

# Democracy

Definitions:

The rule by many (as opposed to Monarchy, or Oligarchy – Aristotle).

Form of government exhibiting high levels of contestation and participation (Robert Dahl).

Form of government in which “who rules” is decided by elections.(Przeworski)

# Democracy is rare

- By any definition, Democracy is historically rare, though recently, it appears ubiquitous.

# What explains why some countries are democratic and others are not?

- Cultural explanations
- Social/Economic explanations
- Institutional Explanation

# Cultural explanations

- Democracy depends on certain attitudes (equality, individual freedom, non-violent conflict resolution, “rule of law”, etc.) that are alledged to be inherent in cultures and inconsistent with others.

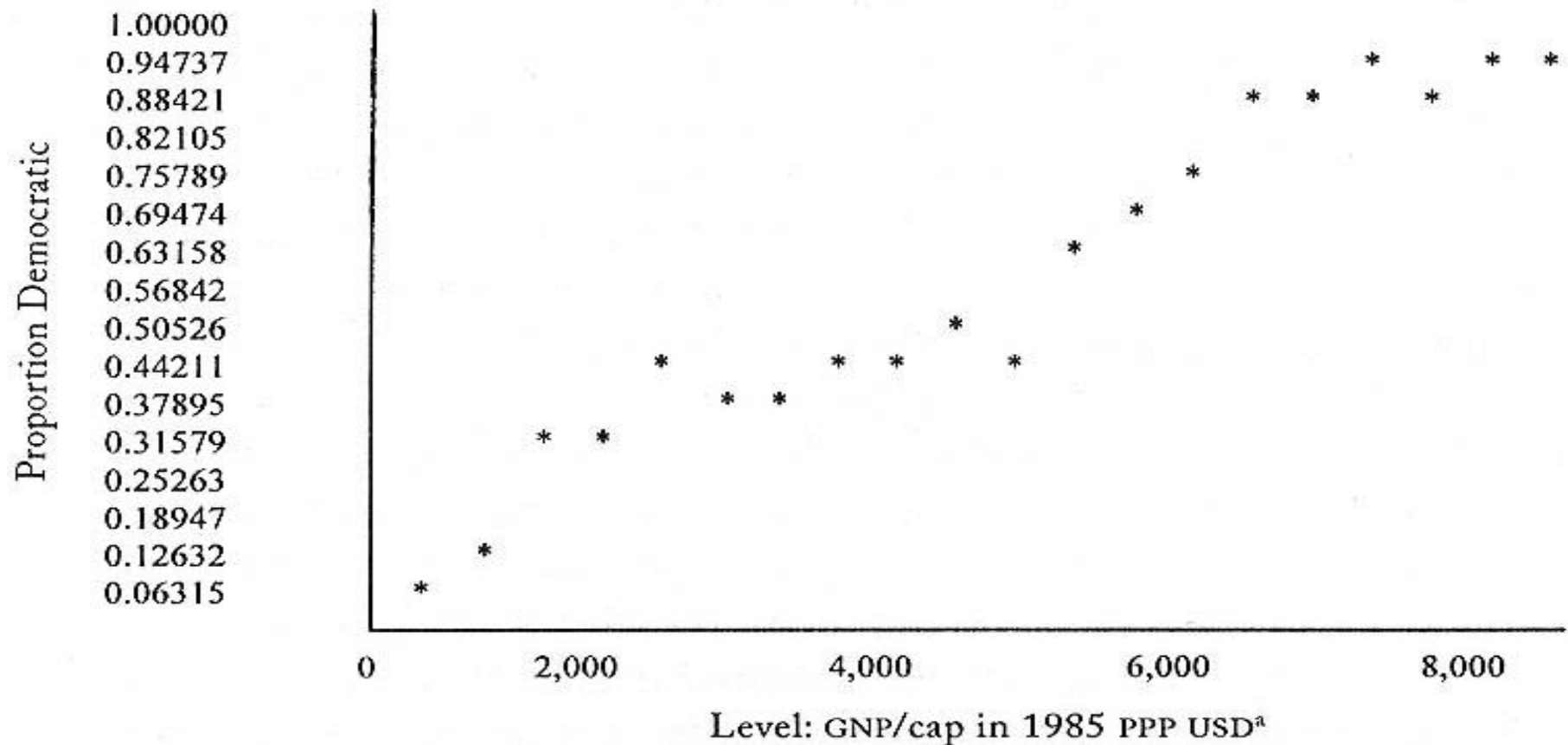
# Social/Economic Explanations

- Modernization Theory
- Class Analysis

# Modernization Theory

- Societies develop through a series of stages

# Strong Relationship between wealth and democracy



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Source: Przeworski and Limongi (1997)

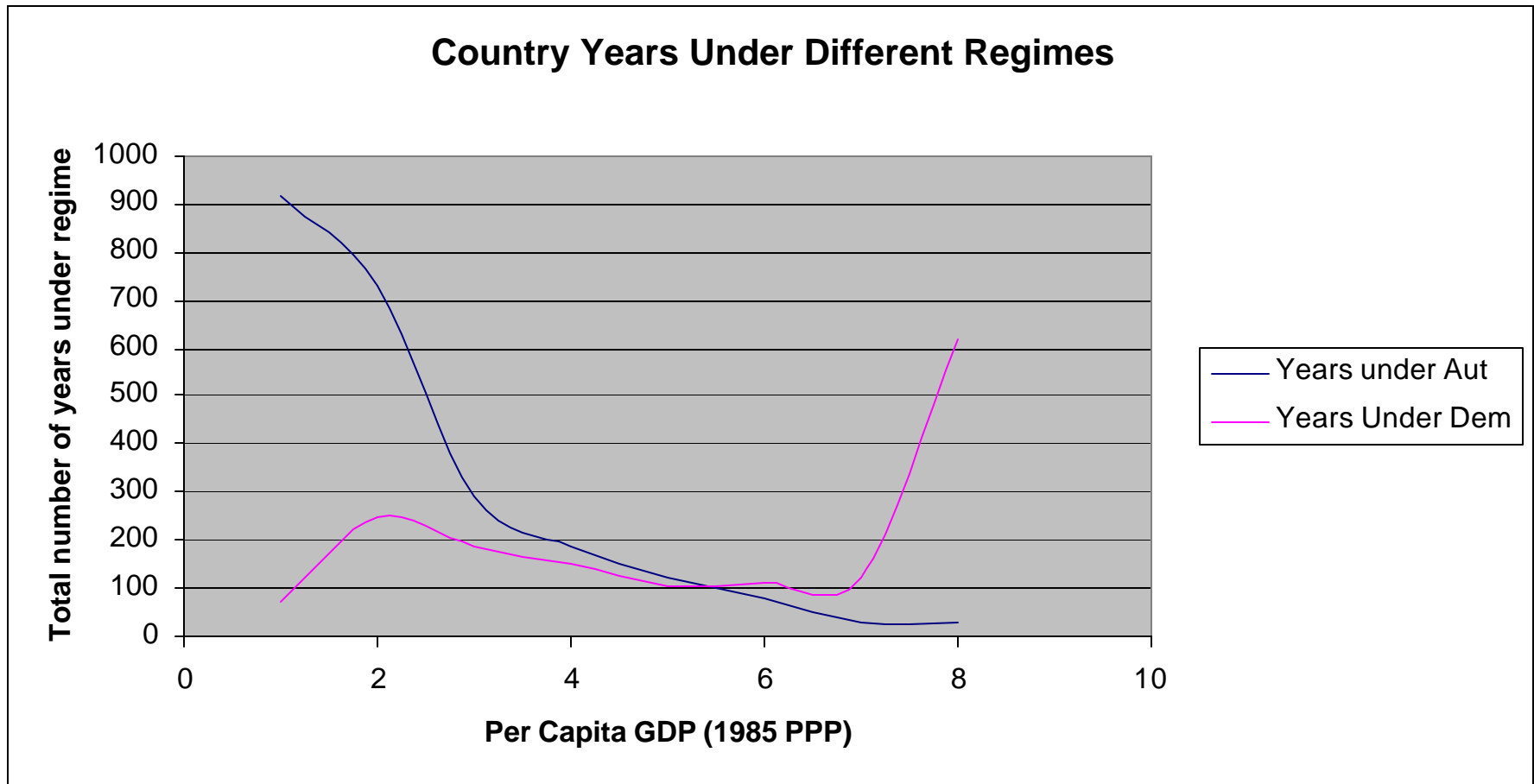
## But is this because:

- Countries are more likely to become democratic as they become rich .... Or
- Countries that become democratic are more likely to *stay* democratic if they are rich

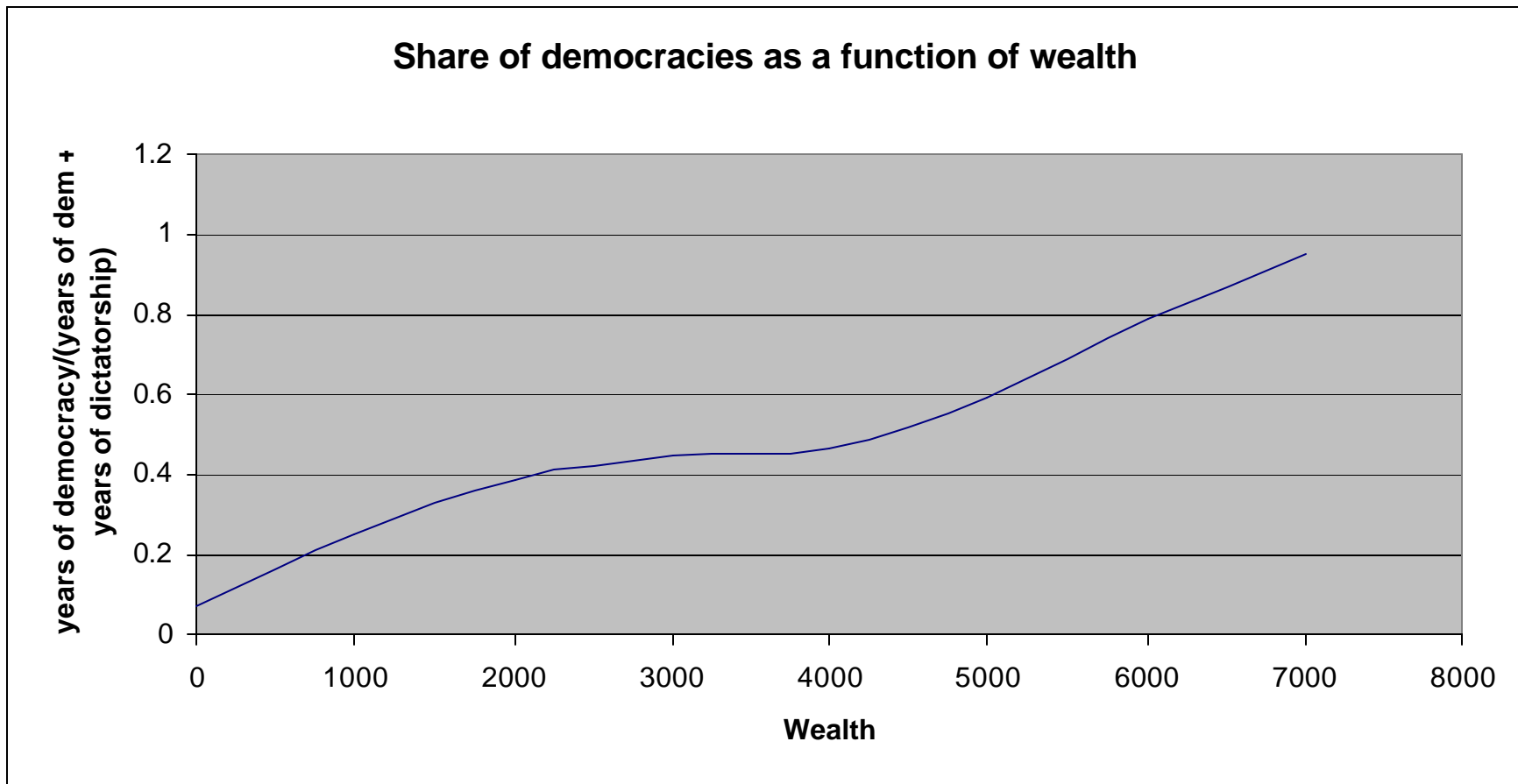
# Modernization Theory

- As (countries) develop, social structure becomes complex, labor processes begin to require active cooperation of employees, and new groups emerge and organize. As a result, the system can no longer be effectively run by command: the society is too complex, technological change endows the direct producers with some autonomy and private information, civil society emerges, and dictatorial forms of control lose their effectiveness. (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997:157).

# Dictatorship is more common in poor countries, Democracy is more common in Rich countries



# Virtually all rich countries are democracies



# These results are consistent with Modernization Theory, but

- Are countries Democratic *because* they got “Rich”?
  - Possible that rich countries have something else that makes them inclined to be democracies, in which case, the observed correlation between wealth and democracy is accidental.

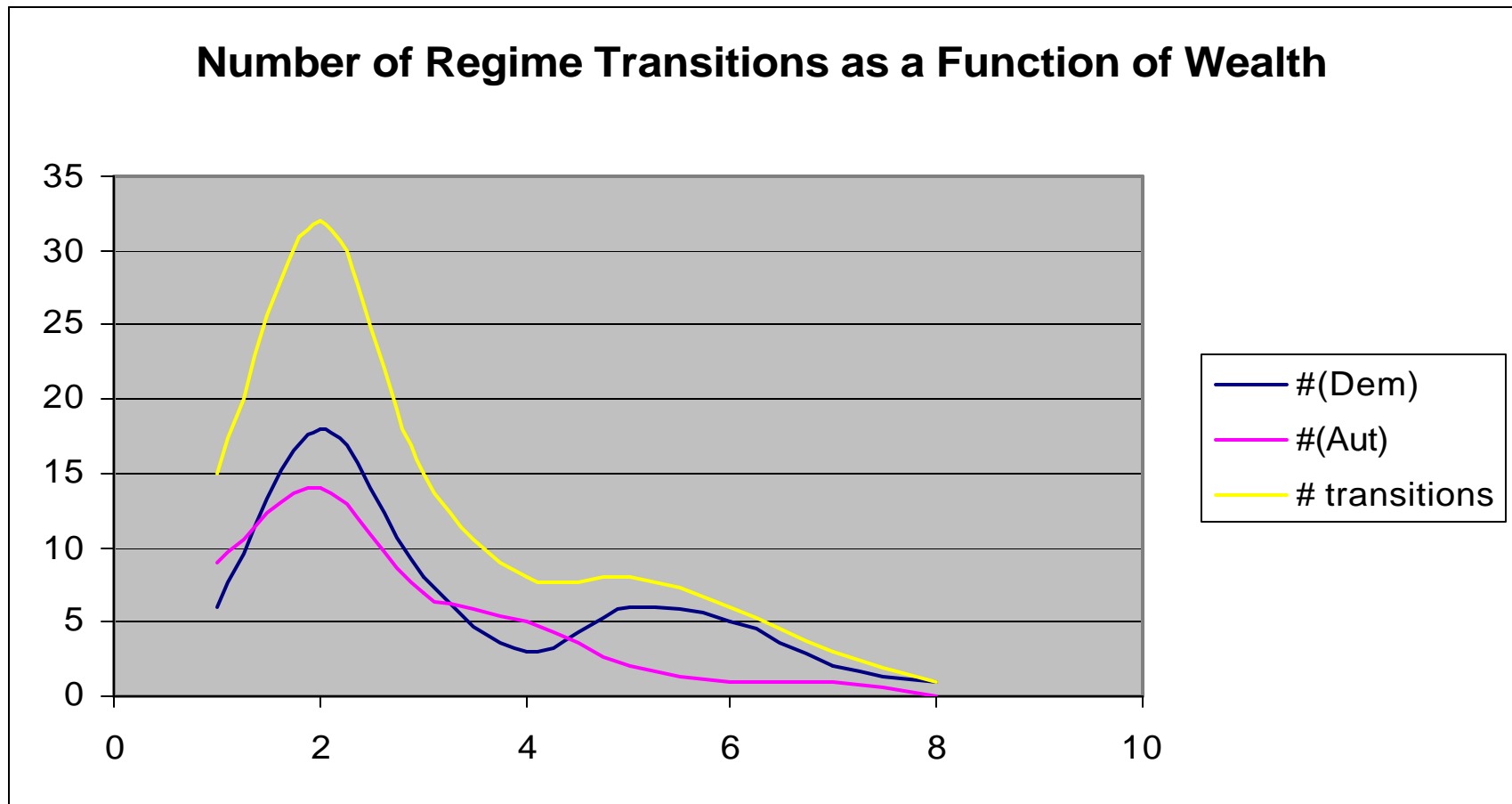
If modernization theory was correct, we would observe

- Poor countries that were stable autocracies until they got sufficiently rich, then they would become democracies.

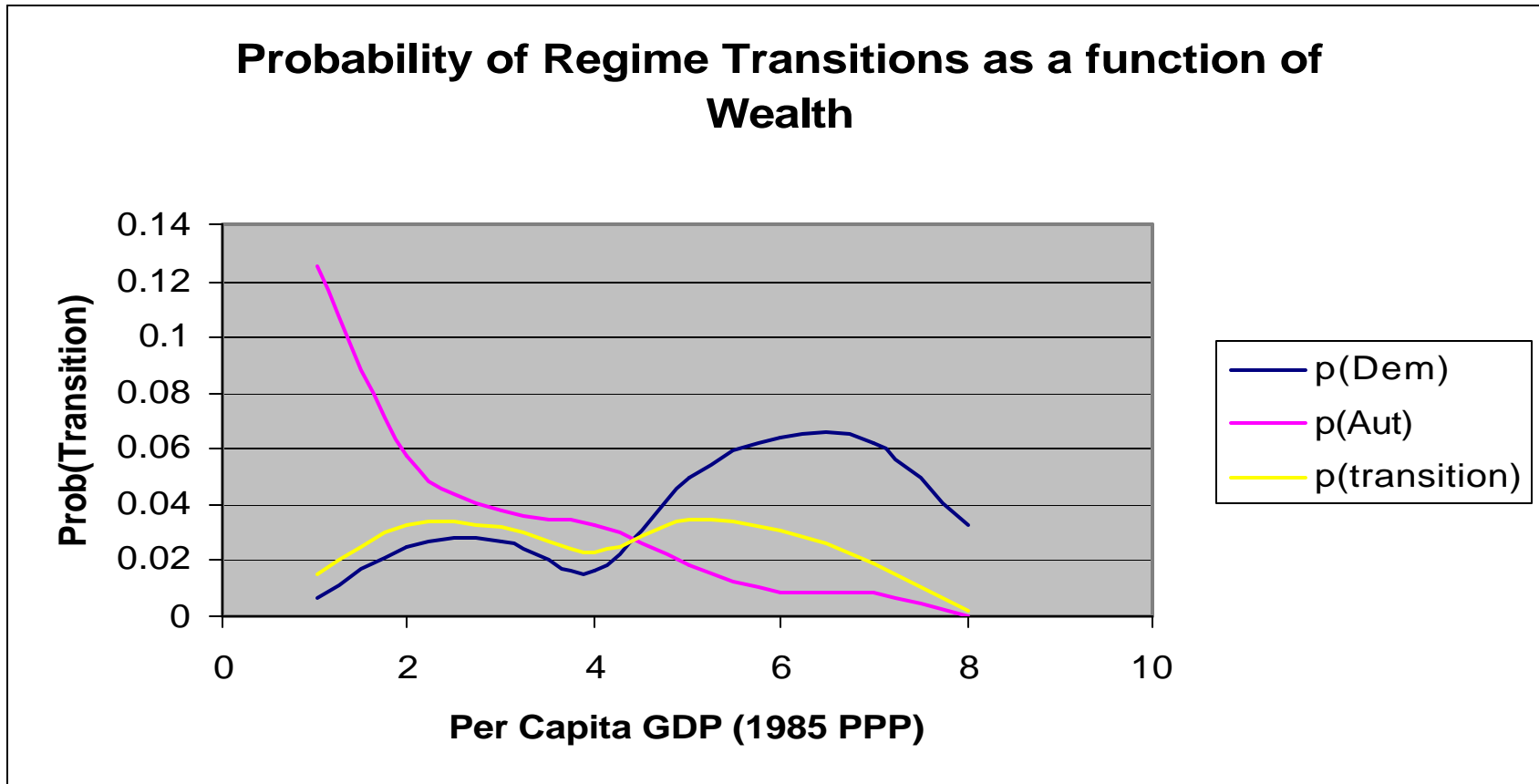
# Alternative Explanations

- Rich countries have more educated people, democracy functions better with an educated electorate.

# Poor countries are not stable



The *kind* of transition a country experiences is a function of wealth — A transition to authoritarianism becomes *less* likely and transition to democracy becomes *more* likely as wealth increases



# So, we observe countries at all levels of development experimenting with democracy

- But if a country is rich and it become democratic (for some reason) it is likely to stay a democracy.
- Rich dictatorships are also more stable than poor dictatorships,
- But because rich democracies are MORE stable than rich dictatorships, rich dictatorships will eventually fail and when they do, they are likely to stay democracies.

# Why are rich democracies stable?

- Choice between democracy and autocracy can be thought of as a choice between a system where you are guaranteed a minimal standard of consumption (democracy), vs. a system where you win or lose everything (autocracy).
- When you have a lot (I.e. when you are rich), getting a bigger share only effects your welfare a little, where as losing everything could be disastrous.

So, if you're rich, autocracy is a big gamble, but when you're poor, its not.

# Alternative explanation

- There are more educated people in rich countries than poor countries.
- Democracy works better when the electorate is educated.
- Therefore, democracies survive because of high levels of education, not wealth.

How would you test this argument?

# Institutional Explanations

- Future lectures