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# Democratization During the Third Wave

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Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci. 2016. 19:125–44

First published online as a Review in Advance on  
January 11, 2016

The *Annual Review of Political Science* is online at  
[polisci.annualreviews.org](http://polisci.annualreviews.org)

This article's doi:  
10.1146/annurev-polisci-042114-015137

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## Keywords

consolidation, democracy, transitions

## Abstract

The initial optimism that greeted the onset of the “Third Wave” of democratization has cooled with the instability of many new democracies and the proliferation of stable competitive authoritarian regimes. These disappointments have produced a return to structural theories emphasizing the constraints posed by underdevelopment, resource endowments, inequality, and ethno-religious cleavages. We argue, however, for a sharper focus on the political mechanisms that link such factors to the emergence of democracy, including the extent of institutionalization in new democracies and the still understudied role of civil society and the capacity for collective action. The international dimensions of democratization also require closer analysis. We also underline a methodological point: The quest for an overarching theory of democracy and democratization may be misguided. Generalizations supported by cross-national statistical work yield numerous anomalies and indicate the need for approaches that emphasize combinations of causal factors, alternative pathways, and equifinality.

## INTRODUCTION

In his 1991 book, Samuel Huntington coined one of the most widely recognized metaphors in recent social science when he argued we were living through a “Third Wave” of democratization. This wave began in the mid-1970s and picked up steam during the winding down of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The direct consequence of the Soviet collapse was the expansion of democracy in some of the breakaway republics of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In addition, the decline of Cold War polarization led indirectly to transitions in military and one-party dictatorships that had previously leveraged support from the rivalry between great powers. The elections held in the wake of these withdrawals fostered considerable optimism—even triumphalism (Fukuyama 1992)—that democracy was on the march and that underdevelopment and other structural factors would not impede its spread.

Thinking about democratization, however, has undergone a substantial shift since this journal published an influential review on the topic 17 years ago (Geddes 1999). By the early 2000s, significant doubts had set in, expressed in especially forceful terms in Carothers’s (2002) important article, “The End of the Transition Paradigm.” Carothers criticized the assumption that structural constraints on democratization could be finessed. He also summarized growing doubts about whether movements away from authoritarian rule would necessarily lead to democracy. During the late Third Wave, many transitions, perhaps even the majority, resulted in what Levitsky & Way (2010) called competitive authoritarian regimes and others labeled illiberal democracies (Diamond 2009; Zakaria 1997, 2007) or semiauthoritarian (Ottaway 2003), electoral authoritarian (Schedler 2002, 2009), and hybrid (Diamond 2002) regimes. These governments held elections and tolerated a limited opposition, but only within narrowly constrained political spaces defined by the incumbents. Equally disturbing, many of the countries that did manage transitions toward democracy proved unable to sustain it. The net increase in the number of democracies during the Third Wave hid substantial churning, with a steady if small stream of reversions to authoritarian rule.

In summary, since the turn of the millennium the empirical landscape has shifted in ways that have expanded this domain of study. We are still interested in explaining transitions to democracy: that is, in identifying the causal factors that give rise to the collapse of authoritarian rule and the onset of political change. Yet more attention is now given to whether the new regimes really cross a democratic threshold and prove durable. Although generally beyond the scope of this review, the growing number of “competitive authoritarian” regimes has generated a cognate literature on their causes and prospects, with an increasing recognition that they may constitute a persistent equilibrium outcome (see Magaloni & Kricheli 2010 for a review).

How has this changed empirical landscape affected theorizing about democratization? Perhaps the most important trend is a strong resurgence of structural theories emphasizing factors such as level of development, resource endowments, inequality, and ethnic or religious heterogeneity. A long-standing weakness of these theories, however, is their inattention to the mechanisms linking structural factors to regime change and democratic stability. We argue that this gap calls for a greater emphasis on a variety of political factors that received little attention in both earlier generations of work on democratization and the new structural approaches. These include the impact of authoritarian institutions (Geddes 1999), the nature—and extent—of institutionalization in new democracies, and the still understudied role of civil society and capacities for collective action in the democratization process.

Another response to the changed theoretical landscape has been a much greater attention to the array of international factors that might impinge on democratization and democracy, from the structural features of the international system to overt leverage and diffusion processes. This concern is by no means limited to the academy. Policy concerns include the efficacy of democracy

promotion efforts and the emergence of an antidemocratic countermovement by major authoritarian governments, including those in China, Russia, Iran, Venezuela, and Saudi Arabia.

This article is organized primarily around these clusters of causal factors: the new structuralism, political and bargaining models of transition and consolidation, and the growing literature on international influences on democratization and democracy. A central theme is that the quest for an overarching theory of democracy and democratization—a taproot—is probably misguided. Even generalizations supported by cross-national empirical work, such as the effects of development, must accommodate numerous anomalies. These findings suggest that greater attention should be given to alternative methodological approaches that emphasize combinations of causal factors, alternative pathways, and equifinality.

We begin with a discussion of what we mean by transitions, stability, and reversions. These issues are both theoretical and empirical, as the field has generated a growing body of cross-national empirical work that ultimately hinges on how democracy is coded. We conclude with a vexing normative question: If improved accountability through democratic processes does not succeed in delivering public goods, should democratization be sequenced to place greater emphasis on strengthening basic government institutions first?

## DEFINING THE OUTCOMES: TRANSITIONS TO WHAT?

Early work on the Third Wave (Przeworski 1991, Schmitter & O'Donnell 1986) began with the assumption that the main puzzle to be explained was the collapse of authoritarian rule, defined as the exit of incumbents. To be sure, there were debates about whether such exits were negotiated or not and the power that outgoing elites might exercise over the new democratic order (Di Palma 1990, Garreton Merino 1995, Karl 1990, Linz & Stepan 1996). Transitions were nonetheless largely conceived as the explicit or tacit negotiations over authoritarian exit, typically capped by the staging of transitional or founding elections for chief executives and legislatures.

The concept of democracy used in this literature was also largely procedural, with elections as its defining feature. But elections are only one dimension of democratic rule, and even the electoral component requires nuance. Electoral democracies require a relatively level playing field (Levitsky & Way 2010), and incumbents must surrender office if they lose. But broader definitions of liberal democracy also take into account the importance of horizontal checks on executive power (Schedler 1999), the guarantee of civil and political liberties, and even citizen commitments to democracy as an intrinsic value (Diamond 2009).

A crucial characteristic of the Third Wave is that a large number of transitions resulted in regimes that fell short of this more expansive definition. Some authoritarian incumbents initiated transitions with the purpose of sustaining autocratic rule through partial liberalization. Some new incumbents exploited the advantages of office to marginalize oppositions. Regardless of how they have come into being, such regimes should be considered on their own terms, not as imperfect democracies on a longer-term transition path to democracy. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss this process, which has already been subject to review, including in this journal (Magaloni & Kricheli 2010). But the phenomenon is germane because it demonstrates how core features of our very definition of democracy, such as elections and legislatures, can become instruments of authoritarian domination (Gandhi 2008, Gandhi & Przeworski 2007, Levitsky & Way 2010, Magaloni 2006, Svoboda 2012).

The deeper understanding of the dynamics of competitive authoritarian rule spawned a rethinking of the object of inquiry. Should we be focusing on transitions if transitional regimes subsequently revert? Or should the focus shift back to the elusive subject of consolidation (Linz & Stepan 1996)? Consolidation might be considered in either qualitative or quantitative terms. A

qualitative approach (e.g., Diamond 2009) focuses on the substantive differences between electoral democracies and those that are liberal, putting greater weight on the measurement of civil liberties and citizens' attitudes toward—and commitment to—democracy. A quantitative approach, by contrast, would focus primarily on the question of sheer survival or persistence, independent of the threshold adopted to define a regime as democratic. In effect, the propensity to revert became the testing ground for theories of consolidation. The question was, what makes democratic rule stable?

These debates raised important methodological issues. In a particularly important contribution, Svolik (2008) uses statistical techniques to distinguish between consolidated democracies, in which the chance of reversion is effectively zero, and transitional democracies, in which there is some positive probability that they will revert. Once this distinction is drawn, it is possible to address whether the factors that contribute to consolidation (i.e., zero likelihood of reversal) are different from those that lead to reversion. We take up those causal processes in more detail below, but the short answer is that Svolik finds that they do in fact differ: Consolidation is affected positively by economic development and negatively by presidentialism and prior military coups; reversals of nonconsolidated democracies are driven by economic performance. Beyond the specific substantive effects, the implications of this insight are wide-ranging. Svolik suggests that the dominant approach of pooling the entire sample of cases may be misguided; we need to consider the possibility that subsamples of transitions might be driven by divergent causal processes.

These problems were not simply conceptual but extended to the methodological question of how cases are coded. Cross-national panel designs are beholden to the country-year structure. In our study of transitions (Haggard & Kaufman 2012), we found a surprising divergence between the dataset on democratization used by Cheibub et al. (2010; following Alvarez et al. 1996) and the one used by the Polity Project (Marshall et al. 2010). Cheibub and colleagues provide a minimalist dichotomous measure of regime change that hinges on the staging of free elections and the evidence of subsequent turnover.<sup>1</sup> The Polity score is a continuous metric (−10 to +10) that takes into account the broader political framework, including the regulation, competitiveness, and openness of chief executive recruitment; checks on executive discretion, including through the judiciary or the legislature; and the competitiveness of participation, including the protection of political liberties.<sup>2</sup> Even if we permit a two-year window to avoid differences based solely on timing,<sup>3</sup> only 55.4% of the transitions identified by Cheibub and colleagues are also Polity cases. Moreover, 21 of the 65 transitions in Cheibub et al. (2010) had Polity scores of less than 6, suggesting that they are more rightly understood as transitions to competitive authoritarianism at best. These differences are compounded as datasets proliferate, each capturing subtly different transitional processes (e.g., Boix et al. 2013, Goemans et al. 2009, Norris 2008, Vanhanen 2003),

<sup>1</sup>More precisely, the definition of democracy hinges on four coding rules: The chief executive is elected in popular elections; the lower house in the legislature is popularly elected; there is more than one party; and there is turnover. With respect to the last desideratum, countries are coded authoritarian if “the incumbents will have or already have held office continuously by virtue of elections for more than two terms or have held office without being elected for any duration of their current tenure in office, and until today or until the time when they were overthrown they had not lost an election” (Przeworski et al. 2000, p. 23; see also pp. 19–20, 28).

<sup>2</sup>More precisely, the Polity “dem-auth” scale is based on the following component variables: the regulation of chief executive recruitment (XRREG); the competitiveness of executive recruitment (XRCOMP); the openness of executive recruitment and the independence of executive authority (XOPEN); executive constraints, political competition, and opposition (XCONST); and the regulation (PARREG) and competitiveness (PARCOMP) of participation. The last variable captures the protection of political and civil liberties and thus constitutes one of the more important differences with the Cheibub et al. dataset, which relies on the existence of an opposition party alone.

<sup>3</sup>It should be noted that for capturing the effects of short-run shocks, even these small differences of coding can be consequential (see Burke & Leigh 2010).

in some cases nuanced down to the regional level (Mainwaring et al. 2001). Caveat emptor! In what follows, we focus on a number of claims made in this empirical literature. But as an ample literature has now shown, the results obtained using different measures, even if highly correlated, may not prove robust (Casper & Tufis 2003, Elkins 2000).

## THE RETURN OF STRUCTURAL THEORIES

The ebbing of optimism about the “crafting” (Di Palma 1990) of stable democracies coincided with a return of structural theories emphasizing conditions beyond the immediate control of both domestic and foreign political actors. But what background conditions expand or narrow the options for democratic development most decisively? There is much less consensus on this issue than might be expected. Democratization is a relatively rare event. As a result, even average treatment-effect findings that receive substantial empirical support in cross-national quantitative research are vulnerable to the existence of a surprising number of anomalies. This suggests the need for complementary qualitative analysis focusing more closely on necessary and sufficient conditions and alternative causal pathways (Collier 1999, Haggard & Kaufman 2012, Mahoney 2001, Wood 2000). There is also renewed interest in conditional effects: that is, how any given structural factor (e.g., ethnic fragmentation) may be mediated by other parameters (e.g., the design of the electoral system). We begin with a number of political economy models of democratization—those looking to the effects of level of development, inequality and class conflict, and resource endowments—before turning to the surprisingly understudied question of the relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and democracy. In all of these bodies of work, an enduring question is how structural factors ultimately link to politics, a topic we pursue in the next section.

One of the most notable developments in recent debates on democratization is the resurgence of modernization theory. We now have much more refined testing of Lipset’s (1959, 1960) observation of a strong (cross-sectional) correlation between democracy and level of development, although still with relatively little attention to the mechanisms through which it may operate. The return of this debate initially revolved around the issue of whether the level of development had any influence on transitions to democratic rule. Przeworski et al. (2000) argued that it did not, partly because of their focus on the postwar period, during which transitions spread across the developing world. Przeworski et al. were subsequently challenged by Boix & Stokes (2003), who argued that a longer-term perspective incorporating the early European transitions in fact confirmed the relationship between level of development and authoritarian withdrawal (see also Epstein et al. 2006, Kennedy 2010).

There was a much stronger consensus that development is associated with the consolidation of democratic rule. Przeworski et al. (2000) famously show that no democracy has ever reverted above a per capita GDP of \$6,055, Argentina’s level in 1975. Boix (2011) shows that this result was even stronger in the post-Cold War period, when the international system was dominated—at least for a time—by a liberal hegemon, reducing the drag of geostrategic and ideological rivalries on these long-run structural factors.

It followed from this analysis, conversely, that democracies are much more likely to fail in the poorer countries that transitioned during the second half of the Third Wave. However, a considerable number of poor democracies survived for substantial periods. Benin, which transited in 1991, for example, remained democratic through the first decade of the twenty-first century. Other relatively poor success stories from diverse regions include Mongolia (since 1992), El Salvador (since at least 1990), Ghana (since 1993), the Dominican Republic (since 1994), and Moldova (since 1993). To be sure, these findings depend on a narrow definition of democracy,

primarily based on the existence of competitive elections and government turnovers. Still, the survival of these core democratic institutions is puzzling for structural theories. In a number of other cases—including Bolivia (1980), Dominican Republic (1994), Sri Lanka (2003), and Ukraine (1993)—reversions occurred in low-income countries but proved short lived. Just as democratic transitions should not be considered a prelude to consolidation, so reversions sometimes reflected short-term bumps on the path to a more democratic rule. These low-income survivors suggest that even the most basic structural impediments such as level of development may only have conditional effects.

Among the other structural theories that have received mixed support, perhaps the most theoretically novel are widely cited formal models of the relationship between inequality and transitions to and from democratic rule (Acemoglu & Robinson 2006, Boix 2003). These models are in line with earlier, more sociological approaches to democracy that see authoritarian rule as a means of sustaining class inequalities (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). The formal approaches make different predictions about whether transitions are more likely to occur at low (Boix 2003) or intermediate (Acemoglu & Robinson 2006) levels of inequality, but they concur that authoritarian elites have a strong incentive to defend their prerogatives by resorting to repression when income and assets are highly concentrated. They also concur that authoritarian coalitions are more likely to overthrow democracies when inequality is high and governments are engaged in redistribution.

Boix (2003, 2013) presents evidence for the effects of inequality, as do some other large-N studies (Freeman & Quinn 2012). However, Acemoglu & Robinson do not present systematic evidence for their claims in their 2006 book (or elsewhere), and later even they cast doubt on the empirical evidence (Acemoglu et al. 2013). Others, including most notably Houle (2009), Ahlquist & Wibbels (2012), and Haggard & Kaufman (2012, 2016), find no significant relationship between inequality, distributive conflict, and democratic transitions. Houle (2009) does find evidence that democratic stability can be undermined by inequality, but qualitative evidence provided by Haggard and Kaufman casts doubt on whether these reversions can be traced to the causal mechanisms stipulated in class conflict theories (Haggard & Kaufman 2012, 2016).

A possible alternative to these class-conflict models of democratization—dating back to Moore (1966)—focuses on the balance of power between traditional agricultural elites and rising commercial classes. This proposition has been restated most recently in important work by Ansell & Samuels (2014). Drawing inspiration from the European record, they argue that democratization is inversely related to the concentration of ownership in land, but it is positively associated with increases in income inequality that reflect commercialization and the rise of new social classes. Although this is a strong statement that comes from an important historical tradition in the study of democracy, its relevance is harder to map in contemporary postcommunist and developing countries in which the class structure is more fragmented, the strength of the bourgeoisie is limited, and its political orientation is ambiguous.

This is not to say that inequality has no effect on the quality of democratic rule, including the accountability of the government to the public. Indeed, this is an important research program in its own right. Highly concentrated income and wealth can pervert the functioning of democracy via vote-buying and clientelism (Stokes et al. 2013, Weitz-Shapiro 2014). In weak democracies and semicompetitive authoritarian regimes, campaign contributions, direct access to political office, bribery, and control of cultural and communication institutions all contribute to the elites' control over electoral outcomes, public policy, and even mass culture (Rueschemeyer 2004, Solt et al. 2011). Nonetheless, as pernicious as the effects of high inequality might be, evidence that they extend to the actual demise of democratic rule is limited.



Another political economy theory of democracy centers on the effects of natural endowments and particularly resource rents. The so-called resource curse—especially wealth in oil and other minerals—has long been thought to impede democratic development because it offers rulers a source of revenue that does not depend on the consent of the population (Ross 2001, 2013). In fact, oil wealth has sustained not only the well-known Middle East autocracies of Saudi Arabia and Iran, but also competitive authoritarian regimes in countries as diverse as Russia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, and—until its late-1990s transition—Indonesia.

Again, however, inferences about the causal effects of resource endowments must be drawn with caution. Cross-national empirical tests of the resource curse suffer from selection bias, because they exclude resource-rich countries that successfully diversified their economies over time and as a result escaped the purported curse (Kurtz & Brooks 2011). An important but contested paper by Haber & Menaldo (2011; see also Andersen & Ross 2013) argues that there is no relationship between the appearance of resource rents and subsequent political developments: Democracies are likely to stay democratic, authoritarian regimes authoritarian. Dunning (2008) even shows how oil mineral wealth can bolster democratic regimes by softening conflicts over distribution. None of these studies is likely to close the door on research into the effects of natural resources, but they all suggest that the effects of natural resource rents are heavily conditioned by other social, political, and institutional factors.

A final and somewhat different structural determinant of democratization—sociostructural in this case—is the influence of ethnic heterogeneity and the presence of conflicts over national identity and citizenship. In his classic essay on democratic transitions, Rustow (1970, pp. 350–51) argued that agreement over national citizenship was the “single background condition” of significance in his otherwise voluntaristic model. Conflicts over national identity were not deeply implicated in the early Third Wave democratizers in Southern Europe, Latin America, and (for the most part) Central Europe and East Asia; not coincidentally, most of these democracies ultimately consolidated. However, the issue of nationality proved far more unsettling in societies that emerged from the disintegration of multiethnic empires, such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, or in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East that retained arbitrarily drawn boundaries from the colonial era. Azerbaijan, Serbia, and Croatia, the failed transitions in the Arab Middle East, and deeper state failures in ethnically divided countries such as Rwanda provide examples. As the Third Wave spread, a literature emerged about whether democracy would generate heightened conflict in ethnically heterogeneous societies as opportunistic political entrepreneurs exploited these cleavages for electoral gain (Lake & Rothchild 1996) or even international aims (Mansfield & Snyder 1995, 2005).

We were surprised to find, however, how few cross-national quantitative tests exist of the proposition that ethnic fragmentation impedes democracy. As with inequality, the lack of data is a constraint, and there is an ongoing debate about how to measure the concept (Alesina et al. 2003, Cederman et al. 2013). But the few extant tests suggest an indeterminacy similar to that found in other structural theories. Fish & Brooks (2004) and Fish & Kroenig (2006) show that ethnic heterogeneity does not necessarily destabilize democracy, and that any effects disappear altogether with economic development. Saideman et al. (2002) show that as a general proposition, the relationship running from democratization to increased ethnic conflict—and thus to possible destabilization of democracy—does not hold either. We even identify a cluster of transitional cases, including the Baltics and South Africa, in which ethnic conflicts may actually have propelled democratization (Haggard & Kaufman 2016).

The lack of a relationship between ethnic fragmentation and democratic stability is probably due to the intervention of political institutions and how ethnicity is organized and expressed.

Indeed, the most intense research tradition on the topic has focused not on the effects of ethnic divisions per se but on how electoral institutions mitigate or exacerbate such conflicts.<sup>4</sup> Put differently, the effects of ethnic fragmentation are conditional.

In summary, pessimism breeds structuralism. Although debates over the structural determinants of democratization and democratic stability will undoubtedly continue, attempts to anchor the rise and fall of democracy to underlying socioeconomic factors are likely to remain incomplete at best. The odds may be stacked against democracies that emerge in poor countries; and inequality, resource rents, and ethnic heterogeneity may ultimately prove to have at least conditional effects on democracy as well. But an enduring problem with explanations based on structural factors is how to connect their slow dynamics with the short-run political and institutional dynamics that matter for regime change and stability. Except perhaps in extreme cases, the structural approaches reviewed here fall well short of specifying necessary or sufficient conditions for transition or the consolidation of democratic rule. This zone of indeterminacy has given rise to a quite distinct theoretical countercurrent focusing on institutional, political, and conjunctural factors.

## INSTITUTIONAL, POLITICAL, AND CONJUNCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF DEMOCRACY

These institutional factors begin with the authoritarian status quo ante. Geddes (1999) built on earlier observations by Przeworski (1991) to argue that military regimes might be more vulnerable to failure than single-party or personalistic regimes (Dimitrov 2013, Hadenius & Teorell 2007, Magaloni & Kricheli 2010). Military officers have the option of returning to the barracks when support of a military government strains corporate cohesion.<sup>5</sup> Politicians in ruling parties and personal dictatorships have exit options that are much less appealing.

Further theoretical and empirical refinements along these lines drew the crucial distinction between true one-party systems and dominant party systems that allow limited electoral contestation. Competitive authoritarian regimes have shorter life spans than one-party states but live longer than military ones. But once such regimes do fall, the earlier reliance on democratic forms and the incremental process of change make it more likely that transitions will result in democracies that survive (Brownlee 2009; Hadenius & Teorell 2007, p. 153).

Whatever the influence of prior institutions, we still need an understanding of how democracies actually fail; this question shifts the focus from the authoritarian status quo ante to the nature of the new democratic institutions themselves. For much of the Third Wave, the question of democratic failure was considered more or less synonymous with the question of the military's involvement in politics and the deeper issue of how civilians could establish control over actors monopolizing the means of coercion (for a review, see Feaver 1999). But one of the striking features of the last several decades is the declining incidence of coups, possibly due to the end of Cold War sponsorship of military dictatorships (Clark 2007, Lehoucq & Pérez-Liñán 2013, Posner & Young 2007). Rather, a growing share of democratic failures during the Third Wave have emerged from the efforts by

<sup>4</sup>The consociational approach pioneered by Lijphart argues that maximizing representation and accommodating ethnic diversity is stabilizing (Lijphart 1990, 2004). According to this approach, political institutions such as proportional representation and even mandated representation of minorities can solve the problem. In contrast, Horowitz (1985, 1994) and Reilly (2001, 2011) seek to build multiethnic parties or coalitions rather than emphasize ethnic divides.

<sup>5</sup>Paradoxically, despite the relative fragility of military regimes, there is fairly strong evidence suggesting that a history of praetorianism subsequently poses challenges to the consolidation of democratic rule as well. Once the military has been politicized—even if it chooses to return to the barracks—the costs of reentering politics are lower, and civilian actors may even play a role in inviting its return (Lehoucq & Pérez-Liñán 2009, 2013; Londregan & Poole 1990; Svobik 2008).



incumbents to exploit state resources to remain in power, by stacking the electoral deck, reducing horizontal checks, distributing rents, and attacking and undermining loyal oppositions, a process we call backsliding (Maeda 2010, Haggard & Kaufman 2016).

These processes raised the question of what institutional features of new democratic orders might make them vulnerable. The first generation of the democratization literature paid considerable attention to formal institutions and particularly to how presidential and parliamentary constitutions affect incentives to cooperate in or defect from the democratic rules of the game. That tradition has continued and deepened into a normal-science research program. However, the simple dichotomy between these constitutional types has long been in doubt (Haggard & McCubbins 2001, Mainwaring & Shugart 1997, Shugart & Carey 1992), and their effects are highly dependent on other variables such as executive powers and the nature of the party and electoral systems. Empirical support, moreover, has been mixed. Przeworski et al. (1996, 2000), building on Linz (1994), provided evidence of the positive effects of parliamentarism, and Svoblik (2008) has more recently restated the risks of presidentialism. Other studies, however, turn up no significant differences (Boix 2003, Cheibub 2007, Cheibub & Limongi 2002, Power & Gasiorowski 1997, Saideman et al. 2002, Sing 2010).

For many new democracies, we would argue, the problem is not formal constitutional arrangements but the fact that these arrangements have few constraining effects on either incumbents or oppositions. In transitional situations, the actors' commitment to new institutions is highly uncertain. The complex web of formal rules codified in new constitutions has consequences that cannot be foreseen *ex ante* by powerful actors; consequently, they are frequently changed or simply ignored. As Huntington (1968) emphasized nearly five decades ago, what matters in politics is not only the design of institutions but also the degree of institutionalization (Levitsky & Murillo 2009).

Institutionalization can be conceived as the degree to which the repeated strategic interactions among major political actors, including parties, are stable and predictable, coordinating common expectations (see also Higley & Burton 1989). Weakly institutionalized democracies are characterized by strategic interactions that are not simply fluid or *ad hoc* but resemble a classic security dilemma.<sup>6</sup> Incumbents are unwilling or unable to make credible commitments to oppositions, and they pursue their political and personal interests by ignoring, changing, or undermining constitutional constraints. Expectations of such behavior similarly shape the strategies of oppositions, increasing the perception that losses in the constitutional game will lead to permanent marginalization and creating incentives to ignore constitutional checks and mobilize extraconstitutional resources, including violence.

There are a number of routes through which such weak institutionalization leads to the undermining or overthrow of democratic rule, beginning with weak checks on the arrogation of power by incumbents (Kapstein & Converse 2008a,b; Maeda 2010; Schedler 2009). In poorly institutionalized systems, incumbents use the temporary advantages of office to permanently weaken oppositions. By weakening oppositions, they also undermine the social foundations of institutional checks on executive discretion. They can achieve this by engineering constitutional changes that strengthen executive authority and limit the power of institutions of horizontal accountability, including not only legislatures and judiciaries, but also opposition parties, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the media. The weakening of checks on executive discretion has an important political economy dimension. Corruption, fraud, and abuse of office are routine features of incumbency in weakly institutionalized systems. Unchecked control over revenues, the budget,

<sup>6</sup>We are indebted to James Long for this point; see also Cohen (1994) and Colomer (2000).

state-owned assets, and foreign exchange permits executives to deploy the powers of incumbency to marginalize oppositions.

A second feature of weakly institutionalized democracies that makes them vulnerable to reversal is the pursuit of politics through extraconstitutional means. For incumbents, these means include extrajudicial harassment, repression, and detention of opponents, often defended on majoritarian grounds. These abuses extend to the mobilization of violence to quell dissent, whether through the armed forces, the police, or irregular militias. Oppositions respond accordingly, mobilizing social forces and using violence to offset the constraints associated with playing by the rules (Cohen 1994, Colomer 2000, Huntington 1968).

Finally, ongoing contestation over the rules and the resort to extraconstitutional politics impede the capacity of weakly institutionalized democracies to undertake coherent policy, and most significantly economic policy. To be sure, not all economic crises during the Third Wave were endogenous to politics, nor have they necessarily been fatal; new democracies in Latin America and Eastern Europe survived devastating economic meltdowns during the 1980s and 1990s in part because these catastrophes could be tied to the policy failures of authoritarian predecessors. Nevertheless, a number of studies have identified economic crisis as a major source of democratic failure (Burke & Leigh 2010, Gasiorowski 1995, Przeworski et al. 2000, Svobik 2008). Moreover, it is clear that in many important cases (e.g., Venezuela in the late 1990s), these crises are endogenous to politics—the result of political stalemates (Alesina & Drazen 1991), the political economy factors noted above, and the sheer incapacity and fecklessness of the government.

As we have outlined in earlier work (Haggard & Kaufman 1995), the mechanisms through which economic crises might lead to regime change operate both directly, through the decline in output and employment, and indirectly, through the effects of policy responses to crises; contentious macroeconomic stabilization and structural adjustment efforts are typically combined. First, crises trigger elite defections, but this is not because the state is engaged in excessive redistribution; rather, policy reforms undercut elite interests by stripping away policy rents. Second, crises generate more general disaffection among the public, and they can even generate popular support for authoritarian rule (as in Peru in 1992 or in Niger in 1996). Finally, economic crises also have a more immediate effect on the ability of democratic governments to maintain the loyalty of civil servants and militaries through the obvious channel of declining fiscal capacity.

How can the deterioration of democracy associated with weak institutionalization be prevented, particularly when the structural odds are stacked against success? Mutual assurance strategies among civilian and military elites are clearly an important component of political stability, and they occupied a prominent place in the earlier democratization literature (Di Palma 1990, Rustow 1970, Schmitter & O'Donnell 1986). But as Carothers's (2002) critique of the transition paradigm implies, explanations based exclusively on elite strategies are too voluntaristic and fail to identify the incentives that reinforce commitments to the democratic rules of the game.

One important line of research along these lines focuses less on large-scale constitutional design than on more specific institutional innovations that signal to relevant political and social actors that red lines are being crossed. Kapstein & Converse (2008a,b) argue that institutional restraints on the executive matter for the consolidation of democratic rule. In a complementary approach, Fish (2006) looks at the formal powers of legislatures. Constitutional courts also provide horizontal checks (Epstein et al. 2001, Ginsburg 2003), and electoral commissions have received substantial attention as crucial institutions for the integrity of democratic processes (see, e.g., Eisenstadt 2004).

Constitutional term limits provide a useful example of an apparently small institution that can have substantial effect. Incumbents can—and often do—find ways to circumvent these limits. However, institutions do not operate merely through the formal political checks that they provide. Rather, institutions and the norms they embody have effect because violations of them are highly

visible acts that register clearly with international actors, oppositions, and even rivals or potential successors within ruling parties (Baturu 2014). Maltz (2007) surveyed competitive authoritarian regimes between 1992 and 2006 and found that whereas incumbents retained power in 93% of the elections that they contested, their successors were much less likely to prevail, winning just 52% of the time. Strikingly, these findings carry over to low-income African subsamples. In one of the more comprehensive tests, covering all African elections from 1990 to 2009, Cheeseman (2010) finds that opposition parties were almost four times more likely to win nonfounding elections in which the incumbent had stood down. Even when incumbent parties won, moreover, their margin of victory fell by 10% in open-seat polls (see also Posner & Young 2007).

An important hypothesis emerges from these studies: Executives are more likely to be restrained by “parchment institutions” (Carey 2000) if violations of them provoke a backlash from opposition parties and active civil societies. Robust opposition parties, of course, constitute the first line of defense, and their role can be enhanced by electoral laws and legislative thresholds that inhibit the dominance of majority parties. But in weak institutional environments where adherence to constitutional rules remains problematic, political accountability may also depend heavily on the underlying strength and political orientation of civil society: independent social organizations, organized interest groups, and private sectors.

The role of mass mobilization in democratic transitions might seem obvious, but outside of a handful of earlier studies on “prairie fire” or information-cascade models of protest (Kuran 1989, Lohmann 1994), it is only now receiving the sustained attention it deserves (Chenoweth & Stephan 2011, Kendall-Taylor & Frantz 2014). Using a variety of cross-national tests and measures, Teorell (2010) finds that protest is an important determinant of democratization. A qualitative dataset we compiled (Haggard et al. 2012) shows that mass mobilization was an important factor in more than half the democratic transitions between 1980 and 2008. Networking through social media appeared to play a significant role in more recent transitions (Tufekci & Freelon 2013, Tufekci & Wilson 2012). However, viewed over the longer run, enduring organizations such as unions were pivotal in overcoming barriers to collective action, harking back to important earlier comparative historical work (Collier 1999, Rueschemeyer et al. 1992).

Equally interesting is the contribution that civil society organizations and social media networks play in the consolidation of new democracies, a much-understudied component of the comparative politics literature and an important one looking forward.<sup>7</sup> Some important insights can be drawn from the vast experience of the international democracy promotion community (e.g., Ottaway & Carothers 2000). Although these practitioners generally advance the cause of civil society organizations, they offer a nuanced view of their role in stabilizing democracy. For example, professionalized NGOs, which usually receive preferred treatment from international funders, may make positive contributions to public policy but often lack roots in the societies they purport to represent. More socially rooted civic organizations, by contrast, may have only limited interest in engaging in democratic politics and may be indifferent to or even complicit in abuses of state power. Moreover, in the absence of mechanisms of accommodation and mutual assurance among competing elites, civil society mobilization can increase the likelihood of political polarization or stalemate noted in earlier studies of consolidation.

On balance, however, it is likely that the weakness and the passivity of civil society present a far greater threat to the institutionalization of democratic politics than the occasional disruption it may bring. For example, we (Haggard & Kaufman 2016) find not only that mass mobilizations contributed to about half of all transitions in our sample but also that these distributive conflict

<sup>7</sup>For some important exceptions, see Ekiert & Kubik (1998, 1999), Bunce (2003), and Bermeo (2003).

transitions had enduring effects on the subsequent level of democracy. Moving forward, comparative research should assess more systematically how such organizations and social media networks are formed, their role in the mobilization of contentious politics, and the mechanisms through which they can prevent incumbents from undermining the rules of the democratic game.

## THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY STUDIES

Although much of the focus of the democratization literature has been on domestic politics, one of the more interesting developments has been the entry of international relations into the fray. A handful of these accounts go all the way up to the structural level, considering power shifts (Gunitsky 2014), issues of polarity (i.e., whether systems are hegemonic or competitive), and the identity of the major powers (i.e., whether they are authoritarian or democratic). For example, Boix (2011, p. 823) provides long-term empirical evidence of the effects of international systems with a panel running from the nineteenth century through 2000. Boix's primary objective is to show how changes in the international system condition the effects of development on democracy. One of his most important findings is that the spread or retreat of democracy correlates quite closely with systemic changes (Boix 2011, p. 814). In what he calls constrained systems (Boix 2011, p. 815) in which there is great power and ideological rivalry, democratic great powers might well tolerate or even promote authoritarian clients. Conversely, during periods of liberal and authoritarian hegemonies—what Boix (2011, p. 815) calls unconstrained systems—the great powers are more likely to promote like-minded regimes.

Yet, despite the correlation between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the spread of democracy, there is still the question of the mechanism behind this outcome: whether it was the result of coercion, influence, or emulation (Gunitsky 2014). Of particular interest is whether direct intervention worked. Probably the most comprehensive quantitative tests of this issue focus largely on the period prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union (1960–1996), but their findings have continuing relevance. Gleditsch et al. (2007) find that democratic interventions appear to promote democratization if we set a low bar for “democratization,” but the target states tend to end up as unstable semidemocracies at best. The reason is closely related to the structural constraints outlined above and to a perverse selection issue. Recent American interventions have been targeted on poor (e.g., Afghanistan) or resource-dependent (e.g., Iraq) countries in nondemocratic neighborhoods, a factor to which we return in a moment.

Moreover, many democratic interventions are motivated by efforts to put an end to civil wars, an intrinsically difficult task. Among the cases of military intervention that procured at least a marginally more democratic outcome from 1980 to 2008, we identified the Comoros (1990 and 2004), Guinea-Bissau (2000 and 2004), Liberia (2006), Nicaragua (1990), Serbia (2000), Sierra Leone (1996–1998 and 2007), and Uganda (1980)—all tough cases in difficult neighborhoods (Haggard & Kaufman 2016, ch. 4). Moreover, the record of achieving even marginal improvements in the rule of law in the wake of such conflicts is limited at best; most typically, countries revert to the status quo ante in this regard (Haggard & Tiede 2014).

But direct leverage, including through such mechanisms as the manipulation of aid to political ends, is not the only way in which the international system might operate on the democratization process. In a highly influential collection, Dobbin et al. (2008) attempt to outline more precisely the dynamics of diffusion, an effort that fits neatly with the metaphor of the Third Wave as a sort of tide that pulls countries along. They note that diffusion may occur not only through direct coercion but also as a result of three other mechanisms: competition (more relevant in models of economic policy making where first movers may have advantages), learning, and emulation or socialization.

What are the mechanisms through which emulation and socialization actually operate? Answers range from the role of international institutions to more regional and even local processes

of contagion and cross-border influence (see, e.g., Bunce & Wolchik 2013, Kramer 2013). In influential contributions, Pevehouse (2002), Mansfield & Pevehouse (2006), and Hafner-Burton (2009) find that international institutions have positive effects on democracy and human rights. Yet, in an important study, Poast & Urpelainen (2015) build on Svolik (2008) to make a strongly revisionist argument. They find that international organizations can contribute to consolidation, defined as a reduced likelihood of reversion, possibly through the learning mechanisms outlined by Dobbin et al. (2008). But they also find that international organizations cannot actually prevent reversions because of the lack of instruments for doing so. The tools available to such organizations, such as naming-and-shaming or even eviction, are simply not muscular enough to deter the high-stakes political games resulting in reversion.

A more convincing model of diffusion, and one with deeper empirical support, treats democratization as a regional rather than a global process, considering the host of linkages that might operate between neighbors. Wejner (2005), Gleditsch & Ward (2006), and Brinks & Coppedge (2006) all show how democratization is not only temporally but also spatially clustered. Gleditsch & Ward (2006) develop a frequently used indicator of the proportion of democracies within a given radius (in their case 500 km) of the country in question. Between 1951 and 1998—again capturing only part of the post-Soviet period—the chance of transitioning to democracy was virtually nil when neighbors were predominantly authoritarian. Yet if 75% of neighbors were democratic, the chance of an authoritarian regime becoming democratic rose to approximately 10%. Bunce & Wolchik (2013) and Kramer (2013) explore the myriad of ways in which diffusion operated in Eastern Europe. Such diffusion effects operated in Latin America as well, offsetting structural factors such as level of income and explaining relatively successful democratization even in poorer countries in the region such as Paraguay and the Central American countries (Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán 2014). By contrast, Africa, the former Soviet Union, and particularly the Middle East are regions that pose significant challenges to democratization, as the failed diffusion of the Arab Spring showed.

All of these international themes are likely to remain in play. But as with democracy promotion more generally (which we take up in more detail in the conclusion), shadows are falling over the international enterprise. The expectation of strong diffusion processes was associated with a particular moment in world history: the collapse of an authoritarian superpower, the dissolution of its empire, a brief moment of unchallenged American supremacy, and a strong belief in the combined power of economic interdependence, international institutions, and democracy.

But postulated diffusion effects might also stall, and through precisely the mechanisms envisioned by liberal theorists though in reverse. Not only do bad neighborhoods persist, but large and powerful nondemocracies such as China and Russia have no interest in promoting democracy. The influence on democracy of autocracies such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Venezuela has also clearly been negative. Moreover, these significant authoritarian powers pose challenges to the governance of international institutions in ways that could undermine their socializing effects looking forward (Haggard 2014). Just as international influences can push democracy along, so might they impede it. It is noteworthy that one of the pioneers of the international approach to democratic transitions has recently written on strategies of antidemocracy promotion (Whitehead 2015), a topic that is likely to grow in significance in the future.

## FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY ADVOCATES

More than other areas of inquiry in comparative politics, the study of democracy has been motivated by values. We are not only interested in whether democratization occurs and is consolidated

as a question for social science; we also want to encourage the process for political, security, and purely normative reasons. This raises the question of when, where, and how to deploy resources. Answering this question is not simply a matter of playing the odds—of assessing the chances for success from average treatment-effect findings. Although it is important to appreciate the structural constraints on democratization, we have seen numerous cases that appear to beat the odds. Moreover, outsiders do not control when movements for democracy arise but must think in advance about how to respond to the unexpected even when conditions appear unfavorable.

If external actors are to play a constructive role, therefore, they cannot avoid prudential judgments about what actions will best contribute to democratic outcomes. Particularly in the aftermath of the disasters in Iraq and the upheavals in the Middle East, one unavoidable issue is the question of when—and even whether—it is wise to press for democratic reforms in the first place. Such concerns are reflected in an interesting academic and policy debate over sequencing: that is, over whether democracy should await the establishment of economic and political preconditions (Carothers 2007, Fortin 2012, Fukuyama 2013, Mansfield & Snyder 2007, Rose & Shin 2001). Should we push democracy even in places where political institutions are weak and the most fundamental capacity to deliver public goods is missing? Or is there a normative case to be made for strengthening states first, on the grounds that accountability alone is not adequate to incentivize such institutional changes?

Research on the timing of elections has now shed more light on these debates, again showing the conditional nature of most democracy findings. In an analysis of all postconflict cases between 1960 and 2002, Flores & Nooruddin (2012) show that the chances of a relapse to authoritarian rule increase significantly unless elections are delayed by at least two years in new democracies and by one year in countries with prior democratic experience. Brancati & Snyder (2013) consider all post-civil war cases between 1945 and 2008 and also show that early elections can be counterproductive in post-civil war settings. However, they also show that power sharing, demobilization, and relatively strong state institutions can reduce the danger.

But short of situations of civil war and extreme state failure, the spread of democracy during the Third Wave offers little evidence that advocates should encourage delays in competitive elections and other democratic reforms, even if they could. To be sure, a number of authoritarian countries have achieved remarkable economic growth, most notably in East Asia and a handful of other cases such as Chile. But the authoritarian column also includes some of the most unmitigated economic disasters in world history, particularly in personalist dictatorships: Zaire under Mobutu, Haiti under the Duvaliers, Romania under Ceausescu and North Korea under the Kim dynasty. And although there is some evidence that capable states enhance the likelihood of successful democratic consolidation, we have seen that democracy also survived in poor countries with limited state capacity. Indeed, in many instances, we cannot reject the possibility that the causal arrows also go in the other direction: from democratic accountability to increases in the capability of the underlying state infrastructure (Fortin 2012).

At the same time, however, the evident weaknesses of many Third Wave democracies—their poor records on civil rights, corruption, and incumbents' abuse of state power—indicate a strong need for democracy advocates to embrace an agenda that is broader than simply promoting elections, discouraging military coups, or advancing institutional reforms such as checking executives, establishing term limits, strengthening legislatures, and so on. A key part of this agenda should be addressed to other measures that also discourage incumbents' abuse of state power and reduce the incentives for militaries to intervene. These measures, suggested by the preceding discussion and by vibrant policy debates, remain understudied and point to an important agenda for future studies of democratization:



- Support for grassroots and local civil society groups beyond the community of extant NGOs. In many cases, independent unions have provided a critical check on authoritarian abuses.
- Support for religious freedom and acceptance of diverse religious organizations. Such organizations typically have deep social roots and have historically played a significant role in promoting and supporting democracy.
- Support for independent, “noncrony” private sectors through reforms that reduce state control over finance and encourage competition and transparent corporate governance (Arriola 2012).
- Support for media, currently besieged in a number of new democracies; assuring the media (including its ownership structure) ends up as a true Fourth Estate rather than being captured by incumbents.
- Coordination with other international actors, such as international financial institutions, that are not directly focused on democracy promotion but that can have salutary—or highly deleterious—effects on democratic rule. As the ongoing tragedy in Greece suggests, debates over stabilization and structural adjustment can by no means be confined to their economic effects; they may well prove corrosive of democracy itself.

The broader agenda of democracy promotion sketched above, finally, is relevant not only to preventing backsliding among weak regimes that have met the minimum standards of democracy, but also to pushing competitive authoritarian regimes toward genuine political pluralism. Again, promoting free and fair elections has been the focus of much external pressure, for example, in the so-called color revolutions of Eastern Europe. These changes are clearly necessary and positive, but support tends to wane once elections are held. As Levitsky & Way (2010) warn, gains from leverage are unlikely to be sustainable without dense social, economic, and cultural linkages to established Western democracies.

To a certain extent, such linkages are a function of geography: As we have noted, democracies in favorable areas, close to Europe for example, enjoy substantial advantages. But even in geographically disadvantaged regions, developing and strengthening linkages are not entirely beyond the control of political actors. Indeed, with the growing weight of a number of important authoritarian regimes in the world economy, such counterbalancing linkages become even more important. They can be enhanced through deeper trade ties, enlightened immigration policies, and cultural exchanges. A broader democracy promotion agenda would emphasize linkages that provide transnational actors with an incentive to spotlight abuses when they occur and to enhance the resources of local democratic forces.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci. 2016.19:125-144. Downloaded from www.annualreviews.org  
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