

Regime Change or Democratization?

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One of the most interesting theoretical puzzles in comparative politics at present is the troublesome question of democracy and how to achieve democratization in diverse countries. The original research on democratization focused on prerequisites for the process of democratization, with some scholars focusing on economic development as a prerequisite, and others arguing that there are necessary social, civil, and psychological prerequisites a state must have before it can democratize successfully. More recent research has called into question whether these prerequisites, often necessary, are in fact sufficient for the development of democracy.

Recent debate has focused on the idea that the true potential for democratization may lie in the form the transition takes, the actors involved (elites or mass publics), or the previous regime type. While economic and social prerequisites may be important, this new literature argues that they cannot produce democracy alone, and that democracy is therefore dependent on these transition factors. This “third wave” of democratization – roughly defined as the period between 1974 and 1991, which saw more than sixty countries in Europe, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union accept democracy – has therefore seen new and different transitions within the former communist world and among many former colonies.¹

Given the importance of so many varied factors, democratization theory might be better placed in a larger framework of what I shall call “regime choice.” In essence, theory must ask why and how a state transitions to any new regime type – not necessarily to democracy, a question that the literature is only now beginning to broach. This broader framework may help us understand why some states are unable to achieve democracy, why others have stalled in the process, and why some achieve it despite lacking the so-called “prerequisites” for democratization. In

¹ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 3–30.

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addition, it may offer a clearer picture of how “regime change” occurs, whether it is a democratic or non-democratic transition.

PREREQUISITES FOR DEMOCRACY: NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT

Economic Development as a Prerequisite

One of the biggest debates over prerequisites for democracy can be found in the ongoing question of whether economic development is necessary for democracy (or conversely, whether democracy is necessary for capitalist development). Throughout this paper, democracy will be defined as a consolidated, liberal democratic regime that includes openness and political participation (as defined by Robert Dahl).² Like most other “prerequisites” for democracy, it appears that economic development may be necessary (indeed, as Lipset points out, wealth and democracy are rarely found without each other),³ but it is not apparent that economic development itself can create or support a stable democracy. For example, Fish and Choudhry provide an excellent overview of the ongoing debate in their piece, “Democratization and Economic Liberalization in the Postcommunist World.” They discuss the distinction between the many scholars who support the Washington Consensus (the idea that economic development will inevitably lead to democracy) and those who argue that unbridled industrialization and development can impede the development of democracy. Scholars such as McFaul and Aslund, strong supporters of the Washington Consensus, argue that development creates greater pluralization of economic power, and boosts individuals’ right to combat tyranny effectively, thereby leading to the development of democracy.⁴

In his seminal work, Seymour Martin Lipset created the idea of prerequisites for democracy, especially the idea of economic development as a necessary condition. Lipset’s data analyzes the correlation between certain key economic, social, and civil factors and the “continuous” presence of democracy in different countries. He concludes that wealthier nations are much more likely to sustain democracy, as their greater wealth allows for greater education and equality, leading to public participation and support for democracy.⁵ However, even Lipset was forced to conclude that economic development is not necessarily sufficient, and that historical

² Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 3–11.

³ Seymour Martin Lipset, “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy,” *American Political Science Review* 53 (1959), 69–105.

⁴ Stephen Fish and Omar Choudhry, “Democratization and Economic Liberalization in the Post-Communist World,” *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (2007), 254.

⁵ Lipset 1959, 69–105.

forces and other factors may be necessary for democratization to be successful.⁶

Robert Dahl's *Polyarchy* also presents economic development as a necessary condition for democracy (or at least for his "polyarchy," a partial democracy). The government in any system, according to him, will tolerate opposition to the extent that it is too costly for them to suppress. As a result, if more people have the material resources needed to oppose the government, it will become more costly for the government to suppress them.⁷ Therefore, when society is economically developed, democracy is the most likely result. Samuel Huntington supports these assertions in his article "After 20 Years: The Future of the Third Wave," concluding that economic development leads to a greater opening within society, where economic openness can become political openness. In this "transition zone," countries must inevitably move towards democratization as they develop economically.⁸

In contrast, there are many scholars who believe that economic development does not necessarily cause a move towards democracy. These scholars point out that economic development undertaken too quickly usually produces inequality within states. This inequality, coupled with the need for further development, breeds conditions that are more favorable to technocracies or dictatorships than to democracy. This idea is the foundation of Peter Evans' "Triple Alliance" as well as the broader field of dependency theory. Evans argues that inequality is created by rapid economic development. In his scenario, an alliance develops between an authoritarian state, a local elite, and multinational corporations, preventing the development of true representative democracy, and keeping the majority of the population poor in order to maintain the pace of economic development.⁹

Some authors, such as Ian Bremmer, have attempted to use the region of the former Soviet Union to illustrate the problem of simultaneous economic development and democratization. Bremmer's J-curve shows how developing economies often experience a "transformational recession" when they remove protectionist methods and liberalize their economies, in effect making things worse before they get better.¹⁰ With simultaneous democratization, there is a serious risk that the mass public, feeling the

⁶ Ibid., 103.

⁷ Dahl 1972, 14-17.

⁸ Samuel Huntington, "After 20 Years: The Future of the Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy* 8.4 (1997), 3-12.

⁹ Peter Evans, *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, Local and State Capital in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 34-45.

¹⁰ Ian Bremmer, *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

losses from recession, will backtrack on economic liberalization and thereby reduce the chances of either development or democratization.

The literature appears to indicate that economic development is necessary for democratization to occur; yet as the J-curve illustrates, it still might not be sufficient. Successful economic development combined with an equal distribution of wealth across a state, however, is very conducive to democratization, and can be a key element in a stable, sustainable democracy. Mere economic development, especially if it is rushed, or undertaken simultaneously with democratization, may in fact create extremism, inequality, and authoritarianism. The debate over economic development as a prerequisite of democracy is still raging, but Fish and Choudhry argue that democracy and economic development do not develop apart from each other. In the long term, however, a wealthy, developed nation will be more conducive to the development of democracy.¹¹ Economic development is therefore necessary, but not, as Huntington has argued, sufficient for the development of democracy.¹²

Social, Civil, Psychological, and Other Prerequisites for Democracy

In contrast to the debate over economic development and democracy, most authors agree that there are certain social, civil, and even psychological prerequisites before democratization is possible. However, it is also apparent that these social conditions are not in themselves sufficient for the creation of democracy, although they certainly increase both the likelihood of democratization and the stability of a democracy. The first author to really touch on the social prerequisites of democracy was Seymour Martin Lipset. Drawing key assumptions from sociology, his research correlated various factors with the prevalence of long-term, stable democracy. While he focused on economic development, he also found that there is a high correlation between certain social factors and democracy. For example, he argues that education and democracy are linked, especially the prevalence of literacy. Countries with strong social welfare systems and those with greater urbanization and social equality are also more likely to be democratic.¹³ Not every scholar believes that each of these social conditions is necessary for democracy; Rustow, for example, argues that only one social prerequisite — national unity — is necessary.¹⁴ However, most scholars agree that some or all of these social conditions greatly contribute to a more politically active population, and therefore, the stability of any democracy.

¹¹ Fish and Choudhry 2007, 272.

¹² Huntington 1993, 3–30.

¹³ Lipset 1959, 103–105.

¹⁴ Dankwart Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2 (1970), 337–363.

A strong civil society also appears to be important for the development of democracy. This includes such factors as the level of freedom and openness within civil society and freer civil rights, as well as behaviors of elites. For example, Arend Lijphart, in his work on *consociational democracy*, argues that the consensus-building efforts of elites are the only way to prevent multinational democracies from fragmentation.¹⁵ Linz and Stepan also touch on these issues in *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. They argue that elites must accept the idea of political cooperation in order for democracy to succeed. They also point out that a stable democracy needs a free civil society, an autonomous civil society, and the rule of law – all of which can be seen as “civil society prerequisites” to the development of democracy.¹⁶ Herbert McClosky also wrote on the necessity of elites understanding consensus and compromise. He argued that the reason for democracy’s success in the United States was the consensus-building nature of American political elites.¹⁷

McClosky also argued that both elites and the public must truly believe in democracy for the system to work.¹⁸ These psychological attitudes can also be a prerequisite for democracy, although there is less concrete evidence about whether they are necessary for democracy’s development. Linz and Stepan insist that public opinion and attitudes must support democratization before it can happen, and argue that a large group opposed to democratic ideals cannot exist.¹⁹ In short, most scholars agree that a population must believe in the idea of democratization in order for it to occur successfully.

Some prerequisites seem to be more essential than others. For example, in order to achieve democratization, there must be a sovereign state, a distinct political entity with control over its territory. In addition, some form of national identity is a must. This does not necessarily mean that multinational states cannot exist as democracies, but there must be some identity that binds people together within the state. While these are vital prerequisites for democracy, other attributes are not. Some authors have suggested that such cultural factors as Christianity, Protestantism, or even Northern European culture may be integral to the development of liberal Western democracy. However, as Huntington argues, there is at least one liberal democracy in every non-Western (i.e., non-Anglo-American) civilization, and in almost every region of the world.²⁰ It would then appear

¹⁵ Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977).

¹⁶ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 38–66.

¹⁷ Herbert McClosky, “The Fallacy of Absolute Majority Rule,” *Journal of Politics* 11 (1949): 637–654.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Linz and Stepan 1996, 3–12.

²⁰ Huntington 1997, 7–12.

that none of these cultural factors are in fact necessary for democracy, but merely coincidental.

Prerequisites: The Whole Story?

To conclude the debate on prerequisites for democratization and stable democracy, the importance of prerequisites in the democratization process must be analyzed. Most scholars agree that some social prerequisites are necessary, or at the very least, drastically increase the likelihood of a stable democratization. While there is strong debate over the desirability of simultaneous economic development and democratization, and indeed whether or not it is possible to democratize without full economic development, the evidence suggests that economically developed countries are more likely to have a stable democracy. Therefore, as Fish argues, in the short term the links between democracy and economy are tenuous, but in the long run it appears that economic development does help create a more stable democracy, and democracy can help economic development.²¹ We can therefore conclude from the available literature that some prerequisites are probably necessary to the development of democracy, especially social factors, and that several others promote and sustain democracy in the long term.

However, earlier scholars argued that these prerequisites would naturally lead to the development of democracy, and it appears that this has not been the case. States with strong democratic principles but weak governments or turbulent societies often fail to achieve democracy, especially in smaller African states. On the other hand, numerous states in East Asia and the Middle East have achieved stunning economic growth, and, in some cases, vibrant civil society and educated populations, without the development of democracy. Although these prerequisites seem important, it appears that the focus in the early literature may have been misplaced when it came to answering why democracy emerges where it does, and why some states successfully democratize while others do not. A few states, like India for example, have even become full democracies without equality in civil society. Thus, it appears that even while prerequisites such as education might be necessary, they may not be sufficient. As Lipset acknowledged, something else must give the impetus to democratization.²² As a result, authors have now moved to alternative factors for explaining the development or success of democracy.

²¹ Fish and Choudhry 2007, 254-260.

²² Lipset 1959, 103-105.

THE PROCESS OF TRANSITION FOR DEMOCRACY

If we cannot focus on prerequisites as the reason for development of democracy, more recent literature suggests several new factors that may prove more vital. The potential for democracy may lie in the nature of the transition itself, and also in the actions of those involved. Despite the preconditions' importance in setting the foundations, they cannot produce democracy without a successful transition process and the relevant actors. In fact, it appears that the process of transition, the type of previous regime, and the behavior of elites and mass publics may be the determining factors in whether or not democratization is successful.

Legacies of Previous Regimes

The so-called "third wave" of democratization that has occurred since the early 1990s has shown the world a markedly different set of transitions than seen before. From post-authoritarian regimes, such as Spain, to the post-communist world, and even certain regimes with sultanistic tendencies like Romania, these newly democratized countries have had varying degrees of success in their transformation to democracy. One factor that has become increasingly apparent as important in the success or failure of democratization is the legacy of the previous regime type and its effect on society and political systems. Various economic and societal problems arise out of prior regimes. One example is that citizens who suffered years of suppression fear public participation. Other examples include the economic fallout arising from the Soviet division-of-labor system, where each new country was only proficient at producing one or two goods. In short, the prior regime type can seriously influence whether or not a society is able to develop into a democracy.

In "Democracy for the Long Haul," Huntington argues that these new democratizing states face huge historical burdens in trying to achieve democratization. He sees three problems as particularly vexing. First, he argues that national fragmentation is a problem for societies newly opened to public contestation after the fall of communism. Second, he views transitional democracies as more likely to dispute amongst themselves or even go to war over the resources and problems inherited from previous regimes. Finally, he argues that the loosening of tight controls on a society may lead to its breakdown, with a disregard for authority and a social decay resulting from the new lack of constraints on individual behavior. All of these problems derive from the previous regime type, and Huntington believes that, as a result, the greatest danger for these democratizing states is erosion from within caused by the societal strains of the transition from communism and authoritarianism.²³

²³ Samuel Huntington, "Democracy for the Long Haul," *Journal of Democracy* 7 (1996), 3-18.

The most wide-ranging and effective study of how having a prior, non-democratic regime affects democratization is found in the writings of Linz and Stepan on *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. They contrast the transitional periods for countries that simply have to develop political infrastructure to democratize, like Spain, with those states that must simultaneously develop their economies, civil society, social rights, and political infrastructure. They discuss the factors or “arenas” necessary for transition to democracy, and assign each a probability based on the prior regime type. The factors include civil society autonomy, political society autonomy, constitutionalism and rule of law, autonomy of state bureaucracy, and economy society with degree of market autonomy and plurality of ownership forms.²⁴ Each prior non-democratic regime type will already possess some of these features, but Linz and Stepan’s framework highlights the fact that some regimes have much further to go than others in their democratic development.

Although they also discuss the importance of the path taken to democracy, Linz and Stepan indicate the huge importance of previous regime type for any transformational regime. They point out that authoritarian states are the most likely to democratize successfully, because they already possess many of the necessary elements. In contrast, totalitarian states (especially post-communist ones) lack all the vital factors or arenas, and are more likely to slip into post-totalitarianism than into full democratization. Sultanism is unlikely to see any regime-led liberalization, and is more likely to see sultanistic or authoritarian governance continue. Finally, post-totalitarianism often reverts to authoritarianism due to weak political and civil structures. The type of leadership of the previous regime also proves to be very important. Hierarchical military rule is unlikely to liberalize, while non-hierarchical military regimes may achieve some success in democratization. Civilian leadership is much more likely to result in democracy, but hereditary rule almost never results in democratization.²⁵

Thus according to Linz and Stepan, the type of previous regime is a vital component of the democratization process. Some societies may succeed in their transition if the circumstances are conducive, but others may be unable to achieve democratization from a poorly developed civil system. As evidence, Huntington points to the huge problems faced by the states of the disintegrating former Soviet Union as a result of these legacies.²⁶ In summary, civil, political, and economic structures are all important for democratization, and previous regime type often determines whether these structures exist or can even be developed.

²⁴ Linz and Stepan 1996, 38–66.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Huntington 1997, 3–4.

The Role of Elites and Mass Publics in Democratic Transition

Another factor that has come to be seen as increasingly important for the development of democracy is the behavior of the actors involved in the transition. The focus here is on the elites who initiate and sustain the transition, but also includes the mass public's participation in the process. Scholars focus on political elites because they are usually the ones who start the push for democracy and who manage the transition process. Some scholars argue that in order for democratization to occur consensus among the elites is vital, while others argue that elite fragmentation is necessary. It is also evident that bureaucratic elites, as well as the voting population, bear some responsibility for the development of democracy. All these actors, it appears, may in fact have more influence on the democratization transition than mere cultural or economic prerequisites.

In *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Transitions*, Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillippe Schmitter argue that elite fragmentation and the arising conflicts can create unintended consequences, and that it is ultimately the behavior of elites that shapes an extremely uncertain transition process. They point out that whether democracy is successful or not can very well depend solely on the actions of those who are controlling the transition.²⁷ Terry Lynn Karl makes the same point in her review of "Negotiating Democracy" by Caspar and Taylor. The book argues that a three-actor game, two groups of elites and the mass public fighting for control of the process, is necessary to achieve democratization. If the groups conflict, the state will remain authoritarian. Negotiation can lead to tentative steps to democratization, and cooperation can create a stably installed democracy.²⁸ Again, the authors argue that the fundamental characteristic of regime change is uncertainty, and that it is the actors within the process who control the outcomes.

Lijphart's notion of *Consociational Democracy* describes the cooperation among elites that he considers necessary for stable democracy in any non-homogenous society. Consociational democracy is based upon the structure created by the behavior of elites, who cooperate in order to reserve a functioning state. This elite cooperation serves to bridge schisms within the population at large, and to avoid extremist politics.²⁹ The resultant coalitions and their cooperation help in the creation of a fully functioning democracy. Huntington believes that democratization can only be started when political elites feel that they have a duty or interest in creating

²⁷ Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 3-17.

²⁸ Terry Lynn Karl, untitled review of "Negotiating Democracy: Transitions from Authoritarian Rule," *American Political Science Review* 91 (1997), 758-760.

²⁹ Lijphart 1977, 11-45.

democracy.³⁰ This can mean that they feel their interests would be better served by a democracy, or simply that they have a duty to create a democratic system. However, without the actions of elites, he argues, democratization cannot occur. Roeder, in contrast, argues that elite fragmentation in mature authoritarian or totalitarian systems is the impetus that leads to democratization. In his opinion, elite fragmentation prevents control of the process by any single group – which would lead to post-totalitarianism – and allows for the development of representative democracy instead.³¹

Yet other actors are also important in the democratization process. In the same volume as Roeder's article, Hanson argues that the responsibility for democratic transition lies within the bureaucracy and custodians of state agencies. These actors, he contends, are responsible for the creation and care of new institutions designed to support a democratic state.³² The institutions created within the process will ease the transition, and make any resulting democratic system stronger. Anderson's contribution to the volume claims that mass publics are actually as important as elites. For him, the fragmentation of the elites within the system creates a breakdown in the independent identity of these elites and they can no longer repress the opinions of the mass publics. Public contestation is therefore the method by which totalitarianism and authoritarianism become democratization. Anderson argues that the importance of elites fades as democratization expands.³³

While none of these scholars agree on which actors are more important, every theory supports the idea that actors are vital in the transition to democracy, and that the actions of these actors may be what determines the success or failure of democracy. Elites are frequently considered to be most important, either as strong reformers or fragmented losers who pave the way for democracy, but it is also apparent that state bureaucrats and even the mass publics have a role in any democratization process. Therefore, since democratization is so uncertain and can easily be affected by human agency within the process or by some combination of these diverse actors, many scholars now agree that actors within the transition process are often more important than any societal or civil prerequisites.

³⁰ Huntington 1997, 7-12.

³¹ Phillip Roeder, "The Rejection of Authoritarianism," in *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy*, ed. Anderson, Fish, Hanson, and Roeder (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11-53.

³² Stephen Hanson, "Defining Democratic Consolidation," in Anderson et al., eds., 2001, 126-152.

³³ Richard Anderson, "The Discursive Origins of Russian Democratic Politics," in Anderson et al., eds., 2001, 96-125.

Type of Transition

In recent years, the literature has focused on the type of transition as one of the most important factors in whether a transition successfully produces democracy or not. Scholars such as Karl, Schmitter, Linz, and Stepan have written books that illustrate the links between previous regime type, the type of transition, and the results produced by the democratization process. While much of the original literature on democratization argued that the transition process was important, the authors never emphasized the type of transition as directly responsible for the results. Instead, they focused on the prerequisites necessary for democratization. In contrast, Karl and Schmitter's "Modes of Transition" argued that transition could be achieved through different methods, not all of which are equally acceptable.³⁴ Following their article and book, there has been new focus on the importance of transition type within the context of regime change: Who undertakes the democratization?, where does it start from?, and which method of transition? have become the new important questions.

The nature of the transition to democracy has interested some scholars for a long time. Rustow, in his piece "Transitions to Democracy," argues that there are many roads to democracy besides the traditional Western democratization process. His piece focuses on critiquing the prerequisites for democratization. He argues that there is only one prerequisite, and that the process is vitally important in the development of democracy. Any democratization must emerge from political struggle over major issues, and it is this process of contestation that allows democracy to transpire.³⁵ In his writings on the development of democracies into bureaucratic authoritarianism, Collier also focuses on the importance of the process of transformation. Using the Marxist ideal of historical sequence, he describes the process of transition to democracy from oligarchy or authoritarianism, and the eventual transformation of democratization into bureaucratic authoritarianism.³⁶ For Collier, process is again the most important part of democratization.³⁷ Although these early examples do not delve into why process can affect the outcome of democratization, they represent the first step in exploring the consequences of type of transition for democracy.

Karl and Schmitter take this idea one step further in their article on the modes of transition to democracy. They contend that the mode and means of transition are in fact the primary determinants of which type of democracy or non-democratic regime will emerge from a democratic

³⁴ Terry Lynn Karl and Phillippe C. Schmitter, "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe," *International Social Science Journal* 128 (1991), 269-282.

³⁵ Rustow 1970, 337.

³⁶ David Collier, "Overview of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian Model," in *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*, ed. David Collier (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 19-32.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

transition.³⁸ The different means through which polities change from autocracy to other systems are divided into four broad categories within the article: pacts, imposition, reform, and revolution. While not all transitions fall precisely into each category, a broad spectrum can be created, with strategy (compromise/multilateral => force/unilateral) on one axis and actors (masses => elites) on the other. Thus “pacts” are elite compromises, “imposition” is forced on the public by the elites, “reform” is a compromise of the masses, and “revolution” is forced by the masses. The authors do point out several civil society prerequisites that can affect possible transition to democracy, but the framework provides a guide to how easily transition can occur in certain cases.

The idea that mode of transition is the primary determinant of the type of regime that emerges is based on this framework of transitions. Karl and Schmitter argue that for each case, the likelihood of a stable democracy emerging is different, subject to the prerequisites discussed earlier. According to the authors, pacts and imposition – the two forms of transition by elites – are the most likely to succeed. Examples such as authoritarian Spain and Turkey back up this assertion. In contrast, they contend that the mass forms of transition, reform and revolution, are significantly less likely to succeed, with failed democracies such as Cuba and Bolivia providing evidentiary support. The authors conclude that although all forms have been tried at one point or another, transitions “from above” appear to work best, and that the transitional “pacts” may provide the best chance for any society trying to democratize.³⁹

Linz and Stepan borrow from this idea in their book on *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. They attach the idea of mode of transition to the problems of previous regime type, and discuss the probability of each type of transition succeeding in different types of previous non-democratic regimes, adding an extra dimension to Karl and Schmitter’s theory. They also add two new types of transition to the matrix: Defeat in War and Extrication from Military Rule.⁴⁰ Although Linz and Stepan focus more on prior regime type, their framework demonstrates that the path taken in transition is the most important factor: some modes of transition work for previous regime types, while others frequently fail. The pact transition can be successful as a transition from authoritarianism and some post-totalitarianisms, but not from totalitarianism or sultanism. Defeat in war can succeed in all systems except sultanism. Revolution can create an interim government for transition in all systems, but it is only likely to succeed in democratization from a post-totalitarian state. Linz and Stepan also offer multiple “regime specific” transition pacts including the

³⁸ Karl and Schmitter 1991, 269–282.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Linz and Stepan 1996, 3–27.

defection of elites from party structures, or external hegemonic support and monitoring.⁴¹ The book highlights the importance of transition in the success or failure of democracy, but it also illustrates the huge number of possibilities for what any given polity can become through the uncertain transitions to democracy.

The idea of pacts as a mode of transition has become popular among scholars, with literature both criticizing and praising the idea of elite cooperation to create a transition to democracy. In Valenzuela and Mainwaring's compilation *Issues in Democratic Consolidation*, several of the authors discuss the idea of pacts in transitions to democracy. Mainwaring agrees that pacts are the solution, providing evidence that democracy has only succeeded where the political elites and leaders saw it as the best solution to societal problems.⁴² However, O'Donnell argues that excessive use of pacts can easily lead to a reversal of democratization, as a result of erosion from within the system. Nevertheless, he also argues that if the first attempt at a pact transition fails, the resulting authoritarianism will make an eventual second transition more likely to succeed.⁴³ Likewise, Valenzuela argues that elites can cause problems for the consolidation of democracy after the transition period. These elites create non-democratic oversight bodies, and frequently institute exclusionary electoral systems.⁴⁴ Elite erosion from within the system can be dangerous for democracy's consolidation.

Despite these concerns, however, modes of transition is still considered among one of the most important developments in understanding democratization. Modes of transition moves on from the early ideas of prerequisites, and allows for the inclusion of such important factors in democratization as the nature of the previous regime and the importance of human agency within the process. Although prerequisites for democracy are clearly important, and the presence of some societal and cultural factors strengthens democracy, it is the type of transition, along with the actors involved and the previous regime-type that may prove to be truly responsible for whether democracy develops or not. However, the uncertain nature of any transition to democracy illustrates that democracy is not a foregone conclusion, and that numerous other outcomes are possible. As a result, this critique will argue that democratization theory should be placed in the larger framework of "regime choice," which would

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁴² Scott Mainwaring, "Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues," in *Issues in Democratic Consolidation*, ed. Mainwaring, O'Donnell, and Valenzuela (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 294–342.

⁴³ Guillermo O'Donnell, "Transitions, Consolidations and Paradoxes," in Mainwaring et al., eds., 1992, 17–56.

⁴⁴ Samuel J. Valenzuela, "Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings," in Mainwaring et al., eds., 1992, 57–104.

allow more detailed study of how any type of regime transitions to another. Not all countries transition to democracy. Adopting the idea of “regime choice” would allow a broader study of regime change, rather than an analysis of democratization, and a clearer analysis of how governments transition from one form of government to another.

CRITIQUE

The field of democratization theory is broad and detailed, and includes several ongoing debates that are yet to be resolved. As a result, the critique of these authors and theories will be split into two broad sections. The first section deals with specific critiques about the authors’ theories and methodologies, and aims to show the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. The second will critique the idea of democratization theory more broadly, and will argue that the whole debate should be placed within the broader framework of regime choice. The creation of a framework for shifting regime-type is a vital theoretical step in understanding why any polity succeeds or fails not just in democratizing, but also in moving to any other system of governance.

Criticisms of Democratization Theory

The biggest criticism of democratization theory is that “democracy” lacks a settled definition. There is no general consensus among scholars, authors, or even politicians about exactly what the word democracy denotes. Some argue that democracy is merely acceptance of democratic norms, while others say that electoral freedom is democracy. Dahl even goes so far as to argue that democracy has not yet been reached by any society, and that the closest we can see at present is a “polyarchy,” a system that exhibits many of the features of democracy, but hasn’t quite reached full democratization.⁴⁵ The same problem applies to the idea of democratization. Although most of the articles discussed within this paper purport to explain democratization, there is no clear consensus on what “democratization” is. Like the idea of democracy, most books or articles open with an explanatory section that explains the author’s own definition of the term. Yet these explanations rarely have much in common. As a result, each theory attempts to explain the development of a slightly different phenomenon, meaning that no two theories can be easily compared or combined. In each case, the definitions of democracy must be taken into account before attempting to understand the author’s point.

It seems that a clearer definition of democracy and democratization is necessary. One of the simplest and most effective definitions that appears in the literature is that proposed by Linz and Stepan, and later elaborated

⁴⁵ Dahl 1972, 7-9.

upon in Valenzuela and Mainwaring's *Issues in Democratic Consolidation*. This dual definition of democratization provides a link between the earliest stages of a transition to democracy, and the stable democracy that eventually emerges. During the "transition" phase of democratization, it is unclear whether democracy will continue, and not all of the key characteristics of democracy are necessarily present. The second phase, "consolidation," heralds the appearance of a fully consolidated and stable democracy, which will likely continue for the foreseeable future.⁴⁶ While this definition appears to be one of the most reasonable, there are literally hundreds of different definitions for democracy and democratization. The literature must find a more common definition in order to make theory more relevant, and to allow for arguments to be compared more efficiently. A broad, yet comprehensive definition like the one proposed by Linz and Stepan would allow further research on democratization to proceed without getting bogged down in a debate about what any transition to democracy is trying to create.⁴⁷

There are also problems to be found within the theories that have been developed about democratization, especially those early theories that dealt with prerequisites for democracy. The issue of economic development as a prerequisite for democracy is still hotly debated, but there appears to be a real lack of evidence for either side of the debate. Most authors use causal logic to argue that economic development leads to economic and social indicators that support the opening of society and democracy. Yet most of these arguments are driven by examples, and there are many examples, such as India, that do not fit into this logic. In fact, only Lipset's early articles use empirical evidence to correlate economic development with democracy,⁴⁸ and it appears that many of these authors could benefit from further evidentiary and empirical support.

The prerequisites debate also leads to an interesting problem between correlation and causation. While many of the social, civil, and psychological factors can be correlated to stable democracies, this does not mean that they cause democracy. Alternate theories such as the modes of transition theory solve many of these causation problems, but the problem persists that these social prerequisites could merely be coincidences. In particular, it is possible that focus on Western democracies has isolated social facets of Western society and attributed them to democratization. This problem could be solved by studies that look at the correlation of these social, civil, and psychological factors across a range of democracies, both Western and non, to see whether these factors appear to be present in all democracies or

⁴⁶ Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell, and Samuel J. Valenzuela, "Introduction," in *Issues in Democratic Consolidation* 1992, 1-16.

⁴⁷ Linz and Stepan 1996, 3-27.

⁴⁸ Lipset 1959, 69-105.

not. Some scholars also attribute certain features of Western society to democratization per se, again confusing correlation with causation. Factors such as Protestantism and Northern European culture are often seen as integral to the development of democracy, when in fact, the correlation is skewed by the focus on Western democracies. Scholars must study a broad range of polities, both Western and non-Western, in order to avoid false correlation of social and civil factors with democracy. Studies should be as broad-ranging as possible, and should seek to avoid the Anglo-American democracy as the stereotypical democracy.

The literature that deals with democratization through the framework of actors, previous regimes, and modes of transition offers a substantial improvement upon the idea of prerequisites as responsible for democracy, yet there are still many unsolved questions within the framework that need to be resolved. Some of the conclusions that authors draw as a result of previous regime type can be somewhat misleading; for example, Huntington argues that the loosening of authority will lead to the erosion of society as morals degenerate following the repression of the previous system.⁴⁹ However, there is no evidence that the disintegration of a previous regime can have any such strong effect on a society. There needs to be further study on the implications of previous regimes for any democratizing polity, but perhaps the research should focus on the political and civil spheres, where conclusions can be more easily supported with empirical evidence and case studies.

One of the most important ongoing debates about the role of actors in the democratization process is what exactly the role of elites should be in this process. Some authors argue that elites must be fragmented in order to allow democracy to succeed. Others argue that it is the consensus of elites to implement democracy that in fact allows the system to work. It appears that it may depend on the nature of the elites involved and their intentions as to whether they must be fragmented or united; further research would do well to take this into account. Another problem is that it is very difficult to predict human agency within the democratization process. The amount of power various actors have within any transition varies with each case, as do their intentions and actions. It may be that the theory must focus more upon the role of actors within the larger transition framework, rather than attributing success or failure solely to those who initiate or sustain the democratic transition.

Finally, the literature on modes of transition is strong, but still needs much development. Karl and Schmitter's original framework provided an important starting point, but it only provided four basic types of transition. Transitions implemented through outside interference or war were ignored, as were transitions that were created through cooperation by elites and

⁴⁹ Huntington 1996, 3-18.

mass publics, or by political power vacuums. Linz and Stepan address some of these missing aspects of transition, but their ideas lack a structured framework like the one provided by Karl and Schmitter's original spectrum.⁵⁰ Modes of transition is at present the best explanation of how democratization occurs and why it may succeed or fail, but further study is required to flesh out the possibilities of transition and incorporate these into a more comprehensive framework of modes of transition.

"Regime Choice": A Broader Framework

While this paper has focused on democratization theory as the vehicle for explaining regime change, it also contends that the place for democratization theory is within a broader framework of *regime choice*. Scholars now agree that there are multiple types of regimes, not merely the original three: democracy, totalitarianism, authoritarianism. Since the transition to democracy does not necessarily result in democratization, but frequently ends in authoritarianism or post-totalitarianism, it seems that a broader framework of regime transition would provide a better understanding of how regimes shift from one form to another. While regimes attempting to democratize would still be the primary focus of the framework, further study of regimes that transition from one form of non-democratic regime to another would also be included in the framework to provide a better understanding of why failed democratization leads to these other regime types.

The study of non-democratic regimes is therefore important to this framework. Originally, scholars such as Friedrich and Brzezinski discussed the differences between the three big regime types: democracy (the Western world), authoritarianism (originally interpreted as fascism), and totalitarianism (usually communism). Each of these systems had specific features and differences: democratization had high pluralism and low ideology; authoritarianism had a small group in the leadership position, limited pluralism, and no official ideology; while totalitarianism had no pluralism, a permeating official ideology, and party control of state power.⁵¹ However, in recent years, scholars such as Linz, Stepan, Chehabi, and Dahl have expanded this framework to include several new regime types. Post-totalitarianism is characterized by limited pluralism, declining mobilization, and the presence of party elites maintaining control of the polity.⁵² Sultanism, on the other hand, is marked by an absence of legal political structures, and is headed by a single, charismatic leader. The ideology is his or her own personal ideology and there is usually no

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 38–66.

⁵¹ See Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski for examples of writings on totalitarian regimes and characteristics.

⁵² Linz and Stepan 1996, 3–27.

pluralism.⁵³ The interplay between all three of these regimes during transition periods is vitally important for understanding why some regimes fail or succeed in their democratization, and whether or not they achieve a different regime type as a result.

It is into this framework that this paper suggests placing the issues of democratization and transitioning regimes. The evidence shows that as a result of the mode of transition, previous regime type, or actions of elites, some types of regimes are unlikely to achieve democratization. For example, totalitarian regimes, which lack any of the structures necessary for democracy, are unlikely to transition fully and successfully to democracy in one step. Instead, most of them transition into the category of post-totalitarianism, which allows them to develop limited pluralism. Post-totalitarian societies can then either transition into democracy or revert to authoritarianism. A framework showing the likelihood of possible regime changes would indicate these linkages, as well as allowing for a flow-chart of developmental possibilities. If each successive regime change creates more institutions and societal and civil pluralism, the chances are greater that democracy will be developed later. In short, the framework of regime choice would allow scholars to chart the transition of failed democracies as well as those that are successful, granting a clearer picture of how politics can transition from one kind of regime to another.

CONCLUSION

The puzzle of democratization is one of the most pressing problems facing political scientists today. There is no longer a set "path" for democratization, and increasingly, each country requires a different approach. The idea that prerequisites were necessary (and largely sufficient) for democracy is no longer accepted as true. Indeed, most scholars now believe that although some prerequisites (e.g., education, literacy, economic development, a free and open civil society) aid in the development of democracy, they are not necessarily the most important factors in whether democratization succeeds. Indeed, it now appears that all these factors, especially economic development, may contribute to the stability of democracy in the long term, but have less obvious effects on the process of democratization itself. Certainly, whether these prerequisite social and civil factors are necessary or not, they are definitely not sufficient for the development of democracy.

The factors for democratization that scholars consider increasingly more important lie within the nature and type of the transition itself. Since

⁵³ H.E. Chehabi and Juan Linz, *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3-25.

the previous regime type may play a significant role in whether or not the transition will succeed, the starting point of transition is now recognized as important. In addition, the actors — elites and mass publics who participate in the process — may be able to determine whether democratization succeeds, or whether another system results. Finally, the “mode” or type of transition and how it is implemented may be vital in determining the outcome. Thus, democratization is dependent on all of these “transition” factors. In the end, prerequisites may be important, but it seems that democratization depends on the method of transition and the actors involved.

