

The idea that transnational norms such as democratic principles of governance travel across borders into authoritarian regimes and shape the attitude of domestic actors as a consequence of contact with established democracies is intriguing. This paper presents a study that systematically explores whether transnational influences yield democratic socialization. It investigates the properties linkage between established democracies and authoritarian regimes needs to have in order to shape the attitude of state officials toward democratic governance. By looking at bureaucrats employed in a stable authoritarian regime, a group of actors is selected that plays a crucial role in sustaining authoritarian rule or eventually implementing democratic change from within the state apparatus. Using original survey data covering the attitude of 150 Moroccan state officials, this study employs cross-sectional, multiple regression analyses, which allow determining the socialization effect of transnational influences. The paper obtains strong support for the contact hypothesis: Linkage needs to be targeted, structured and interpersonal as to socialize individuals from non-democratic regimes into democratic governance. This research provides important insights into the micro-mechanisms underlying processes of norm diffusion and political transition in authoritarian regimes.

*Key words:* Arab authoritarian regimes; democratic change; functional cooperation; international socialization; linkage; norm diffusion.