

## Conditions for Democratic Consolidation

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This survey of the literature on conditions for democratic consolidation suggests the necessity of going beyond procedural definitions of democracy (based on fair, honest and periodic elections) to more normative ideas about decision-making being controlled by all members of the group as equals. In this view, democracy is a matter of the *degree* to which basic principles are realised and democratisation is always and everywhere an unfinished process. Four factors which facilitate democratic consolidation — the experience of transition itself, a country's economic system, its political culture and its constitutional arrangements — are analysed through an assessment of ten key hypotheses implicit in the literature.

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Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies*, University of California Press, 1990.

Diane Ethier (ed), *Democratic Transition and Consolidation in Southern Europe, Latin America and Southeast Asia*, Macmillan Press, 1990.

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Samuel P Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

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Robert A Pastor (ed), *Democracy in the Americas: Stopping the Pendulum*, Holmes and Meier, 1989.

Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens and John D Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Polity Press, 1992.

The purpose of this review article is to provide a survey of some of the burgeoning literature on conditions for democratic consolidation, and to reduce it to some systematic order. I do so as a political theorist, and in no sense a specialist on Africa, but in the expectation that the comparative literature reviewed will be of some relevance to African countries, even where it is based on the experience of other continents. This expectation, it should be said at the outset, begs a fundamental methodological question: what is the appropriate level for comparative theorising in the social sciences? Should it be the most general and global level, or the regional and the local? Can any useful generalisations be made embracing political processes in sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb, Latin America, central Europe and so on? Can we be sure that the term 'democracy' has the same meaning in these regions? Even if we can, is there not a danger of giving the so-called 'transition to democracy' the same teleological status as the 'transition to socialism' which earlier proved so disappointing?

My short answer to these questions is that the appropriate level of generalisation can never be decided *a priori*, but will depend upon the particular problem in view; and that the more general the hypothesis, the more it will need complementing and modifying by the specificities of region and locality. At most, therefore, theorising at this level provides a set of questions to be asked, and suggestions of where to look for answers, rather than a recipe for what will infallibly be found. In this sense theory, as the systematic abridgement of experience, is always the starting point for further analysis, not the end point of enquiry.

Let me begin with some conceptual clarification of the terms 'democracy', 'consolidation' and 'conditions', each of which raises considerable issues. To take democracy first, it is conventional for specialists in comparative politics to follow Schumpeter (1943, chs. 21-22) in defining the concept in 'procedural' rather than 'normative' or 'ideal' terms, i.e., in terms of a set of institutional practices, rather than a set of basic principles. So Huntington, underlining his approval of the way US political scientists have made democracy 'less of a hurrah word and more of a common sense word', defines a political system as democratic 'to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote.' On the basis of this common sense approach, he concludes, informed political observers can apply the procedural conditions of democracy to existing world systems and 'rather easily come up with a list of those countries that are clearly democratic, those that are clearly not, and those that fall somewhere in between' (Huntington 1991:7-8; cp. Huntington 1989).

Now although Huntington is somewhat more peremptory in his dismissal of any ideal or normative conception of democracy than the other authors reviewed, most of them agree with his concentration on the electoral process as the defining feature of democracy, together with the freedoms of speech and association necessary to make that process effective. Few readers would wish to deny that 'free and fair elections' constitute an essential part of democracy in the context of the contemporary state. Yet there are several problems with the procedural or institutional method of defining it. First, because it is unable to tell us what exactly makes these institutions 'democratic', it encourages a purely formalistic approach to democracy, in which procedural means such as 'freely competitive elections' or 'multi-partyism' become treated as

ends in themselves. Secondly, the concentration on the electoral process leaves out much else that is important to democracy, such as: the control by those elected over non-elected powers, inside and outside the state; their accountability and responsiveness to the public between elections; the control ordinary people exercise over their conditions of life at the most local level; and so on. Everyone will have their own items to add to this list. Thirdly, the confidence with which it is asserted that some countries simply *are* democratic overlooks important deficiencies of Western countries from a democratic point of view; and obscures the way that democrats everywhere are engaged in a common struggle against authoritarian and exploitative forces, even though that struggle may be more intense in 'developing' than 'developed' democracies.

In the light of these inadequacies, we cannot dismiss so readily the need to begin with a definition of democratic principles. In my view democracy belongs to the sphere of the political in the broadest sense, defined as the sphere of collectively binding decision-making, whatever the group or collectivity may be, from the family to the state (and thence also to the international arena). Its basic principles are that such decision-making should be controlled by all members of the group or collectivity considered as equals — the principles, in other words, of popular control and political equality. A system of collectively binding decision-making can be judged democratic to the extent that it embodies these principles, and specific institutions or practices to the extent that they help realise them (for further elaboration, see Beetham 1993).

Such a definition enables us to see two things. One is that the central state is only one arena of collective decision-making where democratic principles may be applicable. Because of its complexity, popular control here has mainly to take the form of control over *decision-makers* rather than directly over decision-making, and to do so through a variety of intermediaries acting on the people's behalf (parliament, the courts, financial auditors, journalists, etc.) as well as through electoral choice and the ongoing influence of freely-formed public opinion. Secondly, democracy is not an all-or-nothing affair, but a matter of the degree to which the basic principles are realised: a comparative rather than an absolute judgement. In conventional parlance those countries that reach a certain minimum threshold or clustering of practices which embody these principles qualify as 'democracies' *tout court*; but this shorthand way of speaking should not obscure the significant differences of kind and degree between such countries, or the extent to which democratic institutions and practices can coexist with undemocratic, and sometimes pre-democratic, ones. Democratisation is thus always and everywhere an *unfinished* process.

In the light of such a conception of democracy, then, the literature under review can be seen to share a characteristic focus: on the electoral choice of central state officials; on the historical process whereby such choice under reasonably 'free and fair' conditions has become established, or re-established; and on the conditions for its effective maintenance in the future. This is an important subject indeed; but it is not the whole of democracy, and does not on its own guarantee ongoing popular control over the decision-making that affects people's lives. The democracy spoken of here, in other words, is primarily electoral democracy.

This brings me to the second conceptual problem, that of 'consolidation'. Most writers on democratisation agree on two propositions. One is that the process of consolidating democracy, which begins where the 'transition to democracy' ends, i.e., with the inauguration of a new government at the first free and fair elections since the end of the pre-democratic regime, is a much more lengthy and difficult process than

the transition itself. Establishing democratic electoral arrangements is one thing, sustaining them over time without reversal is quite another. Not all who make the transition will be able to sustain it. This is the point of Huntington's metaphor of the democratic wave: each new historical wave of democratisation leaves more established democracies on the beach when it retreats, even though many countries will fall back with the tide. From this follows a second proposition: the factors making for the consolidation of democracy are not necessarily the same as those contributing to its inauguration; the explanation for democratic sustainability may well be different from the explanation for the transition from authoritarian rule (see Rustow 1970).

But what exactly is meant by 'consolidation', and how do we recognise a 'consolidated democracy' when we see one? A variety of different criteria are proposed in the literature (see also Linz 1990). One is the 'two-election' test, or more properly the 'transfer of power' test: democracy is consolidated when a government that has itself been elected in a free and fair contest is defeated at a subsequent election and accepts the result. The point of this criterion is that it is not winning office that matters, but losing it and accepting the verdict; because this demonstrates that powerful players, and their social backers, are prepared to put respect for the rules of the game above the continuation of their power.

However, the problem with this criterion is that it is perfectly possible to have an electoral system that meets certain minimum democratic standards, but where such a transfer of power simply does not take place, because the electorate goes on voting for the same party (the so-called 'dominant party' model). Such has been Botswana since independence, and such were Japan and Italy for nearly 50 years. Are we to say that these were not consolidated, simply because no transfer of power took place? The recent changes of government in Italy and Japan at the hands of the electorate suggest that they were indeed consolidated years ago. For this reason some writers favour a simple longevity or generation test: 20 years, say, of regular competitive elections are sufficient to judge a democracy consolidated, even without a change of ruling party, since habituation to the electoral process would make any alternative method for appointing rulers unthinkable.

This criterion in turn has its own difficulties. It is well known that, the longer the same party remains in power, the more indistinguishable it becomes from the state apparatus on one side and powerful economic interests on the other; and the more doubtful whether electoral competition takes place on a genuinely level playing field, or that electoral accountability retains much force. Here the question of democratic consolidation cannot be separated from the quality of democracy that is being consolidated (for example, Italy: how democratic ever was it?).

A further problem with longevity is that it is not in itself a good predictor of how a system will behave in the future. We would have much more confidence in the robustness of a democratic system if it had survived substantial shocks or crises, including the shock of the transfer of power, than if its course had run smooth. Like the concept of stability, the concept of consolidation or sustainability is essentially a predictive or counterfactual concept, about a political system's ability to withstand shocks if subjected to them in the future. The analogy might be with a pane of glass, where we can distinguish between the strength of the material or the system, and the force of the pressures to which it may be subjected. A democracy can best be said to be consolidated when we have good reason to believe that it is capable of withstanding

pressures or shocks without abandoning the electoral process or the political freedoms on which it depends, including those of dissent and opposition. And this will require a depth of institutionalisation reaching beyond the electoral process itself (see Whitehead 1989).

What then, finally, about the 'conditions' for democratic consolidation? Talk of 'conditions' can all too easily be read deterministically, especially when economic conditions are discussed. This was certainly the tendency of the famous early article by Lipset (1959) entitled *some social requisites of democracy*, with its proposition: the more telephones, the more democracy. In similar manner Huntington identifies a zone of economic development between \$500-1000 per capita GNP, at which a country is ripe for democratisation and capable of democratic consolidation; by implication undemocratic countries above this figure are retrograde, and those below it should abandon hope. Di Palma's response to such determinism provides a useful antidote: successful democratisation is the product of human volition. When people have experienced the worst that arbitrary and oppressive governments can do, they will readily agree to rules that will at least limit the damage that governments can inflict upon them. This is democratisation born, not of economic inevitability, but of the conscious desire for self-preservation, even if it is everyone's second best choice, or 'democracy by default' as it has come to be called.

However, a simple voluntarism is no more adequate than its deterministic counterpart. The project of democratic consolidation is clearly more difficult in some circumstances than others, and faces much more formidable obstacles in some countries than others. It is a task of social science to identify these circumstances and subject them to comparative analysis. Yet these 'conditions' can at most be described as 'facilitating' or 'hindering', rather than as 'determining', a given outcome. And among the conditions will be that of political *agency*, from broad social forces to individual leadership, whose response to given circumstances will itself be under-determined.

To help assess these facilitating conditions, it will be useful to consider them under a number of different headings. For reasons of space, I have had to omit the external conditions deriving from the international and regional context, important though these are, and concentrate on the domestic ones. These include: the process of transition itself; the character of a country's economic system; its received political culture; its type of constitutional arrangements. Aspects of each of these will have a bearing on a country's prospects for democratic consolidation. Implicit in the literature under review (and sometimes explicit) are a variety of hypotheses, some more contestable than others, which I have formulated as concisely as possible to assist analysis.

## The Process of Transition

Here we are concerned with the question of whether, and to what extent, the process of transition to democracy affects the subsequent prospects for its consolidation. Two different aspects of the transition merit examination: the character of the previous regime, and the actual mode of transition itself.

**First hypothesis:** Prospects for consolidation are affected by the character of the previous regime. Despite various attempts to make such a connection, there is no clear evidence from the history of past transitions that the form of the immediately

preceding regime — whether single party or no-party, 'sultanist', bureaucratic or whatever — has any bearing on later consolidation. Nor is previous experience of democracy necessarily significant either. Although it is intuitively plausible that previous democratic experience should leave some sediment of popular support for democracy, and provide an opportunity to improve on past mistakes, on the other side a succession of failed attempts at democratisation (as in Russia) or a history of alternations between democratic and authoritarian rule (the Latin American 'pendulum') may simply generate a sense of defeatism about the prospects for long term consolidation. As in so much else, South Africa is an exceptional case for an independent state in the twentieth century, of having a lengthy experience of 'quasi-democratic' institutions with a limited suffrage, or elective oligarchy, prior to democratisation; in this it is closer to the typical nineteenth century West European experience of consolidating representative institutions before the expansion of the suffrage, than it is to other twentieth century states.

Although there is, then, no systematic connection to be drawn between the previous regime-type and future democratic prospects, two distinct classes of regime leave to their successor a quite specific agenda, whose handling will certainly affect these prospects. A military regime leaves behind the difficult task of depoliticising the armed forces, and reorganising them in ways that make their intervention in politics more difficult in the future. This task is easier where the regime ends in the discredit of military defeat (Greece, Argentina) than where it negotiates a guaranteed role or veto power for itself over its democratised successor (as in Chile). Even in the former, the issue of whether, and how far, to prosecute former state personnel for human rights abuses is one fraught with difficulty for the new regime (see Huntington 1991, ch. 5, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 4.1, January 1993).

A communist regime, on the other hand, leaves behind the enormous task of introducing a market economy simultaneously with the democratisation of the state. The question of the precise relation between a market economy and a democratic polity will be considered later. Here it can simply be observed that initiating the processes of democratisation and marketisation simultaneously is full of perils, not least because their timescales are so different, and the early experience of economic dislocation and hardship that accompanies marketisation can readily undermine support for the democratic process. If there is one thing that the literature under review is agreed upon, it is that *performance* criteria are much more important for fledgling democracies than for established ones. The latter enjoy the typical democratic advantage that failed governments can be removed without this bringing down the system; in the former, if the experience of democracy from the outset, rather than just of particular governments, is associated with failure, this will discredit the system itself. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Russia's combination of economic dislocation with national humiliation at the collapse of empire, should make commentators particularly pessimistic about its democratic prospects, or conjure up parallels with the end of the Weimar Republic (see *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 5.2, April 1994: 'Is Russian democracy doomed?').

A different aspect of the previous regime should be mentioned here in conclusion, since it has an important bearing on the fate of democratisation, and that is the extent to which the inherited state structure is capable of asserting any systematic policy across the territory it supposedly controls. Strictly speaking, this is a question about the state as such, rather than the particular regime *type*. As a number of writers have argued (Bromley 1993, Hawthorn 1993, O'Donnell 1993), state formation is

necessarily prior to democratisation. A 'state' which is incapable of enforcing any effective legal or administrative order across its territory is one in which the ideas of democratic citizenship and popular accountability can have little meaning. Although in theory such an absence of regulative order is compatible with electoral competition for the chief offices of state, elections will be little more than a formality when they can make no difference to what happens 'on the ground'. In such situations, to be found in some African and Latin American countries, the continuity between the 'democratic' and pre-democratic regimes may be much greater than any differences to be found between them.

**Second hypothesis:** the mode of transition to democracy affects its subsequent consolidation. At this point the literature is replete with typologies of transition process, which I have tried to synthesize in tabular form (see Figure 1). Even this table is considerably oversimplified, since there are intermediate forms. Huntington identifies a process which combines 'transformation' and 'replacement', which he calls 'transplacement', and Linz one which combines 'reforma' and 'ruptura', which he calls 'transaction'. We could play endlessly with these categories. None of them

**Figure 1 — Processes of Transition**

	External imposition	Transformation (initiated within authoritarian regime)	Replacement (initiated from society and opposition)
<i>Reforma</i> (gradual negotiated change)			
<i>Ruptura</i> (rapid breakthrough)			

Sources: Stepan (1986), Huntington (1991), Linz (1990), Ethier (1990)

seems particularly 'virtuous' in respect of prospects for later consolidation.

More important for democratic sustainability, we might conclude, than the question of how the transition process is initiated, or its particular sequence of development, is a different set of questions: how broad and deep does it run, how inclusive or exclusive is it, who comes to 'own' the transition process as such? In terms of *breadth*, there is now considerable development of the theory of 'elite pacts', of the idea that prospects for future consolidation are enhanced, not only by formal agreement on the rules of the political game between different sections of the political elite (whether among oppositional elites, or between oppositional elites and sections of the old authoritarian elite); but also by informal agreement to limit the agenda of political competition, so that no group's perceived vital interests are threatened by exclusion from office (O'Donnell et al., 1986, vol. 4, pp. 37-47; Przeworski 1991, ch. 2).

Such breadth of consensus is clearly advantageous to democratic consolidation. However, 'elite pacts' may be vulnerable from two directions. If they include irreducibly anti-democratic forces, e.g. from the military, then peaceful transition may be bought at a high price. If on the other hand they achieve consensus by

excluding popular demands or popular forces ('democracy through undemocratic means', as O'Donnell puts it), they will prove vulnerable to the assertion of such demands in the future. Although it has been argued that the elite consensus which secured peaceful electoral competition in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain and the US required precisely the exclusion of the population from political influence (whether formally or informally), it is doubtful whether such exclusion can be made effective under contemporary conditions (see Hall 1993). In other words, we need to pay attention to the depth as well as the breadth of the transition process: to how far it penetrates society, and not merely the political elites. Here the idea developed in many African countries of the 'national convention', which includes the widest groups from civil society in the democratisation process, provides a useful counterpart to the idea of elite pacts, with its European and Latin American provenance.

A key indication, in my judgement, of who 'owns' the transition process is to be found in the manner in which a new constitution is constructed. Is it the product and possession of one set of political forces, or is it the result of a genuinely national debate and the possession of the country as a whole? Is it narrow or broad, or broad rather than deep? Examples from two ends of the spectrum are provided by Russia, where the new constitution was worked out in the President's office, and Uganda, where it has resulted from the most wide-ranging consultation and debate among all sections of the population. Most countries lie somewhere between these two poles. A comparative study of constitution-making processes, and their significance for democratic consolidation, would seem well worth undertaking.

### **Economic System and Democratic Consolidation**

Again a number of different hypotheses can be distinguished here, one about the role of a market economy, one about economic development, and one about class structure and political agency. Although they tend to overlap at the edges, they can best be treated as separate for purposes of analysis.

**Third hypothesis:** a market economy is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition of democracy. This hypothesis is usually expressed as a relationship between *capitalism* and democracy (see for example *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 3.3, July 1992: 'Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy'), but I prefer to leave open the question of whether dispersed forms of social ownership within a market economy, or market socialism, might be both economically viable and politically democratic. Even so, this formulation of the hypothesis, though substantiated by all the evidence, obscures the extent to which market forces can also work to undermine democracy. The relationship, in other words, is an ambiguous one, and both positive and negative aspects need asserting together.

On the positive side is, first, that both market and democracy share the same anti-paternalist thrust: the individual, whether as voter or consumer, is assumed to be the best judge of his or her interests, and the success of parties as of firms depends upon the numbers they can each attract to their product in conditions of open competition. This internal 'congruence' also suggests a causal relationship: the idea of consumer sovereignty cannot exist indefinitely without awakening ideas of voter sovereignty among the population.

Secondly, a market economy disperses decisional and other forms of power away



from the state. This serves the cause of democracy in a number of ways: it facilitates the development of an autonomous sphere of 'civil society' which is not beholden to the state for resources, information or organisational capacities; it restricts the power and scope of a bureaucratic apparatus; it reduces what is at stake in the electoral process by separating the competition for economic and political power into different spheres.

This second advantage of the market tells not only against command economies of the Soviet type, but also against state controlled forms of capitalism. Although there is clear evidence that the state has a positive role to play in economic growth at all stages of capitalist development, we should distinguish between its role in regulating and complementing the market, and its coming to *replace* it as the chief allocator of economic opportunities, or as the main extractor and appropriator of economic surplus. These latter forms typically produce clientelist and authoritarian regimes, which can only be superficially democratised, and even then remain vulnerable to endemic corruption.

The disadvantages of the market for democracy are equally obvious to the undogmatic. The inequalities of wealth which come with market freedom tend to prevent effective political equality. The experience of being treated as a dispensable commodity in the labour market contradicts the publicly proclaimed idea of the democratic citizen as the bearer of rights in a context of social reciprocity. The widespread unemployment and rapid fluctuations of market economies render voters vulnerable to demagogic mobilisation in support of authoritarian and exclusivist forms of politics. Finally, the generalisation of the market motivation of private interest maximisation corrodes the distinctive ethos of public interest and professional service on which the integrity of the public sector depends; the market's penetration of the state here proves as damaging as the state's penetration of the market. Democracy, we might conclude, needs not only a welfare system to protect individuals from market vicissitudes (i.e., social democracy); it also requires that the distinctive logics of market and state be recognised and preserved from mutual erosion.

This ambiguous relationship between the market and democracy is reflected in quite contradictory evaluations of the impact of the neo-liberal strategy of market reforms and structural adjustment on democratisation (compare Whitehead 1993 with O'Donnell 1993). On the one hand the uncoupling of politics from the market to create a 'leaner' state, less personalised economic relations and a more independent civil society are all positive for democracy. On the other hand, the reduction in social welfare, the refusal to acknowledge any positive role for the state in the productive economy, and the undermining of a distinctive public service ethos, must be judged equally negative. The failure of neo-liberalism lies in its inability to recognise these important distinctions, or to see that, if the market is not a *sufficient* condition for democracy, this is because of limitations inherent in the market itself.

**Fourth hypothesis:** the chances for democratic consolidation improve with economic development. With this hypothesis we enter the realm of quantitative political science: the construction of numerical indices of democratisation and economic development respectively, and the statistical analysis of the relationship between them across a large number of countries. The enterprise was popularised by Lipset (1959), and Hadenius's book (1992) is only the latest and most thorough in a long line of successors (see also Hadenius 1995). The conclusion of this literature seems to be that the chances for sustainable democracy are indeed improved by economic

development, though there are exceptional examples both of underdeveloped democracies and developed economies with little democracy.

However, a positive correlation between economic development (defined aggregatively in terms of GNP per head of population, fuel consumption per head, etc.) and democratisation raises as many questions as it answers. Leaving aside the contestability of defining 'development' in such terms, we still face the puzzle of what precisely it is about economic development that helps sustain democracy. Lipset's original article was rather more forthcoming than some of its successors in seeking to explain the connection in terms of a set of mediating variables. With economic development, he argued, comes a reduction in the extremes of inequality, a more complex articulation of civil society and a more widely educated population.

It is intuitively plausible that these intermediate variables have a positive relationship to democracy, though less in terms of Lipset's Cold War preoccupation with 'moderate' mass politics than in the social basis they provide to political equality, in the greater self-confidence they give to people that they can influence their own destinies, and in the lower tolerance on their part for authoritarian and paternalist regimes. However, it is by no means self-evident that, say, reduced inequality or a more educated population follows automatically from economic development. Are these variables not themselves regime-dependent, in that they depend upon government policies? Might it not be that lessening the extremes of inequality and creating an educated population facilitates both economic growth and democratisation? Or that such policies might improve the chances for democratic sustainability even in the absence of high levels of economic development?

On the issue of inequality and electoral democracy the evidence is inconclusive, since it depends upon what measures of economic inequality are chosen, and at what point in time. Even allowing for the fact that democracies tend over time to reduce inequality through their social policies, Muller (1988) found a clear causal relation between reduced levels of inequality and democratic sustainability. On the other hand Hadenius (1992) could find no such link, but demonstrated a strong positive correlation between education, literacy rates and democracy, independent of any other measures of economic development. What no one would deny is the self-evident proposition that fledgling democracies require sustained economic growth *whatever* the level of economic development they start from. And if Hadenius's conclusions are confirmed, then we can add to this proposition a further one: the best public investment governments can make for the future of their democracies lies in improving the literacy and education levels of their population.

**Fifth hypothesis:** specific forms of class agency affect the chances of democracy. This hypothesis, deriving from the well known work of Barrington Moore (1966), rests on a very different methodology from that of quantitative political science: the comparative historical analysis of key case-studies. Its assumptions are also very different. Since economic development is not a uniform process, we need to pay attention to the specific character of a country's economic structure (including its insertion into the international economy), and to its distinctive pattern of class formation. What matters for democracy is the existence of social classes whose way of life gives them a consistent interest in, and capacity to support, democratisation, both in general and at particular historical conjunctures. The central issue for democratic consolidation, in other words, is that of social and political *agency*.

Despite the emphasis on historical specificity, the work of Rueschemeyer, Stevens and

Stevens (1992) also reaches broad general conclusions which will no doubt be familiar to readers of this journal. Economic development, they point out, is precisely *capitalist* development. And capitalist development is conducive to democracy, they argue, not because of the presence of capitalists (who are typically ambivalent towards democracy), but to the extent that it reduces the economic and political weight of large landowners on one side (whose repressive systems of surplus extraction make them the most hostile to democracy), and develops a substantial organised urban working class on the other. It is the latter whose interests are most consistently inclined towards democracy, and whose capacity for collective action gives them the political muscle to promote it, and to defend it when it is under threat. Where forms of capitalist development leave a landed oligarchy in place, or produce only a comparatively small working class, the chances for sustainable democracy are slimmer, since they depend upon cross-class coalitions which may be highly unstable.

The argument is persuasive, but it is subject to qualifications, as the authors themselves admit. A strongly organised working class whose demands constitute a substantial threat to either property or profits may frighten the owners of capital into the arms of authoritarian reaction. Democratic consolidation therefore requires more than the presence of organised labour, but the conditions for class compromise as well: economically, the room to meet the minimum demands of both capital and labour; politically, the incorporation of both classes into the representative system through political parties of both left and right. These are of course the classic conditions of social democracy in post 1945 Western Europe (see also Przeworski 1986, Sheahan 1986).

Here lies a second qualification, about how far conclusions drawn from the history of the advanced capitalist countries are applicable to developing ones. As the authors point out, the relative size of the organised working class (as opposed to the urban dispossessed, who are more readily mobilised for populism than for democracy) is much smaller in the typical capitalisms of the developing countries. This suggests that we need to pay closer attention to the other social forces making up a potential democratic coalition. If we extend the concept of democratic agency beyond that of organised economic interests, to include all those whose conditions of social activity incline them to defend the freedoms of association, expression, and so on — technical and professional strata, teachers, women's groups, NGOs, non-state churches, peasant associations — then we may find the basis for a firmer coalition stretching beyond the organised working class than Rueschemeyer's text might suggest.

### **Political Culture and Democracy**

The idea that democratic consolidation will be most likely in those countries where the political culture — popular beliefs, attitudes and expectations — is supportive of democracy, is at first sight a plausible one. However, the controversy which surrounded the first systematic attempt to demonstrate such a connection (Almond and Verba 1963) showed that there is fundamental disagreement among political scientists as to what a democracy-supportive political culture consists in, and considerable suspicion that, whatever it is, it is more likely to be the product of existing democratic institutions than it is their cause.

There are broadly two different kinds of response to such difficulties. One is to abandon the cultural approach altogether, and argue that democracies emerge and become consolidated, not out of any principled commitment to democratic norms, but when the major political players recognise sufficient common interest in

establishing electoral procedures, and subsequently see that their interest in keeping to the rules of the game outweighs the costs to them of their being undermined. Democratic consolidation thus becomes amenable to a 'rational choice' analysis of the respective interests of different players operating in conditions of uncertainty; and democratic legitimacy is reduced to a matter of habituation to a set of rules which all players have an interest in observing. 'Culture' thus disappears as a significant explanatory variable (Przeworski 1991, ch. 1).

A different approach seeks to avoid the charge of causal circularity between democratic culture and institutions by identifying aspects of a society's culture that are in themselves non-political or pre-political, such as religious belief, but which may have a bearing upon democratic sustainability; and to avoid the issue of what precisely a democratic culture consists in by identifying those aspects of a culture that are most inconsistent with democratic institutions and practice. In other words, if we cannot say what a democratic culture is, we can at least say what it is not, or what is incompatible with it. This approach gives us two negative hypotheses.

**Sixth hypothesis:** certain religions are incompatible with democratic sustainability. The religious hypothesis used to be put in a positive form, as a unique congruence between Protestantism and democracy. Given definitive formulation by Max Weber, this thesis held that Protestantism, by encouraging an ethic of individual responsibility, a rich and internally democratic associational life and, in its non-conformist variants at least, a clear separation between church and state, prepared a particularly fertile ground for political democracy. This unique positive relationship was accepted as an article of faith among political scientists until even quite recently (see for example, Lipset 1990). However, the successful transition of Spain and Portugal to democracy in Europe, the experience of liberation theology and grass roots Catholicism in Latin America, and the increasingly positive attitude towards democracy among Catholic hierarchies in most continents over the past decade or more, have all led to a reevaluation of the old thesis. Now Western Christendom as a whole must be given a clean bill of health, so to speak, as regards democracy, and the problem sought elsewhere (Huntington 1991:72-84; cp. Huntington 1991a). In different ways Russian orthodoxy, Confucianism and Islam can all be seen as having features inconsistent with democracy: the first because its conception of the popular will is transcendental rather than empirical; the second because it subordinates the individual to the collective good; the third because it consists in a legislative project, which allows no separation between faith and politics.

The problem with this 'negative' hypothesis in turn is that it treats religions as monolithic, when their core doctrines are typically subject to a variety of schools of interpretation; and as immutable, when they are notoriously revisionist in the face of changing circumstances and political currents. The speed with which the supposed incompatibility of Catholicism and democracy could be reversed over the course of a single decade should make us properly cautious of any sweeping anathemas pronounced on non-Western religions by Western political science.

The one thing we can say with more certainty that is incompatible with democracy is any form of belief, whether sacred or secular, which claims that the final truth for society lies in some superior and esoteric knowledge that is beyond question by the uninitiated, and to which political authority must be subject. Such a belief will necessarily prove authoritarian and anti-democratic, however many people it can mobilise in its support; and the greater the number of those who do not share the belief in question, the more repressive it will be. It is thus not so much the doctrinal

content of any religion, as the manner in which it is practised and politically organised, and, as the next hypothesis asserts, its relationship to 'outsiders', that is relevant to the fate of democracy.

**Seventh hypothesis:** societies divided by clearly defined and historically antagonistic cultural groups will have great difficulty in sustaining democracy. Of all the hypotheses this is the one least easy to dispute, whether the groups in question be defined by ethnicity, language, religion, historical memory, or whatever else gives people a sense of common identity that readily distinguishes them from others. As long ago as the 1860s J. S. Mill wrote that 'free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities', because 'each fears more injury to itself from the other nationalities than from the common arbiter, the state', (Mill 1861, ch. 16). It is an accepted proposition in most of the literature considered here that, of the necessary background conditions for democracy, besides the state's effective legislative control over its territory, a measure of national unity is the most essential. Once the principle of popular sovereignty has been acknowledged, that all political authority stems from the people, then the question of who constitutes 'the people' assumes a decisive political importance (see Nodia 1992).

The reasons why democracies are more dependent on national unity than able to construct it *de novo* are twofold, one to democracy's credit, the other much less so. First, democracy as a system of government depends upon popular consent in conditions of free expression and association. If people simply cannot consent to go on living together, then the only alternative to secession or civil war is the imposition of some form of authoritarian rule. Secondly, democracy as the electoral competition for power is itself enormously divisive, because politicians will exploit those bases of popular mobilisation that will most readily deliver the numbers to ensure them political office. If there are no effective bases of mobilisation that cut across 'ethnic' loyalties (using this term in the broadest sense), and no party which successfully transcends them, then an intensification of ethnic politics is the likely outcome. Here democracy can readily come to seem part of the problem rather than the solution, especially if it is constructed in a 'winner take all' fashion.

The relevance of this particular hypothesis to sub-Saharan Africa is all too obvious, given its artificially constructed states and its history of colonial divide-and-rule policies. However, if we cannot reconstruct the past, we may at least develop institutional arrangements that will help minimise democracy's own shortcomings (Horowitz 1993). With hindsight the system of one-party rule looks like a flawed experiment, because whatever gains for national unity were achieved came at a considerable price. Whether more democratic alternatives can be developed to minimise division, and if so which, forms the subject of the institutional theories to be considered next.

### **Political Institutions for Sustainable Democracy**

Those who argue that the character of political institutions is important do not necessarily ignore the more 'fundamental' or long-run factors given by a country's social and economic structure, its cultural patterns or its history of state and regime formation. What they urge is that, if our aim is not so much to explain the past and the present as to influence the future, to look forwards rather than backwards, then we should concentrate on those features that are realistically alterable by human action within a reasonable time-span. Of these the most obvious are political institutions.

This institutionalist tendency is noticeable in the early volumes of the *Journal of Democracy*, with its experts on comparative government such as Linz and Lijphart, who have long argued that there is not one single 'democracy', but many democracies. From this standpoint the crafting of democracy is as much a matter of ingenuity as of will, of knowing the general tendencies of different institutional forms, as well as creatively adapting them to local circumstances. Among these general tendencies we can distinguish three different propositions: about the superiority of parliamentarism over presidentialism; of proportional over plurality electoral systems; of regional over centralist forms of government. The first two in particular have been widely debated in numbers of the *Journal* (for presidentialism see vols. 1.1, 1.4, 4.4; for electoral systems see vols. 2.1, 2.3, 4.1).

**Eighth hypothesis:** presidential systems are less durable than parliamentary ones. This hypothesis is currently a matter of serious debate in Latin America and the countries of the former USSR. In a presidential system (characterised by a strict division of powers and separate elections for chief executive and legislature) presidents face a number of dilemmas, so it is argued. Either they remain 'above politics', in which case they have difficulty in mobilising the organised party support to deliver their agenda; or they are effective politicians, but at the expense of compromising the head of state's unifying role typical of a constitutional president or monarch. More serious than either of these, however, is the inbuilt conflict or 'gridlock' between president and legislature, which there is no democratic method of resolving since both are popularly elected and enjoy democratic legitimacy. Presidents tend to be intolerant of legislative opposition, and the temptation to use their executive power extra-legally to side-step, browbeat or coerce an obstructive legislature often proves irresistible.

Prime ministers, in contrast, are typically much more effective at delivering an electoral programme, since their position as chief executive depends upon a parliamentary majority in the first place. Moreover, parliamentary systems have proved much more flexible in response to crisis or government failure, as they can engineer a change of administration or chief executive without having to wait until a new election is held. Finally, prime-ministerial coups against parliament are virtually unknown. Although these arguments may be overstated, the impressive fact that the US is the only example of a durable presidential system in existence gives them considerable force. The sheer prestige of the US may have given its constitutional system an image of exportability that is simply misleading.

**Ninth hypothesis:** proportional electoral systems are less politically divisive than plurality ones. This hypothesis stems from Lijphart's well known distinction between two different types of democracy, which he calls 'majoritarian' and 'consensual' respectively (Lijphart 1984). The problem with the plurality or 'first-past-the-post' system in divided societies is that, by magnifying the gains to the largest party, it enables it to win a parliamentary majority even on a minority of the popular vote. It also encourages an exclusivist or 'winner-take-all' approach to politics, in which the divisiveness of the electoral contest carries through into government office; the prize of the contest is seen as untrammelled power, in which losing parties have no legitimate place. Proportional systems, in contrast, almost invariably require coalition government, and encourage cross-party compromise and consensus-building as a normal way of life. The objection typically raised against coalition government by politicians of the English-speaking world, that it leads to weak or ineffective government, is simply belied by the experience of continental Europe.

The above applies to parliamentary systems only. In a presidential system, a consensual element can be achieved by multi-preference voting, so that no president can be elected by a mere plurality; or, as in Nigeria, by requiring presidential candidates to achieve a determinate spread of votes across a given proportion of states or regions of the country. Neither, however, will have quite the ongoing consensus-building effects of proportional representation in a parliamentary system.

The value of different electoral systems will very much depend on local circumstances. The 'Westminster model' used to work well in most of the UK, with two main parties of roughly equal size; with three parties of different sizes it produces hugely disproportionate outcomes between parties and regions, and can no longer deliver effective electoral accountability. It used to work well in mainland Britain, with its homogeneous population, but was a disaster in Northern Ireland, with its sectarian divisions. Apart from such specificities of context, our attitude to electoral systems will also depend on how we judge the place of majority rule in democratic theory and practice. Is majoritarianism the acme of democratic perfection, which gives one part of society the automatic right to impose its will on the rest; or is it simply a necessary procedural device for resolving disagreement when other measures (negotiation, amendment, compromise, etc.) have been exhausted? And can majority rule be democratic, let alone sustainable, if it leads to the widespread denial of the basic rights on which democratic citizenship is founded?

**Tenth hypothesis:** democratic sustainability is improved by a system of devolved regional government. Like the previous hypothesis, this is particularly applicable to ethnically and regionally divided countries. Regionalism offers a version of power sharing, which operates at the territorial rather than the parliamentary or executive levels. It enables a party which is defeated electorally at the centre to compensate for its exclusion from office by the prospect of exercising power at the regional level. South Africa provides a highly pertinent current example, although Ethiopia has taken devolved government the furthest.

There is a simple principle at issue here. If the losers in the electoral contest believe that the cost of their exclusion from office is too high, they will have a strong incentive not to abide by the outcome. Too little at stake: people will not bother to vote, and democracy will be discredited. Too much at stake: the losers will take their bat home, and democracy may be destroyed. Regionalism offers a path between this Scylla and Charybdis by dividing the different functions of government between different levels. Although such division contains the possibility of conflict between centre and region, this will be mitigated by a clear separation of functions, preferably subject to adjudication by a constitutional court. At least this offers a more civilised alternative to secession or civil war.

## **Conclusion**

A reader of this article might be forgiven for concluding that we suffer from a surfeit of hypotheses, even without adding to them further propositions about the international environment of domestic politics. This only demonstrates that the consolidation of democracy is a product of many factors or conditions operating together. No one condition on its own will be either necessary or sufficient, but an accumulation of facilitating conditions can be expected to enhance the prospects for the survival of electoral democracy. It is not, however, a matter of simply 'adding them up' in some crudely aggregative fashion. The order followed here — historical

origins, economic and social structure, political agency, constitutional arrangements — does have a certain logic to it, as well as providing a way of integrating the different elements into a coherent story. What is the point of the exercise? Explaining the way the world is requires no special justification for the social scientist. Those bold enough may even use such conditions as are discussed here to predict which countries are most likely to survive this latest democratic 'wave'. Those directly involved in the struggle for democratisation, however, will rightly seek to resist any pessimistic conclusions that might follow for their own countries from such a prediction. Here the hypotheses might serve a different purpose. Apart from the purely historical ones, most of them can be read as having some implications for action or policy, given appropriate adjustments for local circumstances. In the ongoing struggle for democratisation, in other words, social science can have a modest accessory role, in helping political practice to be more intelligent, through a systematic awareness of comparative experience elsewhere.

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