

IS DEMOCRATISATION BAD FOR GLOBAL WARMING?

**Peter Burnell**  
**CSGR Working Paper 257/09**  
**January 2009**

Is Democratisation Bad for Global Warming?

CSGR Working Paper 257/09

Peter Burnell

January 2009

Email: [peter.burnell@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:peter.burnell@warwick.ac.uk)

**Abstract:** *even if democracy and all good things go together the same may not be as true of democratisation. Given the growing number of countries that have attempted democratisation, with varying success, and as the challenge of addressing the causes of climate change becomes increasingly more urgent, it is worth knowing if democratisation makes that challenge more difficult. Similarly it is worth knowing if the political conditions for an effective response to climate instability and its economic and social consequences must impact on the outlook for democratisation. Although contrary to what was once believed, developing countries may not have the dilemma of having to choose between developing the economy and building democracy, the further addition of a requirement to significantly reduce carbon emissions might be just too demanding. The paper offers a framework of analysis as a preliminary to more detailed empirical investigation. It concludes with policy implications for international actors committed to promoting democracy, considering that in developing countries stable authoritarian rule might be better placed than regimes in political transition to mitigate climate change as well as adapt to its effects.*

**Contact Details:** Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL, England. E-mail: [peter.burnell@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:peter.burnell@warwick.ac.uk)

**Keywords:** climate change; democratisation; environmental politics; international democracy support

## **Is Democratisation Bad for Global Warming?**

*Summary: even if democracy and all good things go together the same may not be as true of democratisation. Given the growing number of countries that have attempted democratisation, with varying success, and as the challenge of addressing the causes of climate change becomes increasingly more urgent, it is worth knowing if democratisation makes that challenge more difficult. Similarly it is worth knowing if the political conditions for an effective response to climate instability and its economic and social consequences must impact on the outlook for democratisation. Although contrary to what was once believed, developing countries may not have the dilemma of having to choose between developing the economy and building democracy, the further addition of a requirement to significantly reduce carbon emissions might be just too demanding. The paper offers a framework of analysis as a preliminary to more detailed empirical investigation. It concludes with policy implications for international actors committed to promoting democracy, considering that in developing countries stable authoritarian rule might be better placed than regimes in political transition to mitigate climate change as well as adapt to its effects.*

This paper inquires into whether democratisation matters for global warming. It argues that pending detailed empirical investigation there are circumstances where democratisation could frustrate efforts to mitigate climate change, irrespective of whether adaptation to global warming and its adverse effects make democratisation more difficult. The paper is structured in five sections: 1) outlines the paper's main concern, which is a possible link between democratisation and action on climate change; 2) briefly reviews what the literature says about relations between democratic theory, democracies and the environment; 3) itemises international developments in recent decades that indicate why relationships between democratisation and climate measures are worth investigating, noting in 4) democratisation's more problematic features; 5) introduces the possibility that developing countries, China particularly, and possibly Russia too face a 'cruel choice' between democratising and reducing carbon emissions; 6) employs a figurative illustration to elaborate the dilemmas, incorporating the importance of regime legitimacy and regime stability; 7) presents

international dimensions of global warming's significance for democratisation, and in 8) draws tentative policy implications for international democracy support.

### **1. Questions worth posing**

The 'third wave' of democratisation appears to have slowed down and reached a halt. Figures provided by some recent measurements even appear to indicate some democratic deterioration in certain places, if not a more general reverse wave.<sup>1</sup> The 1990s saw the growth of a now well established multinational industry committed to promoting democracy around the world and arresting its decline. There is also now a widespread belief underpinned by growing scientific consensus that one of the biggest – possibly the biggest - challenge facing humankind is to slow down the rate of global warming. This means addressing the man-made causes: few experts now doubt that the scale and urgency of the required response are much greater than previously appreciated. Furthermore the impact of climate change especially severe weather events on human security is already being felt on a local basis; and the adverse consequences of accentuated climate instability are predicted to increase.

The conditions and causes rather than the consequences of democratisation have tended to dominate scholarly analysis of democratisation, with the partial exception of its effects on economic development, although the findings offer only modest grounds for believing that international democracy support can make a significant difference. However, in today's circumstances it seems reasonable to ask whether democratisation matters for climate change, and whether climate change matters for democratisation. This paper focuses primarily on the first of these questions, in other words the reference to reducing greenhouse gases generally and carbon emissions specifically (climate mitigation), while noting also the implausibility of complete separation between the two issues. Democratisation might have consequences for climate change by making it easier or conversely more difficult to tackle the causes. But both the effects of climate change and adaptation strategies to soften the negative impact could be consequential for the prospects for democratisation, either indirectly by for example causing social and political instability or more directly by requiring solutions where some types of political regime have a comparative advantage over others. The received wisdom is that globally both mitigation and adaptation are

needed, but the magnitude of what comes to be judged necessary under the second will be inversely related to the speed and effectiveness of steps for mitigation.

The paper's primary focus, then may be represented in the form of a few simple questions: if the causes of climate change are to be addressed adequately, which means taking preventative measures to reduce global warming in the future rather than just reacting to and limiting the damage done by the consequences of failure to take such action sooner, then should hopes for democratisation in countries like China - now the world's biggest carbon emitter - be put on hold? Would democratisation in such countries as China and Russia be a curse for climate stability? If democracy's third wave goes into reverse could that be a blessing in this regard?

## **2. A broad consensus exists on democracy and the environment.**

A literature called 'survivalist' and eco-authoritarian argued mainly in the 1970s but even lingering into the 1980s (see for example Gurr 1985) that ecological crisis in the none-too-distant future would be so profound that only authoritarian rule would be able to maintain order. The argument had two main strands: first, the issues are so technical that only experts can comprehend them, which means empowering popular ignorance would be dangerous for policy. Second, the destabilising and conflict-inducing consequences of the projected economic scarcities and shortages of water and food specifically, plus increased health problems and aggravated migration flows will require or force governments to resort to authoritarian solutions, to maintain order or restore stability. A modern twist suggests this would be all the more likely to happen where there is already a history of authoritarian rule, as in East Asia for example.<sup>2</sup>

### *Democracy's favourable disposition theorised*

From the 1980s on, however, a counter-literature, first theoretical and then increasingly empirical argued that democracy has distinctive properties which make it much better equipped than non-democracies to commit to environmentally sustainable development generally (see Payne 1995, Lafferty and Meadowcroft 1996, and Holden 2002 for summaries and elaboration). Briefly, the theoretical arguments state: democracies value human life and so will address threats to life, unlike autocracies, which prioritise power and ideology; democratic institutions are accountable to the

public; democracies have greater openness and learning and educative capabilities compared to autocracies; the dispersion and decentralisation of power in democracies allows for a plurality of local and grass-roots initiatives (as in the US, where state-level and municipal initiatives can take place even if central government is negligent); the implementation of government solutions to complex problems requires willing obedience and cooperation from those who are affected, and this is more likely to be forthcoming in democracies; elected governments (know they) can be held to account for how they respond to current prognoses of future problems, which means democracies are more likely to show sensitivity to the needs and entitlements of future generations; civil society, environmental non-governmental organisation (ENGO) pressure groups specifically can organise freely and help build influential multi- and trans-national movements. The literature that dwells on civil society especially is becoming more and more prominent. This is not just because of the ability of ENGOs to make governments sign and comply with international agreements but because of the potential to influence directly the behaviour of non-state actors like big companies and consumers too. For example Newell (2008: 149) considers that civil society groups have 'succeeded in bringing a significant and often under-estimated degree of democratic accountability to the global politics of climate change'. All in all, while the literature does mention some counter-arguments, the dominant view is that democracy is helpful or, as Holden (2002) concludes, environmental protection requires democracy or at minimum the two are not incompatible.

### *The empirical evidence*

Theorists disagree on the model of democracy or institutional form that is most favourable to the environment,<sup>3</sup> but at the level of examining the actual record the poor environmental performance of the USSR and Soviet bloc countries compared with the West has seemed to offer convincing evidence for the proposition that democracy is superior to authoritarianism. This legacy has helped structure the debate over the last 15 years, not least by focusing inquiries onto the relative performance of different democracies.

One caveat is that the majority of studies refer to performance on the environment in general; only a minority single out climate change specifically, which is a limiting

factor for this paper. Also, methodological issues relating to how we can identify and measure the dependent variable for purpose of evaluating different political regimes are teasing, even after we narrow the focus to global warming, according to whether we are content to capture just the production side of emissions (burning of fossil fuels etc) or want to include also the contribution made by consuming manufactures delivered to the market from production sites abroad (attribution for 'carbon leakage'). Both measures of course go beyond the simple but misleading marker of whether a country has ratified the Kyoto Protocol,<sup>4</sup> while having the disadvantage of inviting us to decide on how to accommodate the role of lagged effects. Those effects refer to observable outcomes that are due to the policy initiatives of a former government (the people in office) and possibly a previous regime (type or system of political rule), which is relevant in countries undergoing political transformation.

Empirical evidence gathered in 1990 by Gleditsch and Sverdrup (2002) found that on a bivariate (but not a multivariate) analysis democracy's effects on climate gases are harmful; Midlarsky (1998) too found democracy's effects on carbon emissions are harmful, in contrast to other environmental effects; Walker's case study evidence based around just three African countries also found a harmful relationship with the environment. A number of other statistical studies make more favourable comparisons with autocracies on environmental protection and sustainability generally (e.g. Ward 2008), although even there the evidence is not straightforward. Neumayer (2002) for instance finds that although democracies are more likely to sign and comply with international treaties on the environment, the environmental regimes these give rise to are not necessarily effective; Bättig and Bernauer (2009 forthcoming) too find that while democracy's effect on levels of political commitment to climate mitigation (policy outputs) is positive the effect on policy outcomes, measured in terms of emission levels and trends is ambiguous. Put differently, democracies are good at making token gestures; Neumayer (2002) concluded that the evidence for saying democracy and democratisation make a difference to actual outcomes is weak and ambiguous.

A second caveat is that more fine-grained analysis focusing not just on greenhouse gases and carbon emissions specifically<sup>5</sup> but which then disaggregates the category of democracies and the category of non-democracies in more detail would add greater

nuance,<sup>6</sup> especially if they go on to relate the findings to a comparison also of the countries in terms of both their level and rate of economic growth and development. Comparisons of carbon emissions by China and India today are at least as significant as say a contrast between Scandinavia and the USSR during the cold war years. An assumption that rich world democracies and poor world democracies have similar predispositions may be no more valid than the proposition that all rich world governments sing from the same hymn sheet. (Ward 2008 for example offers statistical evidence to show that presidential democracies perform less well on environmental sustainability than parliamentary democracies).<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, a number of both national and international developments of fundamental importance have taken place since the debate seemed to be sealed in favour of democracies, which should now prompt us to reopen and establish whether there is greater complexity to the case.

### **3. Developments since the genesis of the prevailing orthodoxy**

First, as already mentioned, there is growing appreciation of the true magnitude and urgency of the challenge of tackling climate change, increased acceptance that human activity is a significant cause and, so, more awareness of the responsibility to act appropriately, which means mitigation as well as adaptation. We now have the certain knowledge that the Kyoto Protocol, which entered into force as recently as 2005, is wholly inadequate to the challenge.

Three more changes, that are connected to the above include: first, countries in the developing world now contribute more to current and projected future levels of carbon emissions than before; second, increase in globalisation, trade and investment have led the production-side and consumption-side responsibility for carbon emissions to coincide much less now than they did formerly, when economies were less open and China was not a major exporter of manufactures; third, increase in technical know-how, which has enhanced the possibilities for making energy savings and using alternatives to fossil fuels, at a price. Of today's 20 leading countries in terms of their current total carbon emissions seven are in the developing world. They include countries that are likely to post high rates of increase in the years ahead.<sup>8</sup> By 2015 it is reckoned that total greenhouse gas emissions including emissions from land

use changes in developing countries will overtake and then increasingly pull ahead of total emissions from the developed countries.

However, there are also some things that have not changed greatly; or perhaps more accurately, they have come full circle. First is the knowledge that authoritarian regimes can be good for economic growth and development and in some cases perform much better than the average for all democracies. Whereas the economic shortcomings of communist authoritarianism are well known, a combination of authoritarianism and state capitalism still looks viable as a developmental alternative (witness China, Vietnam, perhaps even Russia today). This recognition (perhaps grudging in the West but nonetheless attractive to rulers in some other regions, Central Asia for example) comes after a period in the 1990s when much effort was devoted to trying to establish that democracies perform more strongly in developmental terms in the long run. However, even though the statistical evidence suggests a general fit between income *levels* and regime type in the long run, the correlation of high income and democracy is far from perfect, and our understanding of the causal link and direction of causality – if indeed a causal link exists – is even more limited, and is subject to much dispute.<sup>9</sup> No less significant, ‘over the short to medium term variations in *growth* performance - that is, changes in income levels - appear to be only loosely related to differences in governance; here, studies comparing successful and less successful developing economies find that there is no significant difference in terms of their adherence to market capitalism and liberal democracy (Williams, Duncan, Landell-Mills and Unsworth 2009: 6-7). The continuing relevance of the possibility of authoritarian development - or perhaps more important, the appeal this ‘model’ holds for illiberal rulers - should not be underestimated. If such regimes can reach a position where they have scope to choose between further growth and the environment without placing political stability at risk, then the significance becomes that much greater.

A second constant, however, is that notwithstanding the conventional view which says democracies are more environmentally benign than autocracies, there is ample evidence that even people in rich countries, democracies included, are attached to energy-intensive life styles. These countries dominate the league table in terms of per capita carbon emissions even before counting in international aviation and shipping,

or even as they displace emissions linked to the manufacture of goods they consume to countries like China and India ('i.e. 'carbon leakage'). These considerations should be taken into account when making use of the so-called 'environmental Kuznets curve' – an inverted U-shape that posits environmental outcomes will first worsen with rising incomes and then improve after a certain income threshold has been reached. Responsibility for carbon emissions may not be accounted for in all versions of the curve; and anyway, some commentators ponder that the climate change effects of rising incomes may even follow an N-shaped curve instead.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, there is one more big headline news since the debate on democracy versus authoritarian rule and the environment began to crystallise in favour of democracy: namely democracy's third wave, which saw many countries embark on democratisation. More than 20 years after the 'wave's' inception we now see more countries classified as democracies of one sort another than at any previous time. Admittedly many of these new democracies do not count as full western-style liberal democracies and some may deserve to be qualified by an adjective such as partial, limited, or semi; moreover there is evidence that the total number has now reached a plateau, and some commentators speculate about the prospects for decline.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, this entire moving experience post-dates the early benchmark literature on democracies and the environment.

#### **4. Democratisation not unqualified good news.**

The real world experience of democratisation does not bear out an ideal type of smooth and linear progression proceeding inexorably all the way from autocracy at one end of the spectrum to liberal democracy at the other. On the contrary, what we see is a process of change that can be unpredictable and the outcome uncertain both for the identity of the government and the type of political regime. In periods of political transition both the government and the regime can be unstable; change may be halting and interrupted; it may first move forwards in the direction of more democracy and then backwards away from that and subsequently reverse the trend again. But such transition is not necessarily a brief passing experience. Indeed, political opening can bring about regimes that seem to be stuck in transition. That means that although the characteristics they possess places them somewhere between authoritarian and liberal democratic types they are not actually transiting or 'in transit'

– moving in a sustained way – in the direction of one or other of these alternatives.<sup>12</sup> While the democratisation literature gives them many different labels like ‘defective democracy’ and ‘competitive authoritarianism’, and places them in classificatory niches dubbed ‘hybrid’ , ‘mixed’ or ‘intermediate’, to all intents and purposes they may appear to be stable and static, for the time being anyway.<sup>13</sup> Yet inevitably there are still consequences for how decisions come to be made by the governments as well as who is making the decisions. Democratisation sometimes also brings a weakening of executive capability, the state’s ability to manage and solve certain sorts of problems. Established relationships and even the capacity to maintain stable relations with foreign governments and international organisations and the ability to execute international treaty obligations might also be disrupted. The literature has identified some disturbing examples.

For example statistical analysis by Hegre *et al.* (2001) produced evidence to show that although in the long run established democracies are less prone to violent conflict at home compared to established autocracies (which is because established democracies seem relatively more stable), in contrast intermediate regimes and regimes undergoing political transition between autocracy and democracy are more likely to be conflict-prone than either established democracies or established autocracies. Political change in either direction is equally hazardous; a succession of transitions in and around the middle zone means that a long time could elapse before a sustained net decrease in violence takes place. Mousseau (2001: 562) reached similar findings that regimes situated mid-way between autocracy and democracy have higher levels of extreme forms of political violence than regimes at the two ends of the spectrum. In ethnically heterogeneous societies autocratisation is more effective as a way of reducing the levels than by proceeding onwards to a fragile or immature democracy. Other groups of analysts writing more from an international peace-building perspective have also argued that premature attempts to push a country to build democracy after experiencing violent conflict, for example by staging a general election early, can precipitate a return to violence, especially where the state is weak, thereby halting or even reversing the movement towards democracy.

In regard to international relations several contributions by Snyder (2000) and together with Mansfield (2005) argue that even if democracies truly are predisposed

to be at peace with other democracies, the likelihood of both internal conflict and external belligerence actually increases with democratisation.<sup>14</sup> Their qualitative findings have attracted criticism. But they contain an echo from Ward and Gleditsch's (1998) quantitative research findings that uneven or 'rocky' political transitions which involve swings back and forth do increase the risk of war proneness. These have been re-endorsed more recently, by Merkel (2008).<sup>15</sup> Being located in a conflict-prone regional neighbourhood further accentuates the risks. Finally there are the debates in distinctive areas of public policy like macro-economic management that suggest democratising regimes have difficulty pursuing sustained policies of structural economic reform, unless they can show early dividends for key stakeholder groups in economy and society. The evidence for this is mixed: although Central and Eastern Europe's post-communist countries have consolidated democracy notwithstanding painful economic transitions, Russia and countries elsewhere, in the Andean region for instance, have found the combination of liberalising economic and political reform far more challenging. Some have experienced interruption and even erosion of the early democratic gains.<sup>16</sup>

To sum up the above, democratisation or democratising regimes as distinct from established democracies and established autocracies have been associated with some effects that are malign. Moreover the consequences such as increased conflict can further disrupt the process and contribute yet greater political instability, and invite democratic regression. Of course some of the reasoning that tries to explain this dwells on features that might be thought to have no direct relevance to any conceivable relationship between democratisation and the environment. The most noteworthy are the complications that divided societies pose and which lead to suspicions between different ethno-nationalist groups and to strategies of political mobilisation that serve to heighten the inter-group tensions. However by making the process of democratisation more hazardous and difficult to manage even this feature can have consequences for environmental commitments. Unlike the long, gradual development of some of the world's oldest democracies, the reality for countries facing political transition now is one of societies beset by multiple challenges simultaneously: the challenges of fashioning democracy and maintaining a sustainable environment are but two among many. In some such places it is understandable if attention by civil society to the environment is crowded out by what are often hotly

contested political issues concerning the direction and pace of political change, especially where a requirement to reconstruct - or even just 'right-size' - the state and, maybe engage in nation-building too compound the difficulties of democratising the regime.

The testing political environment alluded to above, taken together with the darker side of democratisation and the possible effects, strengthens the case for raising questions about democratisation's implications for global warming - a theoretical case that draws 'bottom-up' support from research like Walker's (1999) study of Mozambique, Malawi and South Africa, which provided empirical evidence for making a distinction between the environmental effects of democracy on the one hand and democratisation on the other, and evidence for saying that the second can be unfavourable. In order to focus on the connection more closely particularly in regard to countries in the developing world like China and India, old arguments claiming that developing countries face a cruel choice between developing the economy and building democracy are now worth revisiting.

### **5. Revisiting the cruel choice**

A well known thesis in development economics in the 1960s maintained that developing countries face a cruel choice: they can either develop the economy or build democracy, but not do both at the same time. The reasoning is that development requires some politically tough decisions, notably restraining consumption in order to invest society's economic surplus and have the possibility of increased economic production and higher living standards later. Democratically elected governments cannot be expected to make the rational economic choice: electoral competition drives politicians to promise increase in welfare now. Poor people living harsh lives in poor countries and especially where average life expectancy is short can be expected to 'overdiscount' the promise of enhanced future benefits. The politicians make a politically rational response. So although the issue does not turn on elitist claims to specialised technical knowledge by government, of the sort that informed arguments favouring ecoauthoritarianism which were circulating around the same time, the conclusion nonetheless was that authoritarian rule is best for development. A normative inference that democratisation should be postponed until later can be seen to follow easily.

For some years the strong developmental performance of East Asia's non-democratic dragons/tigers appeared to confirm the cruel choice thesis on the one side, just as the poor economic performance of India's democracy offered further support on the other. Just as important, cruel choice thinking seems to have influenced the way some governments have assessed their options. Put differently, the construction that power-holders make of the political situation and the alternatives facing their country, regime and government is the main influence on how they choose to act, even where independent observers or critics of the regime take a different view and judge the rulers to be excessively confident, say, or pessimistic and prone to paranoia. Authoritarian regimes that lack strong, reliable two-way channels of communication with the people may be less likely than democratic regimes to make an accurate assessment of the policy choices that will be tolerated by society.

In more recent decades than the 1960s the cruel choice thesis has been found to be flawed; by the 1990s even its original proponent had come round to a 'nuanced revision' (not complete abandonment - see Bhagwati 1995; 2002) after reconsidering the economic evidence. According to Bhagwati 1995; 2002) now democracies may be compatible and at times conducive to development – although only if accompanied by an expansion of economic markets and economic competition. The original reasoning and the grounds for the change of view mostly need not concern us here. But although nobody now argues that on average autocracies perform better in developmental terms than democracies (instead, collectively they show greater variation in performance), the idea that is encapsulated by 'cruel choice' should prompt us to consider whether developing countries in the early stages of the environmental Kuznets curve face a trade-off between pursuing democratisation on the one hand and on the other hand taking steps to mitigate carbon emissions (and, perhaps, adapting to climate change effects as well).

*Democratisation or facing up to climate change: a new cruel choice?*

Do the developing countries that are not established democracies and China in particular face a new cruel choice, not so much between development and democratisation but rather between democratisation and the environment instead?

Before exploring the question further it is worth recalling today's orthodox view that democracy is more likely than autocracy to consider the interests of future generations and for that reason will be more committed to environmentally sustainable strategies for development. A supporting argument for this is that whereas democratically elected representatives can speak for future generations and their inheritance entitlements (in accord with Edmund Burke's well known formulation of the idea of political representation), insecurity leads autocrats to ignore society's future interests. However this comparison does not account for the future-oriented disposition of non-democratic regimes that possess a strong nationalistic vision - perhaps one that is grounded in a long historically-rooted ambition for the country's standing in the world, as in the case of China and Russia now - or the Arab world's dynastic rulers and hereditary monarchies.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the orthodox view does not speak to the distinctive situation of that large category of regimes that are undergoing political change and whose status lies somewhere between stable autocracy and stable democracy.

In developing countries then the 'cruel choice' reasoning suggests that if government is to take rapid and substantial steps to reduce greenhouse gases or carbon emissions in particular, and if there is believed to be a trade-off with economic growth, then freedom from electoral competition and a concentration of power at the centre will be advantageous, relative to a more dispersed power structure and the requirement to refer political choices to the ballot box. Although democratising regimes might have the capability to combine political reform with development it looks unrealistic to expect society to allow such regimes to initiate climate mitigation strategies, where that is believed to mean sacrificing near term economic growth in return for the possibility of diffuse longer term global environmental gains. The scope for choice or the range of options that the politicians believe they face will be the determining influence. Any additional requirements to introduce measures to counter the harmful direct and indirect effects that an already changed climate has on social and political stability may conceivably strengthen further the argument for authoritarian rule.

Put differently, China, the world's leading carbon emitter, may be better equipped politically to reduce its emissions and respond to the harmful effects of climate while continuing to be an authoritarian one-party state than if it sets out along a path of

political reform in the direction of liberal democracy. China's polity today may be much better equipped than is India's plural democracy to address climate mitigation and climate adaptation. Of course political capability by itself does not determine political choice, and the *incentive* for China to address its carbon footprint raises a different and challenging question. This paper does not pretend to address that question at length. However there is the possibility of increased susceptibility to growing international pressure and the effects of being offered technical support on favourable terms from outside.<sup>18</sup> And at home, the regime may calculate that making some modest particularist and substantive policy concessions to the growing numbers of China's citizens who are already protesting the local effects of environmental degradation on their lives could be preferable to running the risk of being forced to introduce more fundamental changes to the entire political system later. If, however, China's communist Party (CCP) genuinely believes that even under present circumstances political stability would be seriously threatened by a sharp deceleration in economic growth then why would it be more inclined to privilege climate mitigation over growth in a context of political transition - most likely a time when the party must engage in political competition while not yet fully reconciled to the idea that it might lose power?

In order to broaden the focus out from the exceptionally important case of China, the next section first introduces the role played by legitimacy in stabilising regimes more generally, and then offers a diagrammatic figure (Figure 1) to serve as a heuristic device illustrating some alternative possible implications for the nexus between regime change, development and climate change.

## **6. The importance of legitimacy, and a figurative illustration**

Political legitimacy and the contribution it makes to the political strength and stability of regimes offers a key to making sense of the range of options that different regime types face. More specifically there is a distinction between *intrinsic* legitimacy, which is where society accepts the inherent merits of the regime or system of rule by virtue of endorsing the values, norms and principles that underlie it or which the regime exhibits or claims to represent, and *performance* legitimacy. The latter obtains where legitimacy rests on actual performance in terms of delivering what people want or need, chiefly material welfare and personal security. The distinction is a familiar one

in studies of democratisation. Legitimacy is the rock of political stability: it protects the regime from domestic threat even though it cannot guarantee that a particular individual, group or political party will occupy public office indefinitely. Indeed, in a democracy the voters' ability to 'throw the rascals out' at the ballot box is often likened to a safety valve that helps protect and actually reconfirms the overarching regime - democracy. This is distinctive to democracies.

A shift over time from performance to intrinsic legitimacy is generally reckoned to increase the chances of regime stability relative to continued reliance on performance legitimacy alone. And another view often expressed in the democratisation literature holds that democracy (i.e. government by consent of the people expressed in contested elections) is a minimum condition for a regime to have intrinsic legitimacy – the tacit inference (and, often, stated assumption) then being that autocracies must rely for their survival on either performance legitimacy or coercion and the threat of force against its citizens (the threat may be sufficient to ensure a largely passive citizenry, such that the amount of force actually used is modest), or some combination of the two. However, although economic crisis *can* make authoritarian regimes vulnerable (as in Indonesia and the downfall of Suharto's 32-year long presidency in 1998), some sub-types (military governments, for instance) may be more vulnerable and others less vulnerable (one party states like China for example).<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the possibility that authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes may possess some kind and degree of legitimacy in the eyes of a significant number of their own people should not be excluded. Nationalism, populism, religious beliefs or some other factor, perhaps just their reputation for being able to maintain order, are possible grounds; *external* legitimation by foreign governments and international organisations like the United Nations may also play a role. All this is important because it means the simple dichotomy that contrasts on the one side stable democracies and on the other side autocracies for whom economic development must be a priority if they are to survive is far too simplistic.<sup>20</sup> Not only does it fail to recognise that authoritarian regimes themselves differ in their institutional nature (monarchies; personal dictatorships; military rule; single-party regimes, and, even 'electoral autocracies') with different propensities for survival and employing different strategies for survival (see Hadenius and Teorell 2007), but it does not speak to regimes that lie somewhere between democracy and autocracy, or fluctuate backwards and forwards in transition - the zone

of instability. That said, we can now consider the relevance of these observations to the situation described in this paper as a new cruel choice.

An obvious inference is that if strong growth and development are not a *necessary* condition for an authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regime to survive, then such regimes may be able to privilege environmental goals without incurring excessive political risk. Another is that if during a process of political change away from autocracy the outcome falls short of liberal democracy, perhaps creating a defective democracy whose capacity or willingness to use coercion or threaten force has been diminished, then performance in economic growth and development becomes more important to political stability: the regime's ability to privilege environmental choices over growth will be constrained. A framework for plotting different countries and their specific situation in the light of regime type and development is offered in Figure 1, although what the figure does not and cannot portray is how crucial a country potentially is to global climate mitigation.

INSERT HERE 'FIGURE 1: REGIME TYPE AND DEVELOPMENT' (SEE PAGE 34)

*Figure 1 annotated*

The regime axis (horizontal axis) represents a spectrum ranging from stable autocracy understood as authoritarian and illiberal rule on the left to stable liberal democracy characterised by political freedoms and civil liberties on the right (regime refers to the type or system of rule, not the government in power). Data such as that from the Bertelsmann Index, Polity IV and Freedom House may be used to position individual countries. The section delineated by X-Y is a zone of regime instability: here, intrinsic legitimacy is insecure and performance legitimacy may play a bigger role than for liberal democracies and stable autocracies as well.<sup>21</sup> The development axis (vertical axis) represents the scope for society to make choices between economic and environmental values, ranging from limited scope in very poor countries at the bottom to rich countries with enhanced scope to make choices at the top. Gross National Income per capita on a purchasing power parity basis may be used to position

individual countries. Each of the four quadrants contained by the two axes can now be described in turn.

The top right hand quadrant (A) depicts countries that compare favourably both in terms of democratic credentials and level of development or scope to make choices. In these societies democracy can privilege the environment at the expense of economic growth without putting the regime at risk (although *governments* might pay an electoral price). Examples include the US, Canada, Australia and western European countries and Japan, all of whom have a significant carbon footprint.

In contrast countries in the bottom right quadrant (B), which depicts democracies in developing countries, face a significant trade-off between development and the environment, which means the choices are more constrained, and yet privileging the environment does not necessarily put the regime at risk. The actual consequences will depend on how much intrinsic (democratic) legitimacy the regime possesses relative to reliance on developmental performance (i.e. where it sits on the horizontal axis, that is to say how close it is to the zone of instability) and how much scope there is to make choices (i.e. where it sits on the vertical axis, that is the country's actual level and pace of development). The number of countries in this quadrant that are critical to climate mitigation may be few but some of them are extremely important, for example India and Indonesia – the second perhaps not yet a stable liberal democracy.

The bottom left quadrant (C) depicts autocratic regimes for whom privileging environmental values over development could be political risky (the risk being inversely related to non-democratic sources of legitimacy and the capacity and willingness to rule by force). But the hazard of instability increases if democratic reform is attempted at the same time. Countries whose regime falls inside the zone of the instability within this quadrant are the most exposed to a new cruel choice (between environment and democratisation). This is especially the case where the regime has to count on economic performance to bestow some legitimacy while not being able either to attract the full intrinsic legitimacy of established liberal democracy or rely heavily on coercion. This quadrant is probably quite heavily populated in terms of the number of countries; China is probably situated in the quadrant but lies outside the zone of instability.

Finally, the top left quadrant (D) presents wealthy authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes that are able to make and survive political choices privileging the environment at the expense of development (environmental choices may attract public support anyway), and vice versa. Examples may be Singapore and some of the small Gulf states, who for instance have sufficient resources to invest in carbon capture and storage without severely depressing living standards.

Overall Figure 1 illustrates the proposition that as poor countries successfully democratise they ultimately have greater possibility of addressing climate change with reducing political risk, and that progress in terms of economic development adds to and accelerates this possibility. It also illustrates that weak democracies in poor countries that are undergoing democratic decline and regimes that are stuck in transition may not be in a position to privilege environmental values without risking increased political instability, unless economic performance is moving ahead sufficiently strongly to compensate – an uncommon scenario. If an autocratic or semi-autocratic regime is insecure and/or there is a commitment to democratise then only a sweeping transition to stable democracy may offer much hope of it being able to give priority to addressing climate change over economic growth.

However, if the environmental case for embarking on climate mitigation is both overwhelming and urgent, then becoming more authoritarian or rendering autocracy more stable could prove a more effective response than a protracted, uncertain path of democratic transition. The salient questions then become how much time have we got, and how drastic must be the reduction in greenhouse gases – questions where scientific advice must be trumps.

Figure 1 also suggests that even an authoritarian regime that is presiding over impressive development, China for instance, may not escape the cruel dilemma over whether to address climate change or democratise, until a certain level of development has been reached. And that while political reform or some combination of reform and development both offer China routes to an *eventual* position where environmental choices can be made without excessive political risk, the amount of travel required to reach that point, the length of time it could take, and uncertainty

about the outcome might all be very great. This means China compares unfavourably with countries lying closer to the intersection of the dotted lines on the graph, Russia for example. The moral is that we might have to wait for China to get much closer to being a stable democracy, or to possessing a reasonably advanced level of development, and possibly both of these before we should expect it to be politically capable of reducing its carbon footprint. However the figure also shows that as Russia becomes richer there is no inevitability that environmental values will be given more weight, unless the country also comes to resemble a stable democracy or alternatively a stable autocracy in the meantime. For any country where stable liberal democracy is reckoned to be unattainable for the foreseeable future, and especially where development is and will remain very modest, the optimum political strategy for privileging the environment could be movement in the direction of stable autocracy.

Finally, an important caveat that should be noted concerns the implicit assumption that autocracies can impose centrally determined initiatives on lower levels of government and on society more generally, perhaps more so than democratically elected governments, where the state may have fewer legal powers and smaller coercive apparatus. This assumption might hold for stable autocracy. It will not apply in weak states and fragile autocracies. There is an important analytical distinction between the political freedom of a regime to make political choices favouring climate mitigation over the economy with or without incurring political risk (the political opportunity structure) and the executive capability to implement and enforce the policy choice, which is a matter of governance.

The two sets of properties may well be connected in complex ways. Even so, the possibility remains that some new democracies especially in societies coming out of violent conflict, and a number of authoritarian regimes too, may lack the capability to put policy choices into practice and secure the intended effects. In fact there is an argument regarding authoritarian China that the leaders in Beijing could not easily reduce the country's carbon emissions precisely because the centre has lost absolute power vis-à-vis the provinces and municipalities, where policy implementation is subjected to the influence of local and particularistic interests, corruption for example.<sup>22</sup> A broadly comparable situation may exist in Indonesia following the decentralisation of power that has accompanied the country's transition to democracy.

Far away from Jakarta deforestation through burning – practiced in order to enable the substitution of profitable palm oil plantations - quite literally seems to be out of control. Brazil’s Amazon rain forest tells a similar story. And just as with the political incentives that structure the policy choices, it is the government’s own reading of the limits to its de facto power to implement, rather than ‘objective’ assessment by independent analysts that will be the determining influence. And as before, the accuracy of a government’s own assessment of its capabilities may be a function of whether the regime is authoritarian or liberal democratic. Incorporating the potential significance of this caveat for action on climate mitigation and adaptation not only requires refinement of the foregoing analytical framework but warrants detailed study in its own right.

Up to this point the paper’s primary emphasis has examined whether democratisation is good for climate stability, the provisional finding being that it might not be good in all circumstances and could even be bad. This is relevant for international democracy support. But before inquiring into specific policy implications at the international level it is useful to set democracy support within a broader international dimension of global warming’s significance for democratisation.

## **7. International dimensions of global warming’s significance for democratisation**

The analysis so far has proceeded at the domestic level. In order to identify possible policy implications for international democracy support some more general reflections on how the international politics of climate change could impact on democratisation can be mentioned first, thereby setting the broader context.

First, there is the matter of international agenda-setting and the follow-through – policy agreement and implementation – as states seek to reach agreement on what to do, commit to put policy into practice and then co-operate with international monitoring on climate mitigation. As the various issues of climate change and its effects (for example on local food security, coastal erosion, and so on) come to dominate international politics more than before, and as the spotlight turns on policy compliance, and as the full financial, economic and other burdens of taking appropriate measures begin to register more strongly, so the amount of time, concern and commitment that leaders in the West can devote to supporting democracy around

the world will come under pressure. This holds true even before other looming issues like those concerning the state of the global economy or nuclear proliferation are brought into consideration.

Domestic and transnational constituencies in the West that urge concentration on the large and varied basket of issues related to climate change, represented by civil society groups and non-governmental organisations specialising in the environment, or third world development, or both, and vested corporate interests already do command the attention of decision-takers in governmental and inter-governmental forums. By comparison the democracy promotion industry is small, fragmented and elitist. It lacks well-organised popular support, although human rights issues conceived more narrowly is a partial exception. There are no powerful vested economic interests. Public opinion survey results in Europe indicate continuing strong popular support *in principle* for government action to tackle climate change, and continuing strong support for international development assistance to help the poor (who are most vulnerable to climate instability) as well. The US has seen a substantial decline in support for democracy promotion, especially among Democrats, whereas the imperative to increase national energy independence/security now enjoys high salience there (US crop substitution of biofuels for food production being a practical illustration that could have serious consequences for poor countries that depend on food imports, food aid in particular).<sup>23</sup> The attention paid by civil society and electorates in these stable democracies to substantive policies concerning the environment and third world development, rather than democratisation, stands in contrast to countries undergoing political change, where alongside economic welfare institutional and process issues concerning the regime, not climate change, tend to be uppermost for the most politically mobilised social groups. This contrast is likely to be all the greater where political change provokes or occurs against a background of violent sub-state or anti-regime conflict. That the one picture (in stable democracies) and the other (in the other countries) are the reverse image of one another points up the potential for tension between the different sets of objectives –economic growth, democracy, peace, environmental sustainability.

Second, there is the matter of international bargaining. As the West comes to introduce more environmental incentives and/or conditionalities into negotiations with

developing country governments, so those governments are likely to enjoy more scope to engage in trade-offs with - and escape the burden of - democratic conditionalities of the kind that have characterised international relations in recent years. This is a new version of an old scenario whereby developing country governments have been able to trade off against political conditionalities their agreement to implement the economic (and poverty reduction) conditionalities embodied in the Washington and post-Washington consensus and, since 9/11 in 2001, agreement to cooperate with western initiatives against international terrorism. A realistic expectation is that greater compliance with environmental conditionalities relative to democratic ones poses fewer political risks for authoritarian and semi-authoritarian rulers. This makes it a rationally preferred option, especially if additional encouragement is given by offers of international financial, material or technical assistance to help with climate mitigation and adaptation measures.

Of course not all countries are open to influence in this way: none of the developing world's leading carbon emitters are aid dependent. However, even trying to use just standard diplomatic means to persuade the governments of big oil and gas producers like Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq, coal producers (like Poland) and major energy-consuming countries to cooperate in international strategies for reducing greenhouse gases (and the trade in fossil fuels in particular) makes for a daunting challenge. Trying at the same time to persuade governments such as these to democratise, or to stop eroding whatever democratic credentials they already have, can only make the challenge more difficult. It could risk blurring the foreign policy objectives, and thereby serve none of them very well. Of course the displacement of interest in democratisation by global warming on the agendas of international politics would not have the same implications for significant carbon producer countries that are stable democracies already (US, Japan, Germany, Canada, UK, Italy, France, Spain, Australia, and so on), or even for stable democracies in the developing world (India, South Africa, Mexico, Brazil, and so on). However, the democracies' own considerable carbon footprint does of course weaken the argument that democracy has superior environmental credentials vis-à-vis other regimes. And in turn it undermines the attempts of rich democracies to persuade other countries like India and China to reduce their emissions, unless offers of international help make such action compatible with continued development.

Finally, although the most important carbon emitting countries are far fewer than the countries where the 'cruel choice' between development and building democracy might once have been considered a problem, or who now face a new cruel choice between democratisation and the environment, let alone countries belonging to both categories, many more developing countries and their poorest people are highly vulnerable to the harmful effects of global warming. And where harm is being felt now, the tendency to overdiscount the future benefits of tackling climate no longer applies. While this point may have little direct relevance to the prospects for the democratic outlook in these countries, it does mean there are added voices to the global coalition insisting that climate mitigation be placed high on the international agenda - with implications for how much priority can and should be given to international democracy promotion.<sup>24</sup>

### **8. International policy implications**

The closer to stable democracy and the higher the level of development the greater is the possibility for regime stability and environmental preference to coexist. However this combination exists only for a minority of countries. Does the account of democratisation and global warming taken in its international context have policy implications for actors interested in supporting the spread of democracy in developing countries? In the absence of more detailed evidence that compares countries and regimes against the propositions advanced so far, the paper concludes with just four very tentative and broad policy indications. They assume that notwithstanding their chequered history and the criticism offered in voluminous literatures too large to be reported here, both international development aid and international democracy support in principle can make a constructive contribution to achieving their stated objectives. Or, perhaps more relevant, these activities will continue to be part of the international landscape, if only because of inertia rather than because everyone has confidence in their potential, or for some other and instrumental policy reason.

First, international democracy support should seriously consider whether in some countries limited progress on democratisation may preclude significant progress on measures to reduce the causes of climate change, at least unless or until the political is exiting the zone of instability and comes close to being a stable democracy. However

the countries to whom this might apply could be relatively few in so far as only a limited number make a significant contribution to global warming now or in the coming years.

Second, international expectations, requirements or pressures on developing world governments to take steps to reduce carbon emissions should be mindful that the political consequences for regime as well as for the government could vary considerably across different types of regime, and across different levels of development. In regard to some countries, China for instance, if the international consensus is that climate mitigation really must take high priority then prudence may advise against trying to push China to experiment with democratic reform (an ambition that might be fruitless in any case). Moves by the centre in China to reclaim power, somewhat akin to what President Putin accomplished in Russia should, perhaps, be welcomed. If the power-holders in any country reject democratic change and for that reason foreign support to ENGOs offers a provocation that could stoke suspicions and fears about the wider political intent, then international offers of technical support for environmental specialists located within the policy elite may offer a politically more realistic alternative, as a channel for promoting climate mitigation further up the domestic agenda.<sup>25</sup>

Third, for some developing countries that are boldly trying to democratise and take measures on climate change simultaneously, significant international financial, economic and technical assistance that reduces the developmental trade-off could help contain – or at least reduce local perceptions of – the political risks, during a hazardous time of regime transition. Put differently, democratizing regimes may require more such assistance than autocracies, in order that steps on climate mitigation will have the necessary support or acquiescence of the electorate. The case for *democracy* assistance that increases the chances of a speedy and successful political transition looks very strong. Development support that is tied to taking climate measures might make it easier for authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes to contemplate reforming the polity, but offers no guarantee of producing that effect or of securing a successful outcome. Development support that increases governance capacity, more particularly in raising local confidence in the capacity to implement climate change measures, must merit consideration.

Fourth, developing countries that are already experiencing or likely to experience soon climate change's harmful effects may be considered as special candidates for extra financial, economic, and technical assistance in support of adaptation and (where relevant) mitigation measures. A variety of national and international funds already exist to offer support for mitigation. But a raft of resourcing, management, policy, coordination and other tricky issues mean there is a long way to go before an orderly, systematic, comprehensive and efficient global institutional architecture is in place. Additionally, a UNDP/Global Environment Facility Adaptation Fund is due to come into operation by 2010, but at the time of writing its prospective funding by developed countries has been criticised as wholly inadequate by governments of developing countries such as India. The World Bank (2008: 200) would appear to provide support for this assessment in its own estimate that 'tens of billions of dollars' are needed, if developing countries are to adapt agriculture to climate change. Making climate change assistance conditional on a commitment to initiating democratic reforms may be counterproductive: withholding support could increase the risk of political instability and/or the likelihood of increasing authoritarianism. However, little may be gained by ring-fencing climate-related support from democratic political conditionalities so long as vital development assistance continues to have such conditionalities attached.<sup>26</sup> Making adaptation support conditional on the country taking climate mitigation steps may be a more promising option. But again, careful thought should be given to the domestic political effects of threatening to withhold (or actually withholding) adaptation support and thence the consequences for action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Finally, the paper concludes with a plea for more comparative empirical investigation of the political dimensions. The combination of pursuing democratisation and development and tackling the causes of climate change undoubtedly poses a huge, politically demanding challenge for a number of developing countries that are important to climate mitigation. But the conclusion Walker (1999) reached after reflecting on his own limited case study findings bears repetition here, because of the implications for how the various conundrums should be addressed in the future: 'The question should not be whether democracy is good for the environment but how and when democratisation, in its varying forms, can change the structures governing

decision-making and access and control over natural resources in ways that favour social and environmental objectives'. Following up on this recommendation now would usefully steer the investigation away from the level of abstract theorising to a much firmer base, one that examines more closely the variety of political contexts and their specific relevance to global warming and the lessons that could be drawn for international democracy support.

## References

- Ambrosio, T. (2009) *Authoritarian Backlash* (Farnham: Ashgate).
- Bättig, M. and Bernauer, T. (2009 forthcoming) 'National institutions and global public goods: are democracies more cooperative in climate change policy?', *International Organization*, 63/2, abstract available online <http://papers.ssrn.com>
- Beckman, L. (2008) 'Do global climate change and the interest of future generations have implications for democracy?', *Environmental Politics*, 17/4: 610-24.
- Bertelsmann Stiftung (2008) *Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2008*, online at <http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de>
- Bhagwati, J. (1995) 'The new thinking on development', *Journal of Democracy*, 6/4: 50-64.
- Bhagwati, J. (2002) 'Democracy and development: cruel dilemma or symbiotic relationship', *Review of Development Economics*, 6/2: 151-62.
- Brownlee, J. (2002) '...And yet they persist: explaining survival and transition in neopatrimonial regimes', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 37/3: 35-63.
- Brownlee, J. (2007) *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Burnell, P. (2006) 'Autocratic opening to legitimacy: why legitimacy matters?', *Third World Quarterly*, 27/4: 545-62.
- China State Council (2008) *China's Policies and Actions Addressing Climate Change* (White Paper), available at [http://www.china.org.cn/government/news/2008-10/29/content\\_16681689.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/government/news/2008-10/29/content_16681689.htm)
- Gandhi, J. and Przeworski, A. (2007) 'Authoritarian institutions and the survival of autocrats', *Comparative Political Studies*, 40/11 (2007), pp. 1279-1301.
- Geddes, B. (1999) 'What do we know about democratization after twenty years?', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2: 115-44.
- Gleditsch, K. and Ward, M. (2000) 'War and peace in space and time: the role of democratization', *International Studies Quarterly*, 44: 1-29.
- Gleditsch, N. and Sverdrup, B. (2002) 'Democracy and the environment', in E. Page and M. Redclift (eds) *Human Security and the Environment* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar).
- Gurr, T. (1985) 'On the political consequences of scarcity and economic decline', *International Studies Quarterly*, 29: 51-75.
- Harris, P. G. (2008) 'Bringing the in-between back in: foreign policy in global environmental politics', *Politics and Policy*, 36:6, 914-43.
- Harris, P. G. and C. Udagawa (2004), 'Defusing the bombshell? Agenda 21 and economic development in China', *Review of International Political Economy*, 11/3: 618-49.
- Hadenius, A. and Teorell, J. (2007) 'Pathways from authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy*, 18/1: 143-56.
- Hegre, H., Ellingsen, T., Gates, S. and Gleditsch, N. (2001) 'Toward a democratic civil peace? Democracy, political change and civil war, 1816-1992', *American Political Science Review*, 95/1: 33-48.
- Holden, B. (2002) *Democracy and Global Warming* (London and New York: Continuum).
- Kagan, R. (2008) *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (New York: Knopf; London: Atlantic Books).
- Lafferty, W. and Meadowcroft, J. (eds)(1996) *Democracy and the Environment* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar).
- Levitsky, S. and Way, L. (2007) 'Linkage and leverage: how do international factors change domestic balances of power?', in A. Schedler (ed.) *Electoral Authoritarianism* (Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner), 199-216.

- Mansfield, E and Snyder, J. (2005) *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Merkel, W. (2004) 'Embedded and defective democracies', *Democratization*, 11/5: 33-58.
- Merkel, W. (2008) 'Democracy through war?', *Democratization*, 15/3: 487-508.
- Midlarsky, M. (1998) 'Democracy and the environment: an empirical assessment', *Journal of Peace Research*, 35/3: 341-61.
- Mousseau, D. (2001) 'Democratizing with ethnic divisions: a source of conflict?', *Journal of Peace Research*, 38/5: 547-67.
- Neumayer, E. (2002) 'Do democracies exhibit stronger international environmental commitment? A cross-country analysis', *Journal of Peace Research*, 38/2, 139-64.
- Newell, P. (2008) 'Civil society, corporate accountability and the politics of climate change', *Global Environmental Politics*, 8/3: 122-53.
- Payne, R. (1995) 'Freedom and the environment', *Journal of Democracy*, 6/3: 41-44.
- Poloni-Staudinger, L. (2008) 'Are consensus democracies more environmentally effective?', *Environmental Politics*, 17/3: 410-430.
- Quan Li and Reuveny, R. (2006) 'Democracy and environmental degradation', *International Studies Quarterly*, 50/4: 935-56.
- Smith, J. and Lennon, A. (2008) 'Setting the negotiating table: the race to replace Kyoto by 2012', in K.Campbell, (ed.), *Climatic Cataclysm. The Foreign Policy and National Security Implications of Climate Change* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press), 191-223).
- Snyder, J. (2000) *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton).
- The German Marshall Fund of the United States (various years), *Transatlantic Trends*, online <http://www.transatlantictrends.org>
- Walker, P. (1999) 'Democracy and environment: congruencies and contradictions in southern Africa', *Political Geography*, 18/3: 257-84, online at <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science>.
- Ward, H. (2008) 'Liberal democracy and sustainability', *Environmental Politics*, 17/3: 386-409.
- Ward, M. and Gleditsch, K. (1998) 'Democratizing for peace', *American Political Science Review*, 92: 51-61.
- Williams, G., Duncan, A., Landell-Mills, P. and Unsworth, S. (2009) 'Politics and growth', *Development Policy Review*, 27/1: 5-31.
- World Bank (2008) *World Development Report 2008*, available online at <http://worldbank.org>
- Yom, S. and M. Al-Momani (2008) 'The international dimensions of authoritarian regime stability: Jordan in the post-cold war era', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 30/1, 39-60.

---

## Notes

1. For instance Polity IV recorded an increase in what it calls autocracies and anocracies (mixed or incoherent authority regimes) after 2005; in 2008 Freedom House detected a decline in freedom in one fifth of the world's countries during 2007.
2. Professor Mark Beeson argued for this path dependence in a presentation on 'The coming environmental authoritarianism in East Asia', at University of Warwick, 19 September 2008.
3. For example Holden (2002) compares ideals of deliberative, participatory, and emancipatory democracy with liberal (elitist) democracy; Poloni-Staudinger (2008) investigates whether consensus democracies are more likely than majoritarian democracies to enact environmentally friendly policies.
4. Russia eventually signed Kyoto with a prospect of being able to sell surplus emission credits – something that it subsequently (December 2008) decided not to do, preferring then to retain the credits for use once a successor to the Kyoto Protocol is established in 2012. China and other industrialising developing countries including India, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and most recently (2008) Turkey signed Kyoto without numerical limit on their emissions.

---

5. Carbon emissions from fossil fuel burning account for around 60% of all greenhouse gas emissions, emissions from agriculture another 15% and deforestation another 10%. (World Bank 2008). Around 80% of emissions from agriculture including deforestation are from developing countries. Land use change also contributes to reduced carbon sequestration.

6. Statistical analysis by Quan Li and Reuveny (2006) suggests that although on their evidence democracies compare favourably with autocracies in terms of emissions per capita they do not perform better than the aggregate of non-democracies of all types, which include intermediate regimes (what Polity IV calls anocracies), which means that the inferior performance of autocracies compared with non-autocracies inclusive of intermediate regimes is the main reason. However this is just one, pioneering large-N study that does not include regime change (i.e. democratisation and democratic regression) as a separate variable.

7. Ward's finding parallels the more general argument (discussed by Bhagwati 1995 among others) that compared to parliamentary democracies presidential democracies are more prone to 'gridlock' in decision-making and more vulnerable to rent-seeking lobbies that have the effect of reducing the government's capability to promote economic development.

8. They are China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, Iran and Brazil. Of the top 20 only China, Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia may be considered as not western style liberal democracies, although precise classification of the regimes in Russia together with Indonesia, Mexico and Ukraine is debateable and some analysts might judge them to be intermediate (between autocracy and liberal democracy) or undergoing transition. Of the top 50 countries ranked by per capita greenhouse emissions inclusive of emissions from land use changes in 2000, application of Freedom House ratings indicates that 10 were not free and another 10 only partly free, in 2007; excluding emissions from land use changes only five of the top 10 were free.

9. Authoritarian Qatar and semi-authoritarian Singapore are among the very wealthiest countries in average income per capita terms, whereas a considerable number of low-income countries now qualify as electoral democracies and are unlikely to achieve prosperity for the majority of their citizens in the foreseeable future. Even India, a long established democracy, now looks to be lagging far behind China in average income as well as life expectancy and adult literacy.

10. The evidence indicates that while carbon emissions as a percentage of GDP decline after a wealth threshold has been crossed, emissions per capita continue to rise. One further element of continuity is the presence of other issues of major global concern whose demands on the attention of leaders often seem more pressing than climate change, such as terrorism, spread of weapons of mass destruction, global financial stability and the preservation of an open world trading system.

11. For example the *Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2008* says that 52 of the 75 countries that fulfil the basic requirements of a democracy under rule of law 'still have a relatively long way to go before they become functioning democracies': the 42 defective and 10 highly defective democracies show 'major qualitative shortcomings'.

---

Of the total of 125 states in the world a further 50 are classed as autocracies, of whom 27 are deemed fragile states.

12. Merkel (2004: 48-49) for example argues that defective democracies are not necessarily transitional regimes; depending on their political power, as well as their social, economic and cultural embeddedness, they can establish themselves for a long period. Societies with low educational attainments and clientelistic and patrimonial structures are especial candidates. Hadenius and Teorell (2007) in their dichotomy of democracy and autocracy calculated that from 1972 to 2003, 77 per cent of breakdowns of an authoritarian government in fact resulted in another authoritarian regime either of the same or a different type. They found that monarchies and one-party states are the most stable; and the most durable regimes are either highly authoritarian or strongly democratic.

13. There is a large and confusing array of labels for regime types that are neither fully liberal democratic nor fully autocratic and, indeed, for sub-types of the two polar types. There is also disagreement over where the conceptual boundaries between distinct types and the sub-types are to be drawn, such that what one account considers a sub-type (of democracy for instance) might be portrayed by another as a separate type.

14. For example, 'democratisation is a cause of nationalist and ethnic conflict, especially in the early stages of the transition in states with weak political institutions' (Mansfield and Snyder 2005: 88).

15. According to Gleditsch and Ward ((2000: 26) 'societies characterized by an incoherent mix of democratic and autocratic authority characteristics are almost as likely to be involved in war as are the most autocratic polities', and societies that undergo reversals along the path to democracy are more likely to become involved in international conflict than if democratisation proceeds smoothly without reversals. Merkel (2008: 488-94) in addition to noting that democracies fight non-democracies and often are the aggressor, too claims that 'institutionally inconsistent hybrid regimes' are less stable than autocracies and significantly more prone to violence; 'transitional regimes' that do not rapidly consolidate are involved in civil war much more often than other regimes.

16. The incentive to consolidate democracy offered by the prospect of accession to the European Union has been a major factor in the majority of examples from post-communist Europe.

17. The 'ideologically-driven nature' of autocratic regimes that for instance Gleditsch and Sverdrup (1995) say renders autocracies more interested in power politics might be thought to work in favour of environmentally sustainable outcomes in the case of certain ideologies like some varieties of nationalism. Beckman (2008) offers a critical consideration of the political ethics in democracies of placing limits on the present generation's freedom to pollute in the interests of future generations.

18. Smith and Lennon (2008: 209) speculate that if the US government after Bush takes significant efforts to cut US carbon footprint, then China will become more

---

vulnerable to external pressure to act as well; their scenario then envisages falling dominoes, as international pressure including pressure from China is displaced onto other major 'hold-out' states, India, for example. China's current pursuit of soft power (understood as the power of attraction, in contrast to getting what you want by coercion or bribery) in international politics, linked to external perceptions of China, may be thought to give some substance to this speculation. Instrumental socialisation into emerging international norms ('logic of consequences') may serve as a vehicle in this particular policy domain just as it has led some regimes to move in the direction of greater human rights and democratic values (and in some cases has led on to accepting the values for their own sake, that is to say a 'logic of appropriateness'). An international burden-sharing arrangement on climate mitigation that is universally regarded as equitable would also be helpful. A different approach to answering the question 'why would the leaders of China, India and so on tackle carbon emissions?' relies on market forces: namely, pressure from ethical consumers in the West applied to these countries' exports and exercised via the agency of the export-oriented multinational corporations that invest there. Issue linkage in international politics may offer another solution: President Putin's decision in 2004 that Russia should join the Kyoto Protocol overrode his advisers but according to some accounts was part of a bargain involving European Union support for Russian admission to the World Trade Organisation. For further consideration of the international incentives for authoritarian regimes to engage with climate mitigation, see section 8 of this paper, 'International policy implications'. Of course the Chinese government's 2008 White Paper *China's Policies and Actions for Addressing Climate Change* (China State Council 2008) claims that a great deal is already being done by the government in respect of both adaptation and mitigation, and arguably the commitment is much more impressive than that shown by India.

19. Geddes (1999: 135). Geddes (1999: 138-40) shows why even exogenous shocks like an economic crisis do not necessarily bring down single-party authoritarian regimes; in fact, they are 'remarkably resilient even in the face of long, severe economic crises' (Geddes 1999: 139). Cuba since the end of Soviet material support is a good example.

20. On autocracy and legitimacy generally see Burnell (2006); on how neopatrimonialism and ruling parties can both help authoritarian regimes to persist see Brownlee (2002 and 2007) and Gandhi and Przeworski 2007 on the similar contribution made by partisan legislatures; for an example of how international support can help the stability of a (semi-) authoritarian regime, see Yom and Al-Momani (2008); for externally-directed as well as domestic strategies of authoritarian protection and renewal by President Putin's Russia see Ambrosio (2009). A recent well known statement from the United States that autocratic values and ideas will help define international politics in the coming years, through a renewed struggle with democracy, is Robert Kagan's, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, which claims that the leading autocrats believe in autocracy and believe they are serving their people: 'Nor is it at all clear, for the moment, that the majority of people they rule in either China or Russia disagree' (Kagan 2008: 60). Of course, perceptions of regime legitimacy, actual support for the regime, and popular strategies for regime maintenance are not one and the same thing, but they are connected.

---

21. In its present form the horizontal axis encapsulates three different variables: regime type or sub-type, regime stability, and regime dynamics or change. This is a weakness. A more complex multi-dimensional matrix or series of matrixes would be needed to capture the distinction between regime type or sub-type and regime change, which might be especially significant, as well as to differentiate between stable and unstable variants of the same regime type or sub-type (but in this matter empirical studies suggest there could be a correlation between stability and sub-type, for example monarchies seem to be more durable than rule by military juntas. See Hadenius and Teorell 2007). However the difficulty of disentangling the influence of (sub-)type and change of (sub-)type variables is well-known, as noted by for instance Hegre *et al.*(2001: 43) in regard to tracing the effects on conflict..

22 .The many writings of Paul G. Harris range over the political and bureaucratic obstacles to implementing environmental policy in China: see for example Harris and Udagawa (2004).

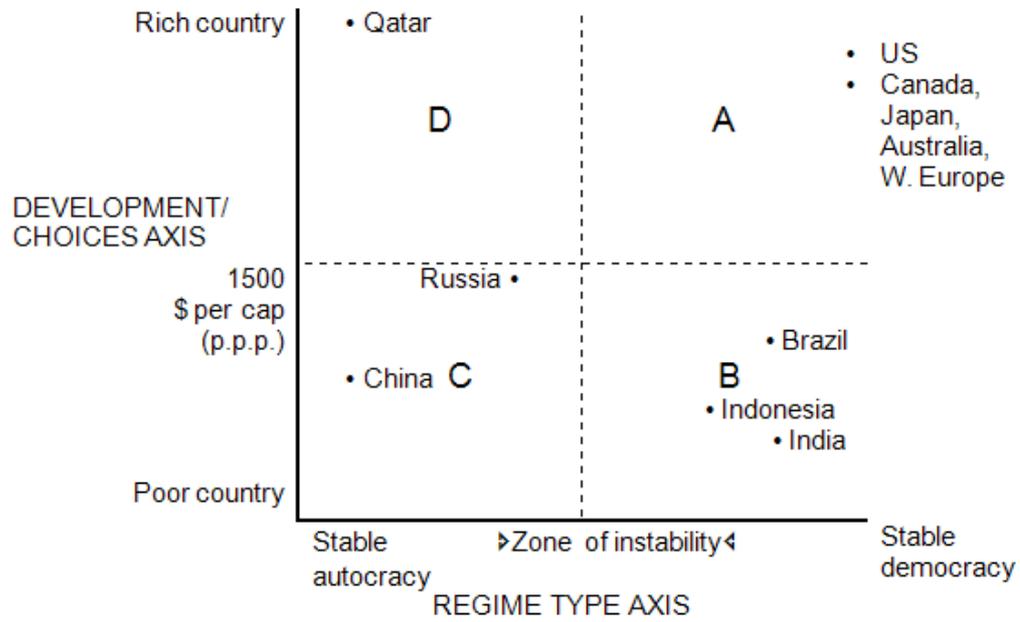
23. Survey evidence based on data from *Transatlantic Trends* conducted annually by The German Marshall Fund of the United States.

24. On the one side small developing countries like Belize, Guyana and Papua New Guinea lead the world in terms of producing greenhouse gases inclusive of emissions from land use changes, on a per capita basis. On the other side sits the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), countries highly vulnerable to climate change, which numbers 43 states and observers drawn from all regions, representing 28% of developing countries and 20% of the United Nations membership.

25. I owe this observation on China to Professor Shaun Breslin. Harris(2008: 933) notes that ideas favouring environmental protection and sustainable development ‘are slowly spreading throughout the Chinese government’ and leading to a more supportive policy towards international environmental cooperation ‘driven significantly by scientists and other “knowledge brokers” who are gradually affecting policy..’

26. The effectiveness of aid conditionality and other forms of international leverage as an instrument for bringing about democratic reform appears to depend on the degree of linkage the country has with the West: the less the linkage the greater the likelihood that autocratic weakening will lead no further than competitive authoritarianism, rather than greater progress towards democracy (Levitsky and Way 2006).

FIGURE 1  
REGIME TYPE AND DEVELOPMENT



---

## CSGR Working Paper Series

226/07 May	Dan Bulley Exteriorising Terror: Inside/Outside the Failing State on 7 July 2005
227/07 May	Kenneth Amaeshi Who Matters to UK and German Firms? Modelling Stakeholder Salience Through Corporate Social Reports
228/07 May	Olufemi O. Amao and Kenneth M. Amaeshi Galvanising Shareholder Activism: A Prerequisite for Effective Corporate Governance and Accountability in Nigeria
229/07 June	Stephen J. Redding, Daniel M. Sturm and Nikolaus Wolf History and Industry Location: Evidence from German Airports
230/07 June	Dilip K. Das Shifting Paradigm of Regional Integration in Asia
231/07 June	Max-Stephan Schulze and Nikolaus Wolf On the Origins of Border Effects: Insights from the Habsburg Customs Union
232/07 July	Elena Meschi and Marco Vivarelli Trade Openness and Income Inequality in Developing Countries
233/07 July	Julie Gilson Structuring Accountability: Non-Governmental Participation in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)
234/07 September	Christian Thimann, Christian Just and Raymond Ritter The Governance of the IMF: How a Dual Board Structure Could Raise the Effectiveness and Legitimacy of a Key Global Institution
235/07 October	Peter I. Hajnal Can Civil Society Influence G8 Accountability?
236/07 November	Ton Bührs Towards a Global Political-Economic Architecture of Environmental Space
237/08 March	Kerstin Martens Civil Society, Accountability And The UN System.
238/08 March	Diane Stone Transnational Philanthropy, Policy Transfer Networks and the Open Society Institute.
239/08 March	Dilip K. Das The Chinese Economy: Making A Global Niche
241/08 March	Dwijen Rangnekar Geneva rhetoric, national reality: Implementing TRIPS obligations in Kenya.
242/08 January	Priscillia E. Hunt Heterogeneity in the Wage Impacts of Immigrants.

---

243/08 April	Ginaluca Grimalda, Elena Meschi Accounting For Inequality in Transition Economies: An Empirical Assessment of Globalisation, Institutional Reforms, and Regionalisation.
244/08 May	Jan Aart Scholte Civil Society and IMF Accountability
245/08 June	Xianbo Zhou and Kui-Wai Li The Commutative Effect and Casuality of Openness and Indigenous Factors Among World Economies.
246/08 June	Kenneth Amaeshi Neither National Boundaries Nor Transnational Social Spaces: Accounting for Variations of CSR Practices in Varieties of Capitalism.
247/08 July	Craig Berry International Political Economy, the Globalisation Debate and the Analysis of Globalisation Discourse.
248/08 July	Kenneth Amaeshi and Olufemi O. Amao Corporate Social Responsibility ( CSR) in Transnational Spaces: An Institutional Deconstruction of MNCs' CSR Practices in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Sector.
249/08 August	Dilip K. Das Winners Of Globalization.
250/08 August	Dilip K. Das Globalization, Oh That Versatile Villain!
251/08 October	Tomonori Taki Reconstructing a State's Responsibility to Provide Safety to Its Constituent Population: Globalization, International Population Movements and Transterritorial Public.
252/08 October	James Brassett Cosmopolitanism vs. Terrorism? Discourses of Ethical Possibility Before, and After 7/7.

## **Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation**

University of Warwick  
Coventry CV4 7AL, UK

Tel: +44 (0)24 7657 2533  
Fax: +44 (0)24 7657 2548  
Email: [csg@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:csg@warwick.ac.uk)  
Web address: <http://www.csg.org>