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Introducing Regime Cluster Theory: Framing Regional Diffusion Dynamics of Democratization and Autocracy Promotion

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ABSTRACT

Recently the role of ideology and hegemony has received increased attention to explain varying dynamics of diffusion and autocratic cooperation. As a result, patterns of interaction in clusters from regions without hegemony or ideology have been overlooked because their autocracy-to-autocracy transitions are no threat to the global status of democracy, even when active regime promotion is very common. This article will apply insights from economic cluster theory to political regimes and introduce a typology to differentiate among clusters.

Regime Cluster Theory is the first framework that presents three ideal-types of ideological, hegemonic and biotopical regime clusters. With a new concept of ‘biotopical clusters’ the paper explains the dynamics of clusters in often omitted regions, like in Sub Saharan Africa, Latin America during the Cold War, or Central Asia during the 1990s. RCT offers a dynamic approach to recognize and assess patterns of forcible regime promotion per cluster as well as distinguish between their different diffusion patterns (coercive, voluntary, bounded learning, contagion) in four arenas: institutions, ideas, policy and administrative practices. RCT advances the comparative study of regime promotion and diffusion in various regions of the world and hopes to shed new light on related theories of alliance formation, regional institutionalization, and (conflict) spill-over effects.

Keywords: regime promotion, clusters, diffusion, linkage, leverage, autocratic cooperation

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1 Introduction

Democracies are visible grouped together. Monarchies currently reside predominantly in the Middle East. Many regions in Sub Saharan Africa were characterized for their large concentration of regimes with one-man rule. Latin America during the Cold War was infamous for its military *juntas*. At various times, certain breeds of regimes seem to aggregate together. After the Color Revolutions and Arab Spring, with an assertive Russia looming over Europe's democratic cluster in the last years, the study of autocratic cooperation has received new impetus.

Despite their heterogeneity in actors, methods and aims, the Color Revolutions and the 'Arab' Spring uprisings were considered to bring change, if not democracy to key autocratic clusters in Eurasia and MENA. (Baev, 2011) The reaction of these targeted dictators to protect themselves from such shocks triggered studies to adapt existing democratization theories to create new frameworks autocracy promotion, cooperation and diffusion. (Ambrosio, 2010; Vanderhill, 2013) Nonetheless, the dichotomy between democracy and non-democracy remains and obscures other regional patterns of regime interactions far away from the frontlines of democratic clusters.

For example, repeated efforts of forced regime promotion in West Africa by Burkina Faso (under Compaoré) with support of Libya (Qaddafi) and the Ivory Coast (Houphouët-Boigny) were followed by The Gambia's democratic reversal by the coup of Jammeh in 1994, the ensuing state collapse in Liberia and Sierra Leone under Compaoré's proxy, Charles Taylor, and resulted in civil war in the Ivory Coast (under Gbagbo). (Annan, 2014; Cohen, 2014)

The list of forcible regime promotion in Central Africa is even longer: After Zaire became a platform for supporting operations in Angola and Sudan for the US, Angola launched two Shaba wars (1978-79) to overthrow Mobutu. After the Cold War, a Ugandan-Rwandan(-Angolan) front united against Mobutu in 1996, overthrowing him before the alliance turned onto itself, with Uganda and Rwanda fighting proxy wars on DRC territory after failing to overthrow Kabila Senior and Junior. Not to mention Uganda's continued interference in South Sudan, or Chad and the DRC's intermingling in the CAR civil war. (Cohen, 2014; Atzili, 2007) These patterns of recurrent regime promotion and foreign predation took place within autocratic clusters, and their dynamics cannot be explained by theories of hegemony or ideology.

This article will introduce a new framework: Regime Cluster Theory (RCT) and present three ideal types and criteria to identify clusters. 'Ideological' and 'hegemonic' clusters are based on the insights of the recent literature but 'biotopical' clusters embody a new approach to assess interaction dynamics among authoritarian regimes. After introducing each ideal-type with some short examples, I will apply the concept of biotopical clusters to some relevant, overlooked examples.

The first goal of RCT is to account for different patterns of forcible regime promotion. What are the motivations in different cluster types and what regimes do they target? Secondly, RCT allows

for the comparison of (non-forcible) regional diffusion dynamics. The classification can be extended to historical examples and stretches beyond the democracy-autocracy dichotomy. RCT aims to predict in *what* arenas of state interactions, *which* modes of diffusion can be expected based on the cluster type of the region. But first, I will expand on the concept of clusters and introduce some necessary concepts. The article concludes by showing other applications of RCT.

2 Introducing Regime Cluster Theory

Many scholars intuitively use the word ‘cluster’ when referring to such groupings of political regimes, although very few actually define what a cluster means in this context. In economics cluster theory has been a basic concept since 1890. Originally developed by Alfred Marshall in his book *Principles of Economics*, clusters are defined as a “concentration of competing, collaborating and interdependent companies and institutions which are connected by a system of market and non-market links.” (Kuah, 2002: 207, 210) Economic frameworks link the concept to an array of elements like externalities, innovation, (economic or infrastructure) linkages, positive feedback, productivity and growth, etc.

Besides geographical constraints, the agglomeration of firms and industries in economic clusters are driven by the need to locate close to customers or suppliers (proximity), to use the advantage of scale by being able to draw on a large labor pool, and thirdly, to facilitate the flow of ideas and innovation, both among workers and business leaders. (Ellison et al., 2010: 1200-1203) For regime clusters to emerge, the proximity of states, transnational networks of social groups and elites, as well as the power of ideas play an important role. In the same fashion, as various economic clusters have their own specializations and needs, so do regimes agglomerate for different reasons.

This article focuses on *political regimes*¹ or the ruling group inside states with their particular hierarchy, (informal) decision-making bodies, organizational structure and agenda. These elites control their state and gatekeep its foreign policy, and are thus responsible for influencing the existing patterns of interaction with other states (regimes) as well as their intensity. I distinguish between the following regime types, based on Barbara Geddes’ (2012) categorization: military regimes, party-based regimes, monarchies, personalist regimes and democracies.

I define a *regime cluster* as a non-random, spatial concentration of interdependent political regimes connected by a regional political subsystem of linkages and interaction, sharing ideological and/or institutional characteristics. In all cases, regimes become part of clusters through coercive means, socialization, and/or evolve toward a similar regime type over time because of regional structures. However, in most cases there has to be a ‘critical mass’ of regimes (or one powerful regime) around which other regimes will cluster. In other cases, regime clusters are foremost shaped by their regional structures, which conform regimes to one-another. Such structures can be the legacy of a historical critical mass-build up like a former empire (cf. the Soviet Union, the Ottoman empire), or they can be regional path dependencies from a colonial past. In each case, increased interdependency with other units has to yield some (positive)

externalities for the cluster as a whole. Regimes either actively consolidate existing ties (linkages) with other units or indirectly strengthen the larger structures which sustain their cluster.

Not all regimes on this globe are part of a cluster at the moment, but many used to be or can be (once again) at a different point in time. For example, the Caribbean islands are considered a region; and the islands are connected through many linkages, but neither ideology, hegemony or regime type unites them as a cluster, nor do they operate as one. Similarly, not every regional hegemon has a cluster, if it doesn't extend its influence to proximate states. Of course, regimes outside clusters can take over administrative practices (from similar regimes), but seldom mirror their foreign policy, worldviews or institutions to others when they are not persuaded to do so ideologically, or coerced to do so by pressure. Hence, most diffusion will take place in clusters, and most forcible regime promotion can be traced back to them as well.

In this article, RCT shifts the usual focus on individual regime behavior to the dynamics of groups of regimes over time. The added value of RCT is to categorize the patterns of interdependency of its units, identify their opportunities and constraints for cooperation, and assess what are the (positive) externalities by being part of a cluster. In other words: In what ways do regimes cluster? Do all clusters need a 'critical mass' to emerge? What are their 'increasing returns?' How do clusters grow? How are such clusters sustained? What kind of innovation is the key to their survival? Under what conditions do they disappear? This set of questions heralds an innovative approach to think about regime promotion, cooperation and rivalry in the contained geographical spaces of the world's regions.

Clusters are spatially interconnected through linkages. I understand linkages in the same way as S. Levitsky & L. Way and J. Tolstrup. Linkages are the economic, cultural, social and political ties elites and societal groups build out over time with other groups in other states. Linkages work as multiplier-effects for external influence: political, economic and ideological leverage. The denser the ties, the more intense the external pressure can be. Linkages are not carved in stone, and (unlike geographical proximity), ruling elites possess significant agency to assess the costs and benefits of maintaining such ties and whether or not to comply to external demands. Some elites are more successful than others in this respect. (Levitsky and Way, 2006, 2010; Way and Levitsky, 2007; Tolstrup, 2014)

Levitsky & Way have identified five forms of linkage, which have been updated by Tolstrup:

- economic linkage – credit, investment and assistance, patterns of export and import
- geopolitical linkage – ties to governments, alliances and organizations
- social linkage – tourism, migration, diaspora communities, and elite education abroad
- communication linkage – cross-border telecommunications, Internet connections and foreign media penetration
- transnational civil society linkage – ties to international NGOs, churches, party organizations, and other networks (2014: 33)

All these linkages are conducive to enhance leverage, but in this paper, I will mostly focus on only three forms: geopolitical, economic and social linkages, and in case of ideological clusters (see below), the relevant transnational civil society linkage. The role and impact of other forms of linkages are time-consuming to measure and describe, and are of secondary importance to analyze the interdependency of regime clusters. Nonetheless, they reinforce the consolidation of clusters. Leverage then is measured in the disparity of military, economic and ideological power between two states. In other words, hard power and soft power.² The latter is not an element of the original theory, but when dealing with the power of ideas, it is a necessary addition to classify and analyze regime promotion. This short overview of Linkage & Leverage theory (L&L) is necessary to explain the variation of clusters and their life-cycles (see below).

3 Ideological Regime Clusters

The first ideal-type are ideological regime clusters (IRCs). IRCs are created by actors guided by a set of universal ideas, a more-or-less comprehensive worldview that shapes policy-making, institutional reform and contains unit behavior. As a prime example Marxism-Leninism springs to mind, but not only utopian ideologies like Communism can create such clusters. Liberal Democracy³ should be considered a political ideology as well - the same label applies to clusters propagating a state religion.

Despite the negative connotations linked with the concept of ideology, I propose the following definition: a political ideology is a set of shared values and norms, which structure and explain a rather coherent worldview and provide a platform for political action (both foreign and domestic) by being perceived as both socially desirable and politically feasible by ruling elites. (Kallis, 2000: 89; Linz, 2000: 75-78; Owen, 2010: 2) So consolidated democracies are also ideological regimes in the sense that they are guided by values and a normative worldview. Political ideologies do not need to be utopian to count as such; but they do need to be shared by the majority of the populace in order to be considered ‘consolidated’ ideologies. And only regimes possessing the latter can become promoters of ideological clusters.

The more comprehensive and universal this set of norms and values, like with Communism or Liberal Democracy, the more appealing they are to other regimes, even outside the region from where the cluster originates. The global spread (and clash) of Communism and Democracy are examples of rivalling, strong ideologies, and surpass the more regional scope of weaker ideologies like European Fascism or Pan-American Bolivarianism for instance. Although every ideology has limitations – and may not take hold in areas where radically different values dominate. Take for instance, the nominal spread of Communism to Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) and MENA: Both ‘African Socialism’ or ‘Arab Socialism’ were always more nationalist than international and neither of these blended ideologies could be exported well beyond their regions because of these nationalist limits.⁴

Kurt Weyland (2017) states that a “novel regime type may also claim inherent normative superiority while condemning alternatives as morally decadent and degrading of human dignity

(...) or as inherently unfair.” (1441) The ‘success’ of a novel regime type determines its attraction for emulation by others (soft power). Mussolini’s initial spectacular success in Italy led to the swift spread of Fascism in and beyond Europe. (1245) However, this sword cuts both ways: after the fall of the Berlin Wall no state has adapted Marxism-Leninism, and with the current troubles in Venezuela, we cannot expect much continued appeal to implement Chávez’ version of Bolivarianism. But even ‘success’ is hard to measure, and will depend on the comprehensive world views (*Weltanschauung*), which shapes target states’ incentives, constraints, causal beliefs and principled beliefs of what is right and wrong – in other words, the appropriateness of the target audience *vis-à-vis* the promoted ideology. (Weyland, 2017: 1240; Goldstein and Keohane, 1993)

Of course, I do not intend to downplay the (local) power of such ideas. For instance, when assessing the spread of fundamentalist Islam, it is clear this radical ideology has found fertile soil even deep in the centers of many democratic clusters, but only in the hearts and minds of a very small (often discriminated) minority, and never to the degree to fear a jihadist coup d’état in the liberal West, unlike in MENA.

In other words, not all ideologies can be successfully promoted to create clusters anywhere. An ideology has to be sufficiently universal to appeal to other nations, and may not penetrate regions with deeply established alternative worldviews. This is illustrated by the work of Franziska Deutsch & Christian Welzel (2016), who assess the diffusion of emancipatory values – the psychological bedrock of a pro-democratic mass culture – and find even these universal democratic values spread at different speeds and intensities in free and unfree climates, with variations according to regime type.

Likewise, Apartheid South Africa’s ideology could only be emulated in the short-lived separatist state of Katanga and Ian Smith’s South Rhodesia. Also, Saudi Arabia never succeeded in widely promoting its state religion, despite their lavish use of economic leverage. The ideological appeal of Wahhabism has not found widespread following that could result in cluster formation, regardless of the vast sums spent by Riyadh to make it happen. The rest of the Islamic world refuses to subjugate to Saudi parochial religious traditions alien to their own culture. (Al-Rasheed, 2016) Notwithstanding, Riyadh possesses soft power and does have the ideological clout to sway and direct jihadist movements, but not at the level of direct regime promotion by suasion.

As the examples show, to be classified as an ideological cluster, a certain coherent ideological worldview of a (group of) regime(s) must be successfully exported to other states and endorsed by their elites and large segments of their populations. This is only possible if an ideology has been widely accepted and institutionally consolidated in the promoter state itself. Shared historical legacies, cross-border social groups and transnational network linkages resulting in matching worldviews, in combination with communication linkage, can all catalyze the spread of ideology. Agency lies with the cluster as a whole, but peaks within its most active ideology promoters of course.

4 Hegemonic Regime Clusters

The second ideal-type are hegemonic regime clusters (HRCs) – in which the regime of a powerful state or a group of states can serve as an institutional, administrative boilerplate for other regimes in nearby weaker states once hegemony is established. In this case it is not so much the magnetic pull of soft power that make such hegemons the gravity center of such a cluster, but it is their (relative) predominance in terms of military and economic power. (Kneuer and Demmelhuber, 2016: 775-776) These clusters are thus characterized by power asymmetry. Hegemons use their leverage over their neighbors to create a ring of allied regimes, reforming or promoting their preferred regime institutions *ex post* – after having established their dominance.

When lacking a comprehensive ideological worldview, these clusters remain regional in scope, and will not have much soft power, beside the attraction of geopolitical or economic status itself. (Brownlee, 2017) Putin's Russia is a clear example (and increasingly so China is becoming one). Russia's lack of ideology stands in stark contrast to its Soviet predecessor. Communism's soft power allured to many young intellectuals in the West in the mid-sixties (before Stalin's atrocities became public knowledge). Russia's soft power in western Europe today can only enchant some business sectors and fascist politicians. In both examples (Soviet) Russia is the regional hegemon, only in the former did it dominate an ideological-hegemonic cluster.

Today, few HRCs can counter the soft power of a strong ideology. Both Russia and China have developed schemes to block the encroachment of democratic values in their societies and have proposed alternatives like Russian "Sovereign Democracy" of "Democracy with Chinese characteristics" that may offer a cloak of regime legitimacy. Both are presented as versions of Democracy, none have the consistency and power of an alternative worldview. It is very illustrative that Russia and China have to band together and set up their own international organization (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) in order to stop Western democratic norms from proliferating in their backyard (Ambrosio, 2018).

The examples of Soviet Russia, Western Europe, the USA and Venezuela show that ideological-hegemonic hybrids are common and more successful since they combine all three forms of leverage: political, economic and ideological. However, a pure hegemonic cluster is characterized by its absence of ideological soft power, and must possess sufficient hard power to structurally alter target states' foreign policy and alliances, establishing patron-client relations with them. Agency within these clusters lies disproportionately with the hegemon, and the region's diffusion patterns emanates from it. Russia and Nigeria are good contemporary examples. Brazil on the other hand lacked the hard power and will to create a cluster.

5 Biopolitical Regime Clusters

The third ideal-type is a group baptized as biotopical regime clusters (BRCs). These clusters are characterized first by the absence of ideology and hegemony, and secondly by the shared similarity of a certain regime type of the cluster units. Through the lens of L&L theory, these clusters can emerge in regions where a group of states have no regional hegemon and have low linkages to great powers outside their region. Similarly, its units only embrace (foreign) ideology to pursue narrow elite interests, but do not promote such worldviews to the population as a whole. The reason that they share a certain regime type is foremost an outcome of the region's shared geopolitical structures or historical legacy. Regimes in such clusters rarely cooperate with each other, but they do interact and learn from another, and subsequent regime turnovers can increase the size of this cluster.

Admittedly, BRCs are usually only temporary, and disappear when hegemony emerges or a pervasive ideology takes over. With increased globalization they seem to disappear in an ever interconnecting world, but may persist in agglomerations of so-called gap countries. A long-lasting example that withstood the Cold War would be the cluster of personalist regimes in Africa's Great Lakes region. Another one, which is slowly disappearing, is its West African personalist counterpart. Also, Central Asia between 1990-1999 was characterized by the low hegemony of Russia at that particular time and exhibited BRC behavior. But not all BRCs encompass personalist regimes, as the departed cluster of military *juntas* in Latin America during the 1980s indicates.

So, what do units in BRCs have in common? All BRCs contain a set of structures, which constrain and socialize regime behavior, making certain internal reforms more likely, and thereby create a regional path dependency pushing states in such clusters toward a certain regime type. Thus, in absence of agency by a group of (ideological) regimes or a hegemon, structural factors like shared forms of inequality, poverty, state weakness, neo-patrimonialism, ethnic strife, resource curses, (neo-)colonial trading patterns, etc. will dominate and shape unit regime behavior and form. The more regimes of a certain type in a cluster, the more they strengthen these formative structures, altering regime behavior in proximate units. Raul Caruso et al. (2014) found a robust and positive spatial autocorrelation for military despots in SSA from 1977 to 2007. The probability that a country in SSA resulted in despotic rule increased as the share of neighbors governed by such regimes gets larger.⁵ Rajeev Goel & James Saunoris (2014) provide evidence for the spatial spillover of informal institutions, in this case corruption and shadow economies.

After decolonization, African regional structures of underdevelopment, its legacy of exclusive institutions and the centralization of power within the men who led the struggle for independence, made SSA especially conducive to personalist rule. By 1972 there were 14 such regimes in power, by 1984 they had reached a peak of 21. Other regime types, like monarchies almost went extinct in SSA. After the end the Cold War, a new democratization wave temporarily reduced the number to 15, climbing up to 18 due to forcible regime promotion in West Africa. Since 2010 the current number is still around 14, indicating the strength of these regional structures, especially in the Great Lakes region.⁶

Table 1: A Typology of Regime Clusters

CLUSTER ELEMENTS		<i>Ideological</i>	<i>Hegemonic</i>	<i>Biological</i>
<i>Main cluster driver:</i>		Ideas & Agency	Agency	(-)
<i>Spatial scope:</i>		-Transregional -Regional	-Regional	-Regional -Sub-regional
<i>Agency located at:</i>		Cluster as a whole	Hegemon	Fragmented at unit-level
<i>United by:</i>		Values, norms, common interests	Patron-client relations (common elite interests)	External threat(s) to unit survival
<i>Similar in:</i>		-Ideology -Foreign policy -Form (regime type)	-Foreign policy -Form	-Form (regime type)
<i>Regime promotion:</i>		-Active -Ideologically motivated	-Reactionary -Defensive measure	-Opportunistic -Aimed at survival
CLUSTER LIFE CYCLES	<i>Emerge by:</i>	-Leverage and soft power of ideologue	-Leverage of the hegemon	-Historical legacies -Absence of ideology & hegemony
	<i>Are sustained by:</i>	-Innovation of ideas -Increasing linkages -Common goods	-Increasing linkages -Elite protection	-Enhancing existing formative structures
	<i>Decline through:</i>	-Ideological erosion	-Geopolitical or economic collapse of hegemon	-Altering regional structures
DRIVERS OF DIFFUSION		Cooperation & Competition	Domination	Rivalry & Survival
<i>Source: Author's own work.</i>				

Since we are dealing with autocratic regimes here, some of these BRCs have been described as ‘bad neighborhoods’ and so – to follow the analogy – the regimes located in them are “socialized” differently than their peers in other parts of the international system. This affects their behavior in domestic and international politics. Since they recreate the structures of their own geopolitical ecologic climate, I labelled these clusters biological, because in a way they maintain their own biotope. In BRCs a study of the pervasive regime type’s behavior is necessary to understand the cluster’s dynamics. Personalist BRCs will reproduce their structures differently than monarchic or military BRCs. With unrestrained dictators they are less cooperative and more bellicose among one another.

Without ideology or hegemon, agency in BRCs is fragmented and dispersed at unit-level (regimes). Even while units are connected through various linkages, they do not have the synergy of an IRC; nor do any of its units possess the concentrated leverage of a hegemon. This means units only share the default regional formal outlook (regime type), which is not random, but

reflects the formative structures of the region or sub-region as a whole. Without a hegemon to monopolize power, provide order and deter units from engaging in conflict these biotopes can be particularly hostile to the regimes that inhabit it, and so over time they have socialized and adapted to survival. In doing so, they strengthen the same structures that have driven them to maintain such a regime type in the first place. This is not a ‘chicken-or-the-egg’ question of course, and the formative structures are usually shared legacies from other historical geopolitical groupings like colonial empires or imperial conquests.⁷

All three cluster types are (sub-)regional and connected by linkages. Regime clusters are a radial category (Collier and Mahon, 1993),⁸ and its subtypes either characterized by ideology, a hegemon, or merely similarity in form (regime type) in case the first two elements are absent. Hybrids are possible and ideological-hegemonic clusters are common. Diffusion takes place in all types of clusters, but the dynamics differ. In IRCs diffusion vectors emerge mostly from ideology promoters, their magnitude depends on the universality of that political worldview and its reception on the ‘cultural’ match of its targets. In HRCs, diffusion vectors are centered around hegemons, and magnitude depends on their disparity of power (leverage) *vis-à-vis* targets who can gatekeep such influence to counter it. In contrast, BRCs do not have a clear identified center from which vectors emerge. Diffusion takes place across changing interaction dyads by interlinked units (linkages) motivated by rivalry and their own survival. Shared regional structural factors shape these interaction dyads, and such structures will persist until they are replaced by hegemony or the successful spread of an ideology in the region, potentially altering the cluster type.

After this overview of RCT’s ideal types, I will now compare these clusters’ respective methods of regime promotion and geographic scope (part 6), cluster life-cycles (part 7), the location and nature of conflicts in clusters (8), before showing how these above elements shape their diverging regional diffusion dynamics (9) and future avenues for applying RCT (10). More attention will be given to examples of BRCs since this cluster type is the innovation to the well-established studies of diffusion and autocratic cooperation, which literature has already provided many in-depth examples of IRCs and HRCs. Table 1 presents the defining elements of each cluster type.

6 Regime Promotion & Cluster Scope

When states are able, they engage in regime promotion. Some regimes resort to violent means to achieve this, but even then regime change is often an *ex-post* outcome since the initial attack was for other reasons. Owen (2010: 2-4) presents ample data that (ideological) regime promotion has been as old as international relations themselves, identifying three waves when forcible regime promotion peaked in world history.⁹ But this is only the tip of the iceberg, for non-forcible promotion has been even more common. Rachel Vanderhill (2013) offers some examples on how states use their leverage to such purposes:

States can alter the strategies of the political elite and increase the capabilities of different elite factions. States can offer positive incentives, such as trade agreements or cheap

supplies of energy, to alter elites' calculations about the costs and benefits of various strategies. States may also offer negative incentives, such as denial of important energy supplies, to change elite strategies. External actors can also provide additional financial resources that enable authoritarian leaders to purchase support and increase their repressive capacity. (8)

Systematizing all the above: governments use their leverage to (a) forcefully remove regimes, (b) promote new elites, (c) alter elites' capabilities, (d) change elites' strategies, or (e) integrate elites in their sphere of influence; all with the self-regarding aim to make the international system more friendly, starting with those states in their vicinity or with high strategic potential.

Broadly speaking, regime interactions encompass conductive or disruptive leverage. **Conductive leverage** aims to support the target incumbent and its hold on power; raise its capabilities to do so; and bind the target more tightly to the promoting state by expanding linkage ties and increasing the benefits for the elites to stay on such course (aims: c, d, e). **Disruptive leverage** is the opposite: Here the promoter is dissatisfied with the current policy of the target state and takes action to blackmail or coerce it back in line by polarizing elites and raising domestic audience costs (Weeks, 2008) for incumbents; forcefully removing the leadership by direct military action or indirectly by weakening its capabilities in face of challengers or popular protests, sometimes enabled and strengthened by the promoter itself (aims: a, b, c, d).

It is necessary to distinguish between different functions (or roles) of certain actors regarding cluster dynamics and regime promotion. Regime **promoters** can be both states *within* or *outside* the cluster. They actively pursue subversive activities and intervene in domestic affairs to oust an incumbent elite to establish a regime which is more similar ideologically, loyal (foreign policy), or at least less hostile. The second role is that of **guardians**, or those foreign actors *outside* clusters that sustain and protect elite incumbents in clusters for strategic or economic reasons. They can do so by countering foreign pressure, devise policies to circumvent imposed economic sanctions or pull a target allied regime out of diplomatic isolation. Guardians have leverage, but not sufficient linkage to target states to really control policy-making. The difference with regime promoters is that they are always conductive since they do not possess the linkage to act against the will of the incumbents in a target state, which often proactively manipulate their guardians to support them. Within L&L theory, this process of counterbalancing leverage or eroding linkages to insulate one's state and diminish foreign intermingling in domestic affairs has been labeled 'gatekeeping' by Jakob Tolstrup (2014).

The existing literature contains terms like 'black knights'¹⁰ and 'spoilers' which overlap in meaning with regime promoters and guardians, but I hesitate to use the former in this context, since both terms are biased and framed from the point of view of democracies. Only in juxtaposition to democratic clusters can autocratic promoters and guardians be labeled spoilers or black knights. Doing so obscures the differences among autocracies like the republican-monarchist struggle in the Middle East, but also the fact that democracies themselves can be black knights or spoilers when pursuing strategic (hegemonic) interests. The violent CIA-provoked coup in Chile in 1973, which ousted democratically elected S. Allende is an example

of a democracy destabilizing a democracy. Or the USSR switching guardianship from their erstwhile protégé in Somalia to Ethiopia for geopolitical gain, after the latter attacked the former in the Ogaden war (1977-78). Regime promoters and guardians are more neutral terms, can be used for all (ideological) regime types and can be either disruptive or conductive in relation to the type of cluster under analysis.

Only ideological regime promoters push for regime change far abroad by applying their hard and soft power to elites using geopolitical and economic linkage, and to foreign nations through transnational civil society linkages. An example are the past military activities of Communist Cuba in Latin America and on the African continent (Angola, Congo, Eritrea and Ethiopia). Such missionary zeal by a small state clearly shows that a popular, universal ideology can lead to regime promotion far beyond the location of the promoter.

Likewise, the ideological-hegemonic hybrid of Hugo Chávez exported its ideology beyond its cluster. As the article by Carlos de la Torre (2017) on the spread of Bolivarianism shows, Caracas did promote a comprehensive alternative worldview to counter Liberal Democracy – branded by Chávez as a corrupt system with savage liberalism. Still the strength of the hegemon matters, and Venezuela’s economic mismanagement, oil curse, and the sudden death of Chávez, its main ideologue, have (for now) annihilated the cluster’s prospects for expansion. Nonetheless, Bolivarian populist ideas have crossed the Atlantic and were embraced by the leftist political party in Spain, PODEMOS. (Vanderhill, 2014; Weyland, 2017; Reid, 2017: 165-192) Depending on their success, IRCs thus can have a regional or global scope.

HRCs in contrast, only engage in regime promotion in proximate neighbors where their hard power is most effective, limiting their cluster to regional phenomena. For instance, the illiberal turn in Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s populist FIDESZ party is not a case of authoritarian diffusion radiating from Russia’s hegemonic cluster. Budapest’s renewed “Eastern Opening” policy is the result of gatekeeping the EU’s influence through rapprochement with Russia based on mutual interests. (Buzogány, 2017: 1319-1320) Also Jason Brownlee confirms that Russia and China have not been catalyzing autocracy far afield, but act more as powerful guardians to support target leaders and policies that will benefit their countries. (Brownlee, 2017: 1340-1341)

BRCs mostly pursue regime change within their most proximate neighbors to make their immediate environment less hostile, thereby inadvertently strengthening the existing regional structures. Regime promotion is opportunistic, based on narrow elite interest, and often defensive. These clusters are characterized by the absence of hegemony that can prevent such breaches of sovereignty.

Take Central Asia in the 1990s. Under Yeltsin, Moscow had all but nominally withdrawn its direct influence in the region. Political turmoil and ethnic clashes followed.¹¹ In Tajikistan in 1992, conflict between the incumbent former communists and united opposition (containing disparate nationalist, Islamist and democratic parties) spiraled into a protracted civil war along regional clan lines. Already targeting Islamists at home, the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan first

acted as a guardian to the side of Rahmon Nabiyev (former Communists) during the early phase of the war, providing weapons and armored personnel carriers. When the opposition camp gained the upper hand with Akbarsho Iskanderov ousting Nabiyev, Tashkent launched a (failed) coup with help of Safarali Kenjayev, the former Tajik KGB deputy chief. Later, during the final stage in the war, when Prime Minister Rahmon(ov) (former Communist camp) was pressured by mediators to include Islamists in a government of national unity, Karimov overplayed his hand and decided to derail the reconciliation process by attempting another coup. In early November 1998, Mahmud Khudaiberdiyev, a former Tajik army colonel, and Abdumalik Abdullajanov, a former Tajik premier – both ethnic Uzbeks – captured the northern industrial city of Khojand and its airport with some 1000 insurgents, demanding a say in the provisional council. After six days of heavy fighting, claiming 300 lives, the coup-leaders fled back to Uzbekistan. (Hiro, 2009: 331, 325, 333, 334-346) Only in July 2018 did Tashkent admit that Khudaiberdiyev had indeed been residing in Uzbekistan and had left the country after the death of Karimov. (Pannier, 2018ab)

This example shows that Tashkent engaged in stealthy attempts at regime promotion without possessing the leverage to merely impose its preferred faction. The predatory behavior by other states in West and Central Africa presented in the introduction, likewise stresses the opportunistic nature of regime promotion in BRCs. Devoid from a guiding ideology, these interferences into the domestic affairs of other states (in crisis) is purely motivated by the survival logic of the promotor regime, in pursuit of direct economic gains or longer-term geopolitical ambitions. Nonetheless, when they succeed, they install regimes that end up as copies of their own (personalist) regime type because regime formation is firmly molded by the region's structural factors.

7 Cluster Life-cycles

The different nature of each type determines the longevity and robustness of its cluster of course. IRCs will use leverage and soft power to promote a certain regime type abroad. These clusters thus tend to expand once they are ideologically consolidated. HRCs can only rely on their predominant leverage to steer neighbors into its orbit. As in the original L&L theory, linkages interact with leverage: so the more (historic) linkages exist among units the more efficient their leverage. Nonetheless, the power of the hegemon determines the cluster's sustainability. In BRCs then, geopolitical structures and historical linkages are all that unites their units. Units thus will be pushed to rival each other or ally with similar units against common threats. In their purest form, only regional structures dictate their behavior, and the path dependency they strengthen will in turn affect other regimes located in or near the cluster.

Theoretically, cluster type thus affects cluster and unit behavior, in other words, their external and internal dynamics, and logically so their defining characteristics should influence their robustness as well as their path to demise. Since IRCs are driven by ideas, HRCs by the power of their dominant unit(s), and BRCs marked by the absence of these elements, their respective life cycles should be linked with these characteristics.

Once established, IRCs sustain themselves by increasing linkages, providing more common goods for the common (ideological) agenda, and by innovating the dominant set of ideas. Just like technology clusters in economics, pitfalls can emerge over time:

The competitiveness of firms in clusters, through their synergies, innovation and strategies tend to converge with firms that are not clustered, over time. This may be due to clustered firms' restricted collective behavior as they define their own field of competition from within, resulting in competitive blind spots which limit their innovation, strategic positioning to the extent of reducing their ability to react to industry-wide shock like governmental policy changes. Non-clustered firms, on the other hand, tend to be less constrained and more adaptable to sudden industry-wide changes. (Kuah, 2002: 233)

These insights from economic clusters regarding innovation seem to apply to IRCs. The 'industry-wide shock' brings up memories of the failure of Communist ideology in the late 1970s. Ideological deterioration is a killer for ideocratic regimes: For instance, for Communist single-party regimes, the party's claims of legitimacy were purely ideological, and derived from the belief that the party had special access to historical truth and therefore enjoys infallibility. When ideologies de-radicalized or restored 'betrayed values' of the original project (e.g. de-Stalinization in the USSR) – such episodes presented enormous crises in Communist regimes, from which none recovered in the end. (Tismaneanu, 2013) Ideological innovation is the key, even if this means replacing Communism with a more nationalist version (like in Vietnam or Laos), or with anti-Americanism (Cuba) (Dimitrov, 2013: 25), or with a personality cult like *juche* in North Korea (Van den Bosch, 2017: 57-62). But even Democracy today has its ideological struggles like the ongoing challenge of populism in Europe and the USA shows.

HRCs sustain themselves by creating more linkages in order to reinforce the client-patron relations which they obtained with their leverage. The more linkages, the more (elite) interests are entwined, and the more effective the hegemon's leverage. HRCs collapse when the hegemon does no longer have the leverage to keep target regimes in orbit. This can be due to domestic crises, as well as through (great) power rivalry leading to a drain of the available resources to maintain clusters. Usually it is a mix of both issues, as the decolonization of the French empire, as well as Gorbachev's fatal reforms indicate.

BRCs are sustained by regional structures, often themselves in turn a result of common historical legacies. BRCs appear after sudden global geopolitical rifts in combination with a roll-back of hegemony. Such pivotal moments were the collapse of European colonialism in Africa and Asia, or the implosion of the USSR and the end of the Cold War. During such times shared transition pathways cement regional structural factors and shape regime behavior over time.

Regimes in BRCs per definition lack the agency to change these structures themselves (otherwise the cluster would be a HRC), therefore BRCs only disappear under the following conditions: If an external hegemon extends its influence and creates order (example one below); if one of the cluster units obtains the status of hegemon and alters the regional structures (example two), or if global changes alter the geopolitical climate and transform the regional structures (example three). In any case the predominant structures have to be transformed or

replaced in order for the BRC to dissolve. To study the demise of BRCs, the focus thus has to be on regime transitions and the role of other actors in supporting and promoting regimes.

The first example would be the reemergence of Russia in Central Asia (CA) after Putin came to power in 1999. Yeltsin did sporadically play a more active role after 1993 to pursue Russian interests when he was under pressure by the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. (Hiro, 2009: 255) But until the late 1990s, CA had slid back to a level of unmitigated personal rule and isolationist policies reminiscent of the time of the khanates. With Putin at the helm, the sudden large US presence in the region during *Operation Enduring Freedom* after 9/11, catalyzed Moscow to step up its engagement with its former Soviet republics. Moscow put pressure on Bishkek to close the US transit center at Manas, while extending Russia's own matching military pressure in Kant. By 2012 Putin started mediating in the protracted water conflicts between downstream states (Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) and upstream energy-poor Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with their hydropower dam projects, which block the much needed water flow for harvests downstream. After the death of independent Karimov in 2016, Putin could extend Russia's influence to Uzbekistan as well.¹² In a border trade dispute with Kazakhstan in the Fall of 2017, Kyrgyz president Atambayev openly called upon Russia to mediate.¹³ With US troops gone or departing, Russian geopolitical hegemony is fairly undisputed in the region, although it still cannot rival China's economic leverage.¹⁴ Nonetheless, interstate conflict in CA seems unlikely, and actions like Karimov's foreign predation in Tajikistan during the 1990s seem a distant memory.

The second example is the BRC in West Africa since the late 1960s; encompassing multiple personalist regimes in twelve countries.¹⁵ This BRC however has been shrinking with the rise of Nigeria. After the sudden death of Sani Abacha 1998, a personalist dictator himself, Nigeria returned to electoral politics. Since then, Nigeria-led ECOWAS has obtained increasing influence as a regional conflict manager. After gaining experience in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars in the late 1990s other ECOWAS members became more committed to the promotion and consolidation of democracy. Its adherence to democracy was strengthened in 2001 with the *Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance*. A pro-democratic council of ECOWAS members started to enforce norm-abiding behavior in the region at a time of many regime transitions from personalist rule. Many countries would have relapsed into renewed despotism without the pressure of ECOWAS. (Hartmann, 2016: 94) So, the emergence of hegemony altered the structures for some units in this BRC. After peace-keeping in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, and Guinea-Bissau, the ouster of dictator Jammeh in The Gambia in 2017 has been the most recent illustration of ECOWAS' geopolitical leverage. While its peacekeeping record itself has been mixed (Obi, 2009), Nigeria's hegemony cannot be denied. This is not the case for the personalist BRC in Central Africa, which is still without hegemony and still experiences unbridled foreign predation.

A third example would be Latin America: its deeply embedded regional structures of anti-imperialism (anti-Americanism), (agrarian) inequality, and loose political control over modernizing militaries came to the fore at the moment that US relative hegemony in the region

became directly challenged after the Cuban revolution in 1959, leading to the rise of an unchecked BRC of military *golpes* in the early 1960s. Hal Brands (2012) put this most aptly:

For Moscow, Havana, and Washington [the 1960s were] a decade in which grand ambitions proved not simply unrealistic, but self-defeating as well. Each power sought to expand its own influence and check that of its competitors, but did so in ways that were thoroughly counterproductive. Castro's clumsy interventionism ensured his diplomatic isolation, and the [strategy of armed struggle] did the Left more harm than good. Khrushchev sought to spread socialism in Latin America, but his methods frightened and repelled the very audience he meant to woo. Washington avoided a "second Cuba" but its military interventions provoked a powerful backlash that more than canceled the limited gains accrued by sending in the Marines. (...) [The great powers] attempted to contain one another, but ended up containing themselves. (64)

In other words, both camps neutralized each other's leverage at a time that the oscillating pendulum between military rule and elections had left the Latin American political landscape in the late 1950s more fragile and polarized than ever. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, a vengeful Castro galvanized and radicalized the Leftist and Rightist forces by fueling guerrillas, while his fallout with the USSR after the missile crisis lowered Cuba's available support for them. The American two-pronged approach of half-heartedly forcing land reforms on unwilling, paranoid Latin American elites afraid of losing their grasp on power (and wealth), while at the same time doling out military support to them did not result in more influence.¹⁶ American lenient policy toward the region's military coup cascade owed not simply to anti-Communism, but also to a frank recognition of the limits of US leverage. (Brands, 2012: 57)

The modernized Latin American militaries took over the steering wheel to root out all traces of insurgency and subversion, activating home-bred, national security doctrines from the 1930s and 1940s, but expanding the definition of subversion to all groups remotely connected to the Left. They embarked on internal wars with the same urgency and methods as traditional military conflicts, trampling human rights and clamping down on free speech. (Brands, 2012: 68) Unlike in Central America, the professional armies of South America were no longer vehicles for personalist rule as during the days of the *caudillo*. Pinochet in Chile was an exception, but still had less personalist power than his African counterparts. (Gandhi et al. 2014: 4) Stroessner's Paraguay was a premodern relic from a colonial past. (Reid, 2017: 124) All of them embraced a siege mentality to ride out the storm of insurrections. A common foe however did not always lead to rapprochement, and old rivalries lingered alongside the anti-Communist struggle. (Darnton, 2014: 111)

By 1977 only Columbia, Costa Rica and Venezuela had democratic regimes, by 1990, only Cuba and Mexico were still unopposed dictatorships. (Reid, 2017: 129) The swift "third wave" of democratization can be attributed to a change of many regional structural factors and the predominant regime type of the BRC. The main systemic changes were sudden and profound. The state-led, protectionist regimes lost their last inches of legitimacy in light of rising petrol

prices, debt crises and commodity busts. The land-owning elites and industrials saw that the uniformed tyrants remained hostile to a much-needed free market. Human rights gained new impetus in US foreign policy under Jimmy Carter cold-shouldering the dictators, at a time when the Leftist forces started abandoning their technique of armed struggle in South America. Without funds to co-opt or repress, military regimes *do* have one other exit-option, and so they started negotiating their return to the barracks. In contrast, without this option, the personalist regimes of Central America slid into civil war. (Reid, 2017: 123-164; Brands, 2012: 204-247) Crippled by debt a new economic paradigm was introduced to the BRC and negotiated transitions to unstable democracy followed.

So, the disappearance of the common threat (Communist insurrections), the ability to gatekeep support for their suppression, together with the resurface of Democracy and Liberalism, reshaped regional structural factors in Latin America, leading to the collapse of the military BRC, which these factors had pushed into power in the first place.

8 Cluster Conflicts and Contagions

RCT can explain the potential location of conflicts in clusters and the uncontrolled results of cluster dynamics. Regime promoters in IRCs are better at connecting with networks far beyond their borders, especially when their ideology is culturally attractive for the target, and can be used as soft power. Linkages can be established *ex ante* or *ex post* regime transformation in the target state, and the decision to militarily intervene will depend on a mix of strategy and opportunism. Ideologically contested “lame duck” incumbents are primary targets: when there is a profound crisis in the target country and its elites are polarized on what kind of (ideological) regime is best for its future. In such cases elites reach out for support through their transnational ideological networks, presenting opportunities for foreign ideology promoters or regional hegemons. (Owen, 2010: 34-36) Beside the well-known series of proxy-wars between IRCs like between the Democratic West and the Communist bloc, another main danger is that regime promotion can lure out defensive reactions from other non-ideological clusters.

The most powerful ideology of contemporary times, Liberal Democracy, has and continues to make inroads far beyond its original cluster, especially after the collapse of its major ideological contestant, the USSR and the Communist bloc. Despite a short, uncontested honeymoon between 1985 and 1995 – the “third wave” – this spread is now being contested. (von Soest, 2015; Tansey, 2016)

However, RCT is not limited to analyze the dichotomous democracy-autocracy struggle that dominates contemporary politics, because it distinguishes between autocratic regime types. The Sino-Soviet split (1956-1966) is also a prime example of two I-HRCs that clashed globally and vied for influence far beyond their borders in the Third World with rivaling development models that were both attractive for recipients. Beyond the scope of this paper, other older historical ideological clashes like the rivalry between absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy and republicanism can also be studied using RCT.

The lack of ideological countermeasures in HRCs explains the location of their conflicts. HRCs are most vulnerable at the fringes of their cluster, where linkages to the hegemon tend to be less dense and exposure to foreign linkages is stronger. Logically, this is where hegemons will put up resistance to block the further spread of rivalling influence, but if it is too weak to stop challenging norms from diffusing in its civil society or pressuring incumbent elites in a client-state, HRCs will tolerate conflict in their periphery if this protects or insulates the hegemon and key allies from unwanted trends. Weyland came to a similar conclusion and stresses the defensive goal of immunization against Western democracy promotion efforts. (Weyland, 2017)

The HRC dominated by Russia has experienced a significant learning curve after the Cold War: After lessons learnt with smoldering conflicts like in Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria, the hegemon has exported conflict to Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014) to avert the encroachment of NATO and the EU in these countries respectively. Similarly, Apartheid South Africa used its dominant leverage to export conflict and terror to Angola, Mozambique and Rhodesia in order to protect White-minority rule at home.

The above examples illustrate that hegemons will tolerate peripheral conflict if it can protect them. Especially if they do not have the resources to maintain all their patron-client relations. This also means that one does not have to fear Russian tanks in Berlin or Prague anytime soon, since Russia is rather creating a ring of instability in order to insulate its HRC from the ideological inroads of Europe's democratic IRC and is not devising a diabolical plan to invade. Brownlee (2017) confirms that the authoritarian regimes have indeed regionally shored up client-states in the last decade, but are not able to subvert democracy globally.

Many authors found that the resilience of the Arab monarchies during the Arab Spring had nothing to do with some inherent regime characteristic monarchies possess. (Josua, 2016; Yom and Gause, 2012; Bank and Edel, 2015) The HRC led by Saudi Arabia explains why they stayed afloat during the Arab Spring: The resource endowments of the richest were used to aid and help stabilize fellow Gulf Cooperation Council members. In addition, these petroleum riches allow them to harness a series of powerful foreign patrons. (Yom and Gause, 2012: 83-84) Kingdoms in MENA rival with non-monarchies in the same region, and this has now resulted in the post-Arab Spring bipolar rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, in which both have instrumentalized their state religion in order to consolidate their camps. (Hinnebusch, 2015) The contagion of proxy-wars between two regional HRCs is thus possible as well (e.g. the civil war in Yemen), albeit in a much smaller geographical scope than IRCs.

Conflicts dynamics in BRCs are different and depend much more on regime-type dynamics, but are mostly located in or near the cluster. These are conflicts aimed at unit survival and (beside foreign predation) can sometimes manifest themselves as interstate wars, even if they are pursued only to serve domestic regime interests. Such international armed conflicts are in line with the theoretical framework of 'gambling to survive' or 'fighting to survive' as devised by Giacomo Chiozza & Hein Goemans (2011: 12-32). In the former, the victory matters and will contribute to regime stability, in the latter, dictatorships are usually already in deep crisis at the moment of conflict initiation, and acts like sending untrustworthy troops to the front or

implementing martial law by themselves are usually desperate measures to prolong regime survival.

The danger of BRCs is the contagion of civil wars or rebellions, which halt development, uproot populations and engrain grievances and societal conflict. In the Great Lakes personalist BRC every country has experienced prolonged civil war, save for Zambia, Malawi, Kenya and Tanzania. Many regimes fell as a result of such insurrections, and ended in conflict traps, from which they are yet to emerge today. Structural factors like state fragility, a legacy of exclusive institutions, colonial structural underdevelopment, etc. have led to the emergence of personalist rule in many states by the early 1970s. Without a regional hegemon to restrain these regimes, foreign-sponsored rebel groups (attempting regime promotion) have been a key element in the list of civil wars, (as they were in the Latin American BRC), and the resulting conflict traps have often led to more personalist regimes coming to power, entrenching and repeating these vicious circles. These rebel armies are not a random symptom. Most are trained, armed and guided by regimes within the cluster who have copied this model from others to counter (foreign) threats or gather rents (smuggling, illegal mining), contributing to regime longevity.

9 Comparing Diffusion Dynamics in Cluster Types

Diffusion is a vast, over-theorized concept, difficult to apply and measure. Based on the integrative efforts of M. Kneuer & T. Demmelhuber, K. Weyland and others, I here present my own interpretation of how the various interactions in cluster types could be differentiated. I likewise distinguish between intentional and unintentional modes of external influence, which lead to diffusion of norms, ideas, behavior patterns, institutions and practices. **Intentional** modes can be *coercive* (using conductive or disruptive leverage towards the target state); or based on *voluntary* cooperation in various spheres. **Unintentional** modes are related to *bounded learning* or the unmitigated spread (*contagion*) of phenomena (like proxy wars or foreign predation) as a result of cluster behavior. This classification is not normative nor exhaustive, but a first attempt to capture various diffusion dynamics from the perspective of cluster typology.

Before comparing cluster types, a few remarks on my choice of framework: I follow Kneuer & Demmelhuber's original contribution regarding four '**arenas of interaction**' on which various modes of diffusion are manifested. As shown in table 2, I differentiate between changes in the *institutional arena*, that is, the (formal) political regime structures or the constitutional level, encompassing both horizontal and vertical power divisions. Secondly, the *policy arena* refers to the regime's vision (policy goals, policy content and policy instruments). Thirdly, the *ideational arena* is linked with norms, values and worldviews. Finally, *administrative techniques* can likewise be promoted, shared or copied, since these are (informal) practices aimed at regime control or regime power-sharing. (Kneuer and Demmelhuber, 2016: 787-789) Table 2 indicates the expected arenas of diffusion for each cluster type.

I find that intentional or actor-driven modes of diffusion encompass a clear set of behaviors ranging from full control over the target, the use of active leverage to alter target behavior within

an asymmetric relationship, to the more consensual socialization, in which targets voluntarily comply to external incentives based on their own (elite) strategic calculations or due to normative persuasion by what is considered a superior model or practice. The level of leverage and available linkages determine the intensity of the coercion.

Table 2: Diffusion Dynamics of Regime Clusters

MODES OF DIFFUSION		ARENAS OF INTERACTION		
		<i>Ideological</i>	<i>Hegemonic</i>	<i>Biological</i>
<i>Intentional</i>	Coercive: (<i>Conductive</i>)	-Ideational -Institutional	-Policy	-Administrative (<i>survival</i>)
	Coercive: (<i>Disruptive</i>)	-Ideational -Institutional [active]	-Institutional -Policy [reactionary]	-Institutional [opportunistic]
	Voluntary: (<i>Cooperation</i>)	-Administrative -Institutional [normative suasion]	-Institutional (<i>survival</i>) -Policy (<i>competition</i>) -Administrative [strategic calculation]	-Administrative (<i>survival</i>) [strategic calculation]
<i>Unintentional</i>	(Bounded) Learning:	Ideational (<i>competition</i>) Policy (<i>competition</i>)	-Administrative (<i>survival</i>)	-Institutional (<i>survival</i>) -Policy (<i>competition</i>) -Administrative (<i>survival</i>)
	Contagion:	-Global ideological rivalry -Proxy conflicts	-Great power rivalry -Peripheral conflicts	-Civil war -Foreign predation
LEVEL OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION		-Multilateral -Institutionalized -Ideological [high]	-Bilateral -Institutionalized [medium]	-‘Shadow governance’ [low]
<i>Source: Author’s own work based on: Kneuer and Demmelhuber, 2016; Weyland, 2017.</i>				

The second set of interactions is unintentional, in the sense that no norms, ideas, behavior patterns, institutions and practices are being actively promoted. Nonetheless, receptive actors take over elements from other units. Many scholars find the nuances between adoption, emulation, learning by example or demonstration more confusing than illuminating, and I as well prefer to follow the approach by Fabrizio Gilardi (2003) and Covadonga Meseguer (2005:1), who bundle the concepts under ‘learning’ and stress the unifying problem-solving and goal-oriented rationale behind the receptors’ behavior. Personally, I lean toward ‘bounded’ learning as opposed to ‘rational’ learning, thereby acknowledging the limited potential for learning by governments, the costs of information gathering, the socio-cultural outlook bias of elites in search for models, and the importance of geographical proximity for adopting available and relevant models. I posit that bounded learning is more related with the (urgent) need for problem-solving and regime survival, related to institutions and administrative practices, while rational learning might be more long-term, goal-oriented, related to policy, norms and practices, and

aimed at becoming more competitive. For example, the emulation of liberal trade practices in Latin America, based on East Asian cases. (Meseguer, 2005: 30, 32)

The three cluster types have different dynamics of diffusion. IRCs are driven by cooperation and competition, HRCs by domination, and BRCs by rivalry and survival at unit-level. As presented higher, IRCs actively engage in regime promotion, do so outside their neighborhood and are mostly preoccupied by altering the ideational and institutional arenas of their target states to match theirs. IRCs will both act long-term and opportunistic to obtain their goal, and will cooperate with other cluster-units to spread their ideology (or defend it).¹⁷ Once elite or transnational network linkages are established, targets become more susceptible to normative suasion to conform their administrative and institutional arenas (normative isomorphism). Learning also takes place, but will be more limited to the ideational and policy arenas, with the long-term goals to become more competitive and successful within the (sub-)region (competitive emulation). The risks of contagion have been described in the previous part.

For example, the Cuban promotion activities in Africa during the Cold War encompass various of these elements. After an early disruptive attempt to have Che Guevara start a rebellion in Congo, they applied disruptive coercive leverage in Angola during the anti-colonial struggle and conductive leverage to keep the MPLA in power during the civil war after independence, by offering troops, weapons and training, and suppressing a coup in 1977. In the 1980s they switched to voluntary cooperation. In exchange for oil revenues, Cubans lent enormous support to transform Angola's military state structures into a Communist party model (institutional), training medical personal, administrators and offering scholarships to students (administrative). Bounded learning however did have an adverse effect in the case of Angola, and after assessing how the Communist economic policies had failed, they soon switched to a market economy by the 1990s.

HRCs operate in a context of dependency, due to the asymmetric distribution of leverage (hard power). Driven by domination, HRCs are in it for the long haul, and will use coercive means to force new linkages in order to make their leverage more effective. Incentives and socialization are the norm, until control becomes possible. Their foremost aim is the alter policy to get targets into their orbit. Disruptive leverage, as with the example of Russia exporting conflict, is rather a reactionary, defensive move to ward of threats to the cluster as a whole. Such moves trigger resentment in targets, and complicate the integration into the hegemon's sphere of influence. The targets in the HRC also engage in voluntary cooperation, but this is mostly at elite level and according to strategic calculations within the limits of a dependency setting. As cluster units become more similar over time (coercive isomorphism) they increasingly learn more administrative techniques, like shared practices to implement electoral fraud, control media, divide opposition, erode linkages to the West (gatekeeping), etc. They learn to consolidate authoritarianism and entrench national elite interests. (Hall, 2014) Autocratic cooperation and learning in the post-Soviet space is well documented.

BRCs are the effect of structural isomorphism caused by the absence of hegemony and ideology. These units are driven foremost by survival and rivalry, and can only temporarily cooperate due

to personal ties between regimes or rally forces in light of common threats. As the above examples of Uganda, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Libya, Chad, Uzbekistan have shown BRCs engage in opportunistic institutional (regime) change (disruptive coercive leverage). When supporting an ally, they may use their limited leverage to promote some administrative techniques (providing mercenaries, weapons, or funding) to allies in trouble, with the aim to safeguard their own survival when they face a crisis themselves at a later time. For instance, after having assisted João Bernardo Vieira militarily in Guinea-Bissau (1998-99), the former returned the favor to Lansana Conté in Guinea during the debilitating 2007 nationwide strikes. There are also examples of where such conductive administrative leverage has backfired; for instance, when Kabila Senior turned on his former sponsors, Museveni (Uganda) and Kagame (Rwanda) in order to maintain his hold on power in the DRC and balance domestic elite support groups.

An example of voluntary cooperation (administrative), would be the hiring of North Korean security advisors in Africa during the Cold War. In contrast to China, Cuba and the USSR, North Korean assistance was not seen as a threat to a regime's independence. And soliciting expertise was thus a strategic calculation by Ratsiraka (Madagascar), Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Conté (Guinea) and other dictators to improve the workings of their security apparatus and protect them against coup d'états.

Most diffusion in BRCs happens through bounded learning. This phenomenon needs more research, but below are some examples: For instance, Soviet incumbents-turned-presidential-candidates in CA during the breakup of the USSR learnt from each other how to consolidate their regimes. Even Akaev in Kyrgyzstan, siding with the opposition against the Communist Party, used similar administrative techniques to run unopposed as presidential candidate. In the first years of the transition, all CA autocrats eliminated opposition formation by fast-tracking election dates, creating obnoxiously high thresholds to party registration, outlawing those challengers that did manage to register, and resulting to violence when needed. After getting into office, they rewrote their respective constitutions to their advantage and pushed them through with dodgy referenda. These are strong indications for institutional and administrative bounded learning.

In Africa, the current juggling with constitutional term-limits or age limits for autocrats has a long track record: Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Zimbabwe established presidencies for life, Uganda abolished terms in 2005, followed by Burkina Faso (2014 – failed), Congo-Brazzaville (2015 – no age limit), Burundi and Rwanda (2015, 2017 – illegal third terms), and now Congo-Kinshasa (2015-2019 – postponed and rigged election). Beside this institutional learning, similar administrative techniques were adopted to counter opposition protests.¹⁸ It is true this form of learning can also be found in other regions.

More work has to be done on the diffusion of policy by bounded learning. But an indicative example would be the sudden widespread adoption of electoral politics in Sub Saharan Africa at the end of the Cold War. Such policy changes came hand in hand with other reforms, for instance the proliferation of national sovereign conferences in Francophone Africa. Mirrored on the successful example of Benin, various battled autocrats (Congo-Brazzaville, Niger, Mali) copied the practice to get the pressure off the kettle (tactical retreat) and solicit aid from the West, others

were confident in their ability to manipulate ‘their’ conference and prolong their reign (Zaire, Togo, Gabon) in a multiparty setting. (Nugent, 2004: 387-395)

The formative regional structures in BRCs (structural isomorphism), the absence of hegemony, ideological boilerplates, or strong guardians push cluster units to prolong their regime survival through learning. The similarity of proximate units and shared threats provide a fertile framework for bounded learning. However, learning in this case is reactionary, described by Bank as “counter-diffusion.” Pointing to the revolutions in Cuba in 1959, Nicaragua in 1979 and Iran in 1978-79, Bank found that proximate regimes “did not seek to emulate the revolutionary precedent; instead, they pushed their countries in a reactionary direction, ‘away’ from this precedent. Thus [learning] not via imitation, but via immunization – against the revolutionary ‘virus’ itself.” (Bank, 2017: 1353)

10 Conclusion and Future Avenues for Research

This article is the first attempt to transplant economic cluster frameworks to political regimes, even if many scholars intuitively have been referring to such autocratic groupings as clusters. Of course, there remain notable differences between economic clusters and regime clusters: unlike the former, regime clusters do not just attract new units (only IRCs can do this), but have to resort to linkage and leverage to expand. Moreover, in regime clusters the drive for survival is greater than the drive for growth – meaning some units will actively harm proximate units in order to ensure their own survival. Also, their life cycles are different: while economic clusters combine elements of innovation, technology lifespans, size advantages, etc. in each cluster – each of the described regime clusters depends on a separate element for survival: ideology, the power of the hegemon, or the structures that reproduce the regime types in said clusters.

RCT complements the latest findings in authoritarian diffusion by acknowledging the role of political ideology, hegemony and structures in shaping diffusion dynamics in each cluster type and linking them to certain arenas of interaction. (Kailitz, 2013; Weyland, 2017; Kneuer and Demmelhuber, 2016) RCT fits Elman’s (2005) criteria for constructing typologies and is both descriptive and explanatory. RCT does not exclude any regime types like other theoretical frameworks. The three presented ideal cluster types are distinctive enough and the one possible hybrid (ideological-hegemonic clusters) is fairly common. RCT is innovative because it covers a theoretical blind spot by integrating cases where structures trump agency (BRCs).

RCT is in line with current research on the spread of authoritarianism, distinguishing between regime promotion and diffusion. (Vanderhill, 2013; Tansey, 2016; Chou et al. 2017) RCT finds that forcible regime promotion can take place in the absence of hegemony or ideology. Moreover, different cluster types have varying diffusion dynamics. Also, RCT is not limited to analyze these phenomena solely through the dichotomous lens of democracy-autocracy, but distinguishes among non-democratic regime types and their different behavior patterns. Therefore RCT can account for autocratic rivalry like the Sino-Soviet split, or for older historical examples of ideological competition (monarchy-republicanism in Europe). It does not imply that

Liberal Democracy is the ‘end of history’ and can account for the diffusion patterns of both past and future ideologies.

Regarding the potential risk for global democracy, RCT indicates that only an alternative ideology can truly threaten Liberal Democracy, and as long as this political ideology is consolidated and innovating this cluster is relatively safe from autocracy promoters. I hope that RCT can deepen our understanding of current democratization policies and their prospects in different target regions.

RCT likewise overlaps with some of the older findings of ‘bad neighborhoods’ first developed by Myron Weiner in 1996 – which are in essence clusters (often BRCs), whose pervasive structures prevent ideological (democratic) regime promotion beyond Europe’s borders (Warkotsch, 2006; Börzel, 2011) or in the Middle East (Hinnebusch, 2015).

The theory of ‘Authoritarian Gravity Centers’ (AGC) conceived by Kneuer and Demmelhuber, is framed in the dichotomous approach of contemporary democracy-autocracy diffusion and accounts for black knight behavior (regional autocratic pushback against democratization). The concept bundles ideological and geopolitical power, and instead focuses on the actor (state) exerting such influence actively (push-factors) and passively (pull-factors). While conceptually useful, AGCs cannot account for autocratic rivalry or historical analyses.

RCT could provide new impetus to studies working on the spillover effects when targeting states in such clusters, like for instance, Peksen & Lounsbury (2012) examining whether large-scale armed operations affect the likelihood of civil conflict onset in countries neighboring the target of intervention. RCT can also consolidate findings on ideological intra-cluster cooperation, like the ‘bar fight theory,’ concluding that democracies tend to win interstate conflicts more often than dictatorships because they can rally more allies. (Graham et al. 2015)

Another future avenue for RCT would be to account for the variation of the level of institutionalization in various regions across the globe. (Kneuer et al. 2018) Without falling into cultural relativism or becoming Western-centered, it can be argued that only established IRCs can maintain regional organizations, which over time do not evolve into “talking clubs” (mere consultation platforms) or “zombies” (lacking any bureaucratic agency), and which functions can go beyond sovereignty boosting. In Western Europe, NATO, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the EU all have their formative roots deeply embedded in the cluster’s Liberal Democratic ideology. (Acharya and Johnston, 2007: 255; Hopmann, 2003: 95-98) No different were the USSR, the Warsaw Pact and COMECON, which all were active organizations, despite being dominated by Moscow.

In contrast, pure-type HRCs tend to create umbrella organizations with bilateral dynamics, which are active as long as they serve the purpose of the hegemon and the latter has the resources to maintain its activities. The evolution of the CIS and its smaller Russian-dominated offspring is a case in point. These organizations are meant to increase linkages and keep neighbors in Russia’s influence sphere. BRCs then are characterized by very low levels of international

institutionalization, reflecting F. Söderbaum's (2012) sovereignty-boosting governance or regional shadow governance, when certain state elites and rentier classes actively seek to preserve existing boundary disparities, murky transparency, weak territorial control and even the continued failure of regional organizations in order to further their own private interests.

Very welcome would be studies that could differentiate cluster variation regarding authoritarian learning and cooperation, and a detailed study of their diffusion patterns: For example, which clusters can create durable international norms?

This article is only one of the first attempts to systematize cluster frameworks and RCT presents a dynamic model in which regime behavior can be evaluated *vis-à-vis* their environment while taking into account historical legacies and changes over time (rise or decline of ideology and hegemony).¹⁹ Clusters can reemerge of course. For instance, the recent personalist turn in China (with Xi Jinping becoming president-for-life) makes the regime much more compatible with its biotope. Before, China was not considered a regime promotor, but rather a guardian. (Vanderhill, 2013: 6) With its historical ties to neighbors and extensive economic linkage, there is now strong potential for creating a personalist hegemonic cluster (as before under Mao Zedong). This regime change might have far-reaching consequences for the neighborhood.

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Notes

¹ I define a political regime as a group of people in a state behaving according to an institutionalized set of fundamental formal and informal rules identifying the political power holders, regulating the appointments to the main political posts, the extension of civil liberties to the population as a whole, as well as the limitations on the exercise of their political power within state structures. (Skaaning 2006)

² As the various nuances and dimensions of power are beyond the scope of this paper, I stick to J. Nye's definition: Soft power is "the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes" (Nye, 2011: 20-21). Without carrots you need a bigger stick; and without soft power it would be very difficult to convince or expand transnational ideological networks (social and civil society linkage), which are so crucial for regime promotion. Sustainable integration is impossible without attraction. Of course, soft power alone does not suffice: Norm diffusion is not a virus, it is "facilitated by "intensive and long-term contacts," which are rooted in networks of communication and flows of people and resources" (Bostrom, 1994: 192; Levitsky and Way, 2010: 44).

³ Throughout this paper I write 'Democracy' with a capital when referring to the political ideology of 'Liberal Democracy' in contrast to the system of governance or regime type, written without capital letter.

⁴ Despite the rhetoric, African Socialist countries were preoccupied with nationalist self-reliance, breaking the ties with the former colonizer. They differed from their capitalist counterparts in the degree they were willing to cooperate with former imperial powers and to the role attributed for private property and (foreign) capital when it came to pursuing development. African states on both sides of the ideological divide were foremost nationalist, which at the time of decolonization was the ideology of the oppressed and not the oppressor. The ideology therefore only had a regional scope. (Nugent, 2004: 138-140; Hyden, 2006: 29).

⁵ In this article such autocrats are labelled as 'military' regimes since they use the dataset of Hadenius and Teorell, 2007 and Wahman et al. 2013. In the dataset of Geddes et al. 2012, 2013 these same regimes are labeled 'personalist.'

⁶ Based on data of Geddes et al. 2012, 2013. Data only include independent countries with over a million inhabitants (for instance, excluding personalist Equatorial-Guinea or Djibouti). The later independence of former Portuguese or South African colonies did not affect these numbers, since none were personalist, save for Guinea-Bissau (1980-99).

⁷ A nice example are the former French African colonies. Despite France's military bases in many of these states, they could only prevent coups (conductive leverage) and aid rival successors (disruptive), but they never changed the 'nature' of these regimes. Most of them were personalist and remained so for decades, even long after French leverage evaporated.

⁸ With ‘radial categories’ it is possible that no two members share all of the defining attributes, since the overall meaning of a category is locked in its subtypes, which may differ from one-another, and during the process of cognition this bundle of traits must be learned together and understood together. (Collier and Mahon, 1993: 848) In this case the central subcategory shared by all is the ‘cluster’ itself, measured through L&L, and its pure subtypes do not share any defining attributes.

⁹ Between 1520 and 1650 Catholic and Protestant princes struggled to establish or maintain regimes of their own type in other polities. During the second wave (1770–1850), governments imposed republican (non-monarchical), constitutional-monarchical, and absolute-monarchical regimes. While the third wave between Liberal Democracy and countervailing ideologies like Communism, Fascism and Islamism started in 1919 and is still going on. (Owen, 2010: 2-4, 20-21)

¹⁰ Originally, black knights were defined as “counter-hegemonic powers whose economic, military, and/or diplomatic support helps blunt the impact of U.S. or EU democratizing pressure.” (Hufbauer et al. 2007)

¹¹ Like deadly clashes targeting Meskhetian Turkish, Armenian or Uzbek minorities in Uzbekistan in June 1989, Tajikistan in January 1990 and Kyrgyzstan in June 1990 respectively. (Hiro, 2009: 136, 319, 285)

¹² *The conversation*, September 9, 2016.

¹³ *Xinhua*, November 21, 2017.

¹⁴ *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 19, 2018.

¹⁵ Benin (1972-1990), Burkina Faso (1982-2014), Guinea (1984-), Guinea-Bissau (1981-2003), the Ivory Coast (2000-today), Mali (1969-1991), Niger (1997-1999), Nigeria (1994-1999), Liberia (1981-2003), Sierra Leone (1993-1998), Togo (1967-today), The Gambia (1994-2017) and regime promoter and guardian Libya (1969-2011).

¹⁶ Cf. ‘competing foreign policy interests’ in the L&L literature.

¹⁷ This seems to be in line with the findings of the ‘bar-fight’ theory, where democracies are more likely to win international conflicts by mustering a larger number of allies than the coalition of their non-democratic adversaries. (Graham et al. 2015)

¹⁸ “Africa’s Softer, Gentler Coups d’Etat.” *Foreign Policy*, November 3, 2015.

¹⁹ Other attempts are: Nisnevich and Ryabov, 2017 and: Houle et al. 2016.