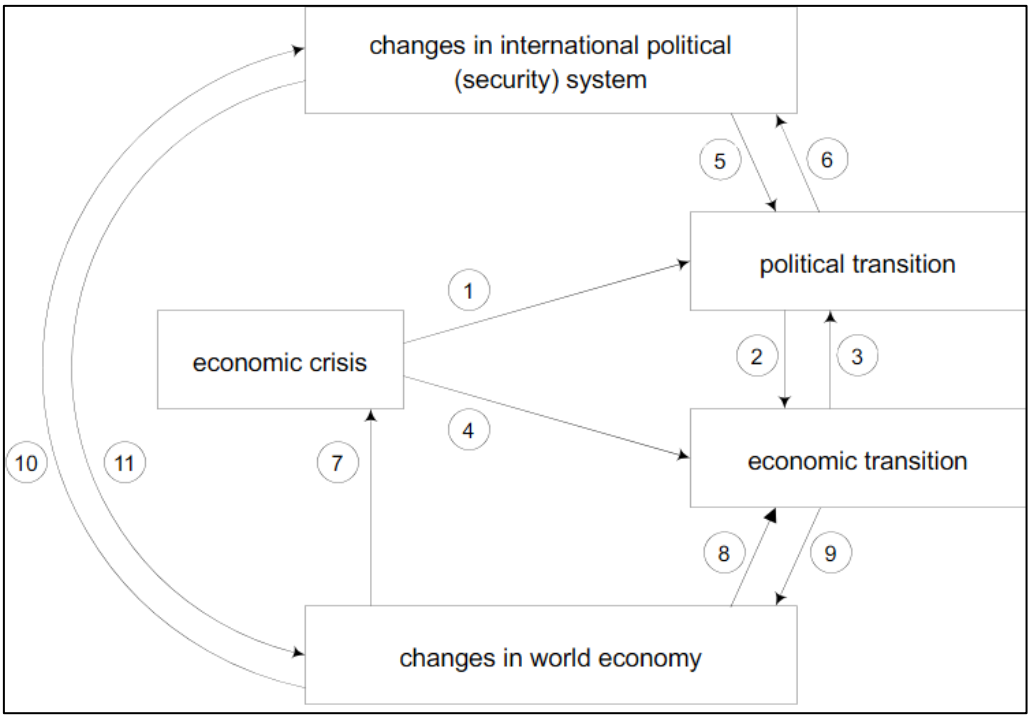

Figure 1. Three Radical Transitions Amidst Economic Crisis.

The changes in the world economy are embedded into the international security system (paths 10 and 11). They influence national and regional economic crises (path 7), as well as economic transformations (paths 8, 9, and 4), and political transitions (paths 1, 2 and 3).

As to raw materials, their mining, channels of transport and delivery chains, their effects on security options are at least as important as the economic developments alone on local and regional markets. Independently of raw materials, the distribution and use of IT act potentially rather compensatory on human and domestic resources. Yet as questions of storing resources and the privileged access to worldwide information right now are limited to superpowers and those nations leading in technological development such as artificial intelligence and space technology. These nations clearly have obtained an advantage.

It looks as if the use of resources and security issues, as well as respective projections into the future, are bigger drivers of global insecurity. Imbalances in informational technology will become gigantic. Yet, at least the already present means allow many nations intensive use of national and international educational resources and thus major progress in development. Gigantic changes in budgets and likewise adaptations of populations will be causes of further turbulence.

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