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From Democracy to Democratization and Back:

Before *Transitions from Autoritarian Rule*[1]

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About the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL)

CDDRL was founded by a generous grant from the Bill and Flora Hewlett Foundation in October in 2002 as part of the Stanford Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. The Center supports analytic studies, policy relevant research, training and outreach activities to assist developing countries in the design and implementation of policies to foster growth, democracy, and the rule of law.

About the Author

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Think back to the time when Philippe Schmitter, Guillermo O'Donnell and their colleagues first conceptualized the four-volume path-breaking study *Transitions from authoritarian rule: prospects for democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe* (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986). Today, when almost all regions of the world except the Middle East have been swept by democratization and virtually every government (no matter how authoritarian) claims to be a democracy, it is difficult to remember how different the political and conceptual map looked a quarter century ago. At that time, the 'Transitions' project simply could not have been launched in most of the countries under discussion because their rulers would have considered both its subject and its spirit to be subversive. Much of Latin America was authoritarian; some former long-standing democracies like Chile had not long before experienced a brutal and dramatic 'reverse wave' back to autocracy; and the countries of Southern Europe had not yet demonstrated that they could shake the powerful legacies of their personalistic or military regimes. So distant did the achievement of democracy seem that, at the 1979 opening session to launch what was then an unheard of cross-regional comparative study of how and whether authoritarian regimes might break down, one of the participants wondered aloud whether this was merely an exercise in 'wishful thinking' – an unrealistic attempt by naive scholars to imagine (and perhaps to help shape) a more attractive future.

Under these circumstances, the achievements of the *Transitions* project are all the more remarkable. It may be no exaggeration to claim that, in the words of the director of the Woodrow Wilson Center, it has had 'the greatest influence in shaping how we understand democratic transitions in Latin America and elsewhere than anything written or published in the last quarter century.'[2] Its impact has been both scholarly and political. Although libraries were full of books about the workings of democracy prior to this project, there were virtually no self-consciously analytical comparative studies about how countries actually became democratic. As the first of its kind, *Transitions from authoritarian rule* inspired a growth industry of democratization studies that have engaged, critiqued and expanded its initial insights –

beginning with transitions, then moving on to examine whether and how democracies could become consolidated and how their quality might be improved.[3]

More importantly, grounded as it was in strong normative goals as well as realistic assumptions, the project profoundly influenced the thinking of democratizers working to bring about the end of autocracies. Not only did the final volume, the so-called 'the little green book' by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), provide a blueprint for identifying the types of problems these practitioners were likely to face in moments of transition, but it inspired real hope among actors 'fighting in the trenches' from Chile to South Africa to Czechoslovakia that reaching democracy was indeed possible – even in the most unlikely of places – as long as they acted with strategic vision and had a little help from fortuna. Aiming at practitioners was a deliberate choice. After living, suffering and studying authoritarian rule, the participants in the project understood that difficult compromises would need to be made and especially broad coalitions built if democratization were to be achieved. Rooted in an intellectual spirit committed to change, the project self-consciously sought to develop theoretical tools that could provide social agents with assistance in altering terrible conditions of oppression. This interaction between praxis and theory paid off. In the end, the *Transitions* project proved not to be 'wishful thinking' after all but rather, in Lowenthal's words, 'thoughtful wishing' about the creation of better polities that assisted democratizers in different parts of the globe.[4]

As a result of the sudden rapidity and frequency of regime changes that followed, the Transitions project proved to have been in the right place at the right time. Conceived well before the end of the Cold War when authoritarian regimes had barely begun to unravel, first in Latin America where militaries across the continent eventually withdrew from power after 1979 and governments were elected in Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Chile and some Central American countries, it would have seemed scarcely plausible that democratization could spread to Asia, with transitions to democracy in the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan – much less to Eastern Europe and parts of the former Soviet Union and Africa. Today, using a very minimalist definition, 120 out of 192 countries are at least electoral democracies,

representing over 60 per cent of the population of the globe. Even more astonishing, there are currently no global rivals to democracy as a model of legitimate government (Diamond 2003, pp. 4–5), and most remaining openly autocratic governments are at least trying to claim their intent to convert themselves into democracies in the future. While the actual process of democratization has proceeded in fits and starts, and the trends in regime change are by no means uniformly positive, both the number of democratic polities and the ratio of democracies to non-democracies are at the highest levels ever recorded (O'Loughlin et al;, ;Diamond 2003).

From its beginning, this body of new democratization studies posed a challenge to the discipline of political science, especially to the growing trend to import formal modelling and rational choice theorizing from economics. With its emphasis on complexity and content rather than simplicity and elegance, its insistence on the importance of process as well as accident and unintended consequences for understanding outcomes, its blurring of the boundaries between international relations and comparative politics, its stress on ideologies as well as rationalities, and its promotion of cross-regional comparisons as well as area studies, it offered scholars and practitioners a different way of conceptualizing and understanding what became the foremost political trend at the end of the twentieth century. As the 'transitology' paradigm has been developed and extended, scholars have sought to identify similarities and differences across diverse cases and regions to explain not just successful transitions to democracy but also failed transitions, transitions that never occurred and even transitions that might occur in the future. What sets this work apart from most (but not all) previous theorizing is its demonstration that very different points of departure and a combination of variables can produce the same broad types of outcomes across different regions of the world – a finding that should provoke change in the ways politics are compared in the future.

This chapter examines the contributions of scholars of transitions by illuminating, first, key shifts in our theoretical understanding that occurred with the publication of *Transitions from authoritarian rule.* Here it focuses on establishing different insights into the role of elections and, hence, the classification of regimes, as well as structural versus more voluntaristic

interpretations of politics and, hence, the role of supposed preconditions. Second, it explores changes in research design that affect how we understand the role of states, nationalities and international factors as well as evaluate the importance of world regions and select units of analysis. Third, it looks at a central methodological challenge posed by the devices politicians choose during different modes of transition, especially the role of political pacts. A brief conclusion follows. This discussion is not intended to be comprehensive. It will not try to cover all of the relevant issues, critiques and literatures that have enriched the field over the last quarter century; nor will it address central questions concerning the definition of democracy, its quality or its testing and measurement that pose serious challenges for the future. Instead, following the mandate of the editors of this volume, it seeks to assess in broad brushstrokes how the field of democracy studies has changed with the publication of *Transitions from authoritarian rule.*

Shifting theory: from structure to agency and back

Influenced by the seminal work of Rustow (1970) in identifying the characteristics of what they called 'the interval between one political regime and another', O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) made the notion of transitions a central concern of comparative politics. *Transitions*, they argued, are a distinctive moment in the political life and trajectory of a country – a period of unknown duration and extraordinary uncertainty that is generally initiated from dynamics within the autocratic regime. They are different from the *liberalization* of authoritarian rule, in which restrictions may be loosened and some individual or group rights may be expanded at the whim of the regime. Such policy changes tend to reflect divisions between hardliners and softliners within the prevailing autocracy, and eventually (though often through fits and starts), they escaped the control of incumbents and lead to some type of uncertain regime change. It is precisely this extraordinary state of uncertainty that is the chief feature of a transition from authoritarian rule. Characterized by a high degree of unpredictability, lack of adequate information, sheer confusion among activists, inability to calculate interests accurately and,

often, accidental solutions, actions during transitions are underdetermined, choices are underspecified, and outcomes are uncertain. Contrary to interpretations by practitioners of democratic promotion or academic specialists working on other regions who tried to apply these theoretical insights, there was never any claim that regime transitions meant democratic transitions – one of the chief misreadings of this work.[5] Instead, however one might have hoped for democratic outcomes, transitions could also end in autocratic regressions, 'soft authoritarianism' (dictablanda), 'hard democracy' (democradura) or revolution.

While it may be difficult to determine exactly when a transition begins, the holding of elections and, more importantly, the general acceptance of the preferences revealed by their outcomes most often mark its end. But, at least in the original formulation, these 'founding' elections occur in a very particular context characterized by overlapping processes of (1) the liberalization of authoritarian rule, (2) the formation or resurrection of civil society, which then pushes the boundaries of change faster and farther than they otherwise would have gone, and, only in this context, (3) the holding of fair elections of uncertain outcome. This is an important distinction because elections held without these prior processes may have important political effects, but in themselves they cannot be said to indicate that a regime transition has occurred. Equating democracy with the mere holding of elections or assuming that such elections will subsequently generate further and deeper democratic reforms down the line commits 'the fallacy of electoralism' (Karl 1986, 2000; Carothers 2002; Diamond 2002). It also favours an excessively minimalist definition of democracy in which accountability, perhaps the broadest and most widely applicable meaning of modern representative democracy (Schmitter 2004, p. 47), is relegated to a narrow electoral sphere rather than to the multiple and varied exchanges of responsibilities and potential sanctions between rulers and citizens that may actually exist (Schmitter 2004).

The reaction to this minimalism led to a vigorous debate over 'what democracy is…. and is not' (Schmitter and Karl 1991), which encouraged broader definitions and more comprehensive and multi-variant indicators for its measurement (Munch and Verkuilen 2002),[6]

and resulted in more fruitful ways of classifying regimes. The field, in effect, has moved from 'democracy without adjectives' to regime classifications that are once again loaded with labels (Collier and Levitsky 1997). Excessive minimalism created the mistaken impression that all countries that change their most visible leaders, liberalize some of their policies, adopt new constitutions and conduct elections with more than one party have successfully performed a change of regime when they may have just 'crafted' a shift from one type of autocracy to another. Instead, we are witnessing regimes that have elections and tolerate some expressions of pluralism but violate other principles and procedures of democracy so severely that they have been called 'delegative' (O'Donnell 1994), 'populist' (Roberts 1995), 'hybrid' (Karl 1995, Diamond 2002), 'illiberal' (Zakaria 1997), 'electoralist' (Diamond 2002) 'competitive authoritarian', (Levitsky and Way 2002), 'semi-authoritarian' (Olcott and Ottaway 1999) or 'contested autocracies' (van de Walle 2002). While there is no agreement on the specific labels, these more finely tuned classifications do permit analysts to distinguish 'changes within a regime type' from 'changes from one type of regime to another.'

It has become increasingly evident that many of these regimes are not 'in transition' from one type of regime to another but rather use selective mechanisms of democracy to create institutionalized 'gray zones' (Carothers 2002). Rather than being 'halfway' on the road to regime change, some liberalized authoritarian regimes with limited multiparty and electoral politics can be remarkably stable because such institutions and procedures provide a site for the negotiation of elite interests, permit long-term agenda setting, even facilitate the cooptation of potential reformers, which both Mexico under the PRI and many Middle Eastern polities demonstrate (Brownlee 2005). And, contrary to the expectations of the original model linking liberalization and transition, liberalization does not always lead to a change in regime (for example, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Jordan); nor does it always escape the control of incumbents. Instead, it may be a device for maintaining their control, and so hybrid regimes may be consolidated and even sustainable for quite some time.

Thus the study of regime transitions has clarified that elections matter both more and less than theorists once thought. On the one hand, holding competitive, free and fair 'founding elections' based on mass suffrage can be the key threshold that marks a distinctive shift in the political rules of the game. They may not end the transition; there can still be a regression to autocracy and elections certainly do not guarantee consolidation. But they certainly signal that regime institutionalization has begun and raise the threshold for those who desire to return to the status quo *ex ante*. If such elections occur in the context of transition, they may be significant enough to alter a country's entire political trajectory. On the other hand, more and more regimes have been adopting and adapting the formal trappings of elections – with regular and competitive multiparty contests – while limiting the application of other democratic rules and processes. The most common explanation for this, the search for 'respectability,' is that the holding of elections in autocratic regimes is due almost exclusively to the West's insistence upon an outward show of democratic forms (no matter how superficial) in the wake of the Cold War and the absence of competing hegemons to counter this pressure. Such 'demonstration elections' and mixed regime types predated the fall of the Soviet Union, but never to the present extent. The hegemony of liberal democracy as a legitimate regime type has meant that the trend toward democracy has been stealthily accompanied by an even more rapid countertrend towards hybrid regimes.[7]

While this more nuanced view towards elections and regime classification is significant, the chief theoretical legacy of *Transitions from authoritarian rule* is the emphasis on human agency that now characterizes the study of transitions, as well as the notion that these transitions can take place in a wide variety of social and economic settings (including those not generally perceived as conducive to democracy). What matters most in such times of 'abnormal politics' are not the structural conditions that may subsequently shape a polity but rather the short-term strategic calculations of actors. When choices are intelligent, broad coalitions are built, hardliners are isolated and fortuna smiles, the combination of pressures from both inside and outside the regime can eventually result in a change of regime marked by the convocation of

'founding elections' of generally uncertain outcome. Where this occurs (and it frequently does not), a transition from authoritarian rule becomes a transition towards democracy. Thus the study of democratization rests on upon a logic of analytically distinct but empirically overlapping causal sequences which, under the best of circumstances, can (but will not necessarily) proceed from the decay and disintegration of authoritarian rule to regime transition to the emergence of a new democracy (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986).

This broad analysis, more than anything else, made the study of transitions and especially transitions that lead to democracy a distinct area of scholarship. Conceptually, it broke with the 'preconditions' tradition that regards the establishment of democracy as the by-product of higher levels of modernization characterized by greater wealth (Lipset 1959), the formation of a bourgeoisie (Moore 1966), more tolerant civic cultures (Almond and Verba 1963) or overcoming economic dependency (Cardoso and Faleto 1979). In marked contrast with the mainstream scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s, which focused on the search for the necessary conditions and prerequisites correlated with the eventual attainment of stable democracy, this outcome was understood to be the product of strategic interactions among political elites who were often pushed from below and who made conscious choices under exceptional conditions about the types of constitutions, electoral arrangements, party systems, civil–military configurations and economic models their countries should adopt. While not denying the long-term causal impact of structural factors, their short-term manifestations were not determinative in this critical juncture.

The turn from necessary and sufficient conditions for understanding both the origins and the outcomes of regime change has shifted research from the causes to the 'causers of democratization' (Huntington 1996, p. 106). This has produced several general propositions which, while not very satisfying to those seeking a general theory of democratic transition, have been repeatedly reaffirmed in empirical work. First, 'transitologists' (and subsequent empirical realities) have verified the 'hopeful wishing' of the past by substantiating the claim that there are very few preconditions for the emergence of democracy; democracies can be built in both

favourable and improbable settings.[8] In this respect, this literature has demonstrated the fallacy of longstanding conventional views that economic development causes countries to become democratic (Lipset 1959; Jackman 1973) by showing that the level of development is not a good predictor of the origin of democratic transitions, even if it certainly helps to explain part of their subsequent survivability (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi 2000, ch. 2). Predictions to the contrary, transitions to democracy can occur even in culturally or structurally unfavourable environments where colonial legacies or religious traditions are especially unfavourable, country size differs greatly and ethno-linguistic fractionalization is present (Barro 1999). The collective choices of actors, if taken under the right circumstances and at the right time, can cancel out, at least temporarily, the negative effects of a low level of development or an especially skewed social class structure (Przeworski 1991, p. 96), and they may even be able to overcome the serious obstacles posed by so-called 'deeply divided' or 'plural' societies (Linz and Stepan 1996; Bastion and Luckham 2003).

Note that this finding rests on the crucial distinction between regime transition and regime consolidation – a distinction which, if utilized, may well resolve a longstanding issue in comparative politics and even provide better guidelines for practitioners of the promotion of democracy. The claim is frequently made that the positive relationship between democracy and economic development has repeatedly been established 'beyond reasonable doubt' (Geddes 1999, p. 117), but past statistical studies have not distinguished between already existing democratic regimes and those in actual transition. When these distinctions are made, the finding is different: preconditions matter a great deal for the survivability of democracy but not for the transition to it (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi 2000).[9] While the level of development does influence the long-term durability of democracy, even here it seems to be a sufficient, not a necessary, condition to survivability. Witness, for example, the respectable number of poor countries that have remained democratic such as Albania, Bolivia, Mongolia and Mali – albeit not always stably so – in defiance of the 'beyond reasonable doubt' correlation.

Still, there are limits to intelligent and purposive human agency – even in moments of 'abnormal politics' when long-term constraints are at least temporarily eased. Despite the impression given by some that crafting democracy is simply a matter of elite disposition or will (Di Palma 1990; Dogan and Higley 1998), and notwithstanding the fact that calculations have often been emphasized to the exclusion of all other factors involved in creating and consolidating new polyarchies, some structural conditions do seem to rule out the probability of a successful transition to democracy. No regime change to democracy can occur until they are altered or eliminated. Where agrarian elites dominate the social structure, where populations are predominantly rural and where labour-repressive agriculture is practised – the so-called 'Moore condition' – the installation of a democracy is highly unlikely. Thus, for example, the transition to some hybrid form of democracy in Central America has only been made possible by shifting the centre of capital accumulation away from traditional forms of export agriculture based on labour repression (Mahoney 2000; Wood 2003). Democracy is also highly improbable where the boundaries of the territory have not been previously defined and agreed upon – the 'Rustow condition' of 'no nation, no democracy'.

Furthermore, the perceived range of choice implied by the emphasis on purposive political action can be deceptive even in the midst of a transition. In other words, some transitions may be subject to more constraints than others. This is even more the case in the post-transition period when actors have already chosen some set of institutions based on these very constraints and are trying to make them work. Under these circumstances, what may appear to be an unusually wide space for political choice can be severely circumscribed in practice by more proximate factors. For this reason leaders' decisions can be viewed as 'choices among competing opportunity costs' (Bunce 2004, p. 230) or occurring in settings of 'structured contingency', in which choices are circumscribed by pre-transitional political, economic or cultural factors that block the perception of viable alternative choices (Karl 1997).

Countries dependent on the export of petroleum, and hence exhibiting an 'oil effect' that delays and sometimes deters democracy, provide a good example. High levels of

dependence on oil rents tend to support generally autocratic regimes in these countries for unusually long periods of time, thus depressing the likelihood of regime transition; the performance of the oil market profoundly influences the timing of regime change when it does come; and, in the rare case where a democracy is actually established, reliance on oil as the chief source off foreign exchange traps leaders into very perverse decision-making paths, leading to defective democracies. The explanation lies in an extreme form of rentier state, which permits exceptionally extensive patronage and militarization that proves especially effective at holding contestation at bay (Karl 1997, 1999). This finding, which has been confirmed by numerous statistical studies (for example, Ross 2001; Hadenius 2004), poses an alternative explanation for why the Middle East and North Africa (with the exception of two non-oil countries, Turkey and Lebanon) have not been caught up in the global wave of democratization. Rather than emphasizing 'the clash of civilizations' or the presumptive inhospitableness of Islam to democracy (arguments unfortunately reminiscent of earlier claims that Catholicism was incompatible with democracy in Latin America), it notes that virtually all rich oil exporters are electoral 'underachievers', while countries that either have no oil or whose oil is no longer producing massive rents are electoral 'overachievers'. This may help to clarify why so many political liberalizations that had begun in this region were stalled or reversed, why no authoritarian executive has been removed from office through elections, and why elections (when introduced at all) are held primarily in non-oil rather than oil-rich countries. [10] In the context of exceptional cooptation and repression permitted by oil rents, the emergence of a strategic opposition coalition, so essential to pushing liberalization into democratization, is especially difficult to achieve.[11]

A second central finding of 'transitology' is that democratization is the result of a combination of causes, not merely one single cause. Most theories of transition embrace complex interaction effects – political and economic, domestic and international. No single factor has been identified as being either necessary or sufficient across a range of cases to be the

cause of democratization. Potential candidates range from the nature and extent of divisions within the prior non-democratic regime (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski and Toka 1999), the quality of elite decision-making (Dogan and Higley 1998), the strength of civil society measured by class actors (Collier 1999; Wood 2000) or social movements (Tarrow 1995), the distribution of ethnic groups (Offe 1997), the pressure from hegemons or other countries or the removal of such pressure (Whitehead 1996; Drake 1998) or the location of countries in a pattern of international diffusion (O'Loughlin, Ward, Lofdahl, Cohen, Brown, Reilly, Gleditsch and Shinn 1998). What is also evident is that the same cause may or may not have the same effect in different settings.

This has made the isolation or assessment of any particular cause especially difficult. Take the debate over whether transitions are primarily elite or mass driven. An initial consensus that they are primarily elite driven (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Di Palma 1990; Higley and Gunther 1992), derived from the experiences of Southern Europe and Latin America, has been challenged – not only by ordinary people who opened up political space by demanding democracy or advancing it farther than elites wanted it to go but also by studies that repeatedly demonstrate how collective action has been more consequential than this original emphasis suggests (see Collier in this volume; Oxhorn 1995; Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Geddes 1999; McFaul 2002 and Bunce 2003). Mass actors have changed the intentions of autocrats, expanded the scope of contestation in successor regimes, fought for the legalization of parties of the left in Latin America, sustained channels of communication between the state and society and even 'unstalled' some transitions. What is unclear, however, is whether they are ever the primary actor in regime change, whether there are regional distinctions in the relative balance between elite and mass actors (hence popular mobilization has simply had a greater impact in Africa or Central and Eastern Europe than in Latin America or Southern Europe) or whether this regional explanation is actually based on the relative strength and weakness of global hegemons at particular moments (for example the capacity of the US to oppose popular movements in Latin America during the Cold War in contrast to the inability of the collapsing Soviet Union to

intervene in its backyard in 1989). Moreover, differences in the type of popular mobilization characteristic in some struggles, as opposed to the actual strength of mass actors, may explain these variations, as Teorell and Hadenius (2004) suggest; massive but peaceful popular protest may have a transition-enhancing effect, while violent clashes involving the use of force may provide the excuse for effective repression. And, of course, all of these factors can come into play.

In this respect, democratization theories differ from many other theories in political science because they emphasize multiple causation and often conclude with equifinality, arguing that different variables or combinations of variables can produce the same result, namely a transition to democracy. This casts doubt on the prospects for building a single general theory of the origins of democracy. With the constant introduction of new causal variables and the multiplication of explanations, various scholars (Shin 1994; Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995; Mahoney and Snyder 1999; Munck 2004b) have made heroic efforts to synthesize these debates as well as the range of explanatory factors. Rational choice approaches, often making the claim of building towards generalizable game-theoretic models of democratic transition, have also tried to cope with complex and often chance causation, but their explanatory variables also vary considerably between models that highlight the critical role of triggers (Kuran 1995), the role of the previous authoritarian regime (Geddes 1999) or the economic interests of actors conceived in class terms (Boix 2000). Thus, despite some impressive progress on the causers of democratization, there is still no integration of these diverse factors into a hierarchy of explanation that could be called a general theory of transition – and significant doubt about whether such an effort is possible.

The same cannot be said for democratic consolidation. Despite the debate over the notion of consolidation as a framework for thinking about post-transitional settings and despite the fact that it has been used in such different ways for such different ends that it has lost conceptual clarity (and at least one of the original authors of the *Transitions* volume prefers to jettison it completely!),[12] most scholars tend to agree with Rustow's (1970) proposition that

what explains a transition to democracy may be different from what explains its subsequent fate. While the answers posed are still predictably varied and often controversial, especially when consolidation is incorrectly defined solely as durability (Schedler 1998), one major feature of consolidation clearly differentiates it from transition: the consolidation of democracy is defined by the substantial reduction in the uncertainty that is so central to transition; indeed, it is about institutionalizing some relative high degree of certainty through a common set of rules (both formal and informal), generally understood political roles and relatively well-delineated policy arenas.[13] This means that consolidation (whatever diverse form it may take) is characterized by an internal logic composed of interdependent conditions – not the same degree of chance or incidental events that elucidate transitions. It also means that this logic can be identified, as Schmitter and Schneider (2004) have demonstrated by means of scalograms. In effect, the factors involved in the consolidation of democracy show a strong sense of internal ordering across regions that simply cannot be found among the characteristics of transition due to its more improvised nature.

Finally, in consolidation the full range of structural explanations kick back into the democratic equation and are much more predictive of performance, meaning, for example, that the level of development or the absence of strong ethno-linguistic differences is strongly associated with successful consolidation. Consolidation is simply far more standardized, imitative and predictable than transition; thus it can more successfully draw upon democratic theory based on longer-term and less proximate structures. It is not surprising, then, as countries move from the high uncertainty of transition to a more institutionalized, more certain post-transition setting that the concern for factors like the nature of the state, the level of development, changes in the global economy, the mix of identities, demographic shifts, etc. come into play.

Shifting design: from region to cross-regional comparison and back

The new democracy studies have also changed the design of research – with a significant impact on the generation of both theoretical and empirical findings. Beginning with *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, scholars regular began to move beyond the original and valuable emphasis on area studies and embrace systematic cross-regional comparison and cross-temporal comparisons in order to discover what is similar and different about regime transitions in widely variant contexts. The application of the transitions paradigm to Africa and the post-communist East challenged the theoretical and geographic reach of assumptions, concepts and conclusions based on the comparison between cases in Southern Europe and South America and raised the question of whether pre-existing scholarship might help in explaining these new regime changes, regardless of their geographic location (Bova 1991; Schmitter and Karl 1994; Bratton and van de Walle 1997).

But the suggestion to apply, test and modify the concepts and arguments from the transition literature to these later democratic experiences was not without controversy.[14] Scholars initially argued that communist regimes had been unique and without precedent, that transitions from 'totalitarianism' would be much more difficult than transitions from mere 'authoritarianism, that democracy seemed highly unlikely given the legacy of communism and that the multiple and simultaneous transformations confronting these countries placed them in a different category (Jowitt 1992; Bunce 1995a, 1995b). Gradually this gave way to the understanding that what was (and still is) occurring in Central and Eastern Europe and the republics of the former Soviet Union is sufficiently analogous to merit comparison with the earlier experiences in South America and Southern Europe, despite the many differences. Thus, instead of comparing post-communist regime changes only with each other, these transitions have become irrevocably linked to broader questions of regime change in general and democratization in particular.

This incorporation has led to new theoretical insights, especially with regard to the problem of prior stateness, the differential role of ethnic and national cleavages, and the influence of international factors. In effect, even as O'Donnell (1994, 1999) was insisting on the

importance of stateness and legality in Latin America, the experiences of both Africa and some post-communist countries raised even more dramatically the problematic of 'democratizing backwards', that is, introducing competitive elections before establishing the basic institutions of a modern state such as rule of law or the accountability of leaders (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Rose and Shin 2001). Without a state that can rule effectively, control territory, generate a sufficient revenue base and wield its monopoly over the use of violence, regime transitions may occur but are unlikely to be democratic. Thus the differential capacity to enforce laws and protect citizens rights, design and implement policies or impose and collect taxes is a fundamental basis for comparison across regions; it illustrates that stateness is a continuum: in some countries of Africa and the former Soviet Union, as opposed to Latin America and Eastern Europe, limited state capacity is not the problem but the lack of stateness certainly is.

This means that points of departure in the modal paths of regime change are often very different, that is, some transitions occur within the framework of relatively highly bureaucratized states with institutionalized channels of interest representation (for example, Southern and Eastern Europe); others are almost totally 'neo-patrimonial' and centrally characterized by both informal and extralegal institutions (for example, sub-Sahara Africa); and still others are some mix between the two (for example, much of Latin America). In this context, the problem for new democracies is whether they can reverse the sequence that characterized previous waves of democracy, that is, create or enhance stateness and especially the rule of law after a transition and not before (Bill Chavez 2003).

Central to this continuum of stateness is the monopoly over the use of coercion and the control of territory. Events in the communist bloc, which differed from most of Southern Europe and Latin America where geographic borders were not at issue during democratization, encouraged transition scholars to correct their relative lack of attention to this aspect of stateness, not only by introducing more than twenty new states but also by raising serious and unresolved claims to a future redrawing of state boundaries. Because in the post-communist cases (unlike Latin America), there was a long tradition of civilian control over the military,

though coupled with the rise of armed civilian groups and party militias contesting territorial boundaries, the greatest threats to democratization came not from the military but from other sources – the rise of nationalisms, the fear of secessionist movements and the collapse of any monopoly over coercive capacity. In this respect, both the post-communist countries and Africa also highlight the importance of multiple nationalisms within the same territory. While cases in Southern Europe (witness Spain) and South America (especially the Andean countries) were not nearly as ethnically or linguistically homogeneous as some have erroneously claimed,[15] such cleavages clearly become more manifest in countries where the control of state power is the only meaningful route to wealth and power, where political competition is consciously organized along ethnic, national or religious lines, and/or where the distribution of such difference involves only a few major groups vying for power (for example, Nigeria, Chad) as opposed to those where a multiplicity of many smaller groups may even represent a majority of the population (for example, Tanzania or Peru). Under the former circumstances, the weakening or even collapse of the state, manifested by its inability to perform even the most minimal tasks of government for the population as a whole, may be the perverse result of attempted regime transitions, sometimes leaving democracy and even peace well beyond reach.

This is the overriding threat in what are called 'war transitions' (Karl 1997; Call 2002) or 'conflicted democracies' (Ni Aolain and Campbell 2005). Because they are characterized by a different type of simultaneity to that which distinguishes the 'double' economic and political transitions of the post-communist cases, that is, the concurrent effort to transition from authoritarian rule to democracy as well as from war to peace, their overriding obsession following periods of sustained violence becomes the avoidance of complete collapse through the establishment of security. Examples include the former Yugoslavia, El Salvador, Guatemala, South Africa, Mozambique and Iraq. This conflation of two primary types of transition presents both enormous opportunities and dangers. On the one hand, war transitions offer the best prospects for rapid state transformation, especially through broadly based reforms of the military, police and judiciary, and for establishing mechanisms of accountability, especially

through trials, truth commissions and new protections of rights. On the other hand, in the context of high violence, this window of opportunity is very short-lived. If such reforms are not attempted or not well designed and carried out, then war transitions threaten to produce failed states or democracies that are so perilous that many of their citizens long for a return to authoritarian rule.[16] Furthermore, in these concurrent transitions, what might diminish violence may not necessarily enhance democracy.[17]

Perhaps most important, cross-regional comparisons have generated significant new findings that would not easily have been apparent through a regional analysis alone. The fundamental hypothesis underlying the Eastern critics of comparison, at least initially, was the notion that transitions from 'totalitarianism' would be much more difficult than transitions from mere 'authoritarianism' because of their Leninist legacies and their parallel transitions of the economic and political sphere. But this has not proven to be the case. On the contrary, not only have the range of their different types of regime change been strikingly similar to the range of variations found in other regions (a mix of democracies, hybrid regimes and some autocracies), but also Eastern European countries achieved the same or even higher levels of democratization as earlier cases from Southern Europe and Latin America, they did so in a much shorter time and they show significantly greater popular support at comparable periods in the transition and post-transition process (Karl and Schmitter 2002; Schmitter and Schneider 2004).

What has proved especially difficult for democratization are, first, the so-called 'triple' transitions, where the definition of the political community and the drawing of territorial boundaries were added to the mix. But they are not alone in their difficulties. Most Central American countries (with the exception of Costa Rica) also show lower levels of democratization, longer time frames for moving to even a hybrid status and less popular support for their regimes. This suggests that 'backyard' transitions, where the history of big power intervention has been especially high (for example, parts of Central America and the Caribbean, and the former Soviet republics), may be especially problematic, as numerous studies of democratic promotion suggest (Lowenthal 1991).

Cross-regional comparisons also suggest hypotheses and propositions that may help to explain these surprising findings. On the one hand, certain aspects of the legacy of communism may prove positive for the consolidation of democracy – an explanation that the strong ideological basis of the former Sovietology has helped to obscure.[18] For example, for scholars honed on the widespread poverty, extreme inequality and deficiency of educational opportunities resulting from the combined heritage of colonialism and authoritarian rule in Latin America and Africa, the legacy of highly educated populations, relative economic equality, relative lack of absolute deprivation and the absence of long-enduring social classes that characterizes most (but not all) post-communist countries is very striking. While this is changing rapidly and sometimes dramatically in the post-communist countries,[19] Tocqueville's earlier argument that relative equality is a powerful enabling condition for building enduring democracy is confirmed by recent formal models investigating the development–democracy connection (Acemoglu and Robinson 2001; Boix 2003).[20] This gives most post-communist countries an enormous 'legacy' advantage over most of Latin America, where social classes are deeply entrenched, political institutions are often 'captured' and democracy has often been oligarchic.

On the other hand, the comparison with Latin America suggests that 'double' economic and political transition, that is, the simultaneous change from autocracy to democracy and from socialist to market economies, may be an advantage, not a disadvantage. As Fish (1998), Aslund (2002) and Bruszt (in this volume) argue, contrary to the earliest arguments that successful economic reform required restrictions on democracy to keep 'losers' from reversing progress (Przeworski 1991; Haggard and Kaufman 1992), the most successful economic transformations in Eastern and Central Europe have taken place in the most democratic contexts. In effect, where the balance of power during the transition is equal and inclusive, this keeps early 'winners' from becoming too entrenched, encourages regulated markets and produces a better equilibrium between citizenship rights and property rights. Where economic transformation

takes place primarily outside the framework of democratic politics, either because it occurs under authoritarian rule or because the removal of its distributional consequences are a condition (implicit or explicit) of transition, the outcome is most often a corrupted market and oligarchic democracy at best. This is the case in much of Latin America, where pre-existing exceptionally high levels of inequality and long historical patterns of entrenched and oligarchic interests have sought to keep the issue of property (and the rent-seeking opportunities that accompany such acute concentration of wealth) initially outside democratic politics (O'Donnell 1996; Karl 2004). In consequence, most of Latin America has not had the prospect of reorganizing property rights to enhance citizenship in a manner that some (though not all) post-communist countries may enjoy.

Thus, cross-regional comparisons suggest one major lesson: communism may have been different from other types of autocratic rule; however, post-communism may not be all that different from other post-autocratic experiences. Where violence and abuse have been especially high, post-communist countries grapple (or fail to grapple) with ending the impunity of abusers and dealing with the past – just like countries in other regions. Where corruption has been especially widespread, the rule of law becomes a particularly important issue – just like in other regions. Where ethno-linguistic or religious minorities have been especially oppressed and democracy allows them to advance their historic claims, their loyalties and obligations provide much of the substance of political controversy – as in other regions. Where civil societies have been suppressed, weak or fragmented, they have to be strengthened – as in other regions. Where state formation and bureaucratization have preceded democratization and are not changed by it, new democracies are likely to be more stable – just as in other regions. The similarities and the differences are compelling enough to apply the same concepts, assumptions and hypotheses and to test them by using the relevant experiences of every region of the world.

Finally, cross-regional studies have made the case for acquiring regional expertise even more compelling. The shift to cross-regional comparison has underlined the continuing need for analysis based on specific regions and even clarified the analytical reasons for supporting area

studies; comparison across regions permits the identification of what is distinctive about any given region. Take, for example, the relative importance of the international context and external pressures for creating a political ambience favourable to democratization: while the significance of powerful international diffusion mechanisms has been widely recognized (Whitehead 1986, 1996; Pridham 1991; O'Loughlin et al;; Gleditsch 2002) and some of their active components have been identified (for example, a favourable international ideological context that has moderated both the extreme left and extreme right, global organizations such as the Socialist International or the Catholic Church, the prevalence of internet and so on), only a view through regional lenses has been able to demonstrate the fundamental importance of different regional dynamics in shaping the timing and prospects for transitions to democracy or democratic breakdown.

Simply put, geographic location matters – and matters a lot. The findings are convincing. More than anything else, countries tend to become like their *immediate* geographic neighbours over time, and political developments in one country can have a strong impact on regime in other countries in the region (Gledich 2002). While this may seem self-evident, the notion of diffusion has not necessarily been based on a criterion of proximity. But (as any parent can attest) the quality of the immediate neighbourhood is crucial. In Eastern Europe, the attraction of joining the European Union was so strong that even countries that had little in the way of pluralist traditions emulated democratic modes of political conduct in hopes of a genuine integration into the West. Indeed, one of the primary reasons Central European countries represent success stories of transition is that they are located closest to the core countries of Europe, while those countries geographically farthest from the West and with little prospect of EU membership have not fared so well (Pridham 1991). In Latin America, a larger number of democracies in the region in a given year enhanced the prospects that existing autocracies would undergo a transition; contrary to common wisdom, this is a more important causal agent of democracy than economic performance or international intervention (Brinks and Coppedge 2001).

Furthermore, a more democratic regional environment reduces the chance of democratic breakdown in a particular country; democracies tend to survive longer when they are located in good neighbourhoods (Mainwaring and Perez Linan 2004). This helps to account for importance differences in the timing of democratic regime change across regions as well as some remarkable geographic variations in regime type. Thus, while Eastern European and Latin American countries have been proven to be a more fertile soil for democracy, in part by 'contaminating' their neighbours, Arab countries, the Caucasus, Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa tend to be authoritarian; bad neighbourhoods seem to have their own contagion effects.

The study of particular regions, as we have seen, is also essential for theory generation or for challenging generally accepted theories. Earlier it was noted that one of the few truisms in comparative politics is the modernization argument that that the level of economic development is a powerful predictor of democratic stability (Bollen 1980; Londegran and Poole 1996; Przeworski and Limongi 1997), and each study has assumed this effect would be uniform across regions. But regionally sensitive analyses demonstrate that in Latin America economic development has not always been democracy enhancing (O'Donnell 1973; Landman 1999; Mainwaring and Perez-Linan 2004), while in the Middle East and North Africa this modernization relationship does not hold either (Coppedge 1997), perhaps because among the Middle Eastern and African oil exporters there is no statistically significant impact of the level of development, measured as per capita income, on the level of democracy (Mainwaring and Perez-Linan 2004). Thus the use of regions as units of analysis has been able to cast doubt on the universalistic conclusions of general theorists by providing the most detailed empirical evidence about a respective region. In effect, both general and cross-regional studies will only prove fruitful if area studies also flourish.

Shifting methods: revisiting modes and pacts

The new conceptualization of the origins of democracy put forward in the study of transitions has also required a change in understanding the 'devices' used by politicians when they try to

craft regime change. Because transitions are understood to be based on short-term calculations that cannot be deduced ex ante or even imputed ex post from the structural positions of influential actors, the normal tools of social science have very real limitations in situations where events are unexpected, actors are non-standard, identities are shifting, institutions are not functioning, support is impossible to calculate and choices are hurriedly made (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). Such tools cannot explain whether a transition will occur, how it will proceed or why it occurs when it does. Thus the type of work that has characterized the study of American politics in the United States, that is, the assumptions and methods used to study the process whereby legitimately elected leaders working through established institutions of democracy make decisions, is not very useful when these institutions are breaking down and new ones either do not yet exist or are in the process of formation.[21] As O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski and Toka (1999), and Teorell and Hadenius (2004) argue, there is simply too much inherent contingency and uncertainty in transition to permit the utilization of the full range of social science tools. Indeed, orthodox quantitative methods, when applied inappropriately to transitions, can produce quite misleading findings.

This is best seen by revisiting the problematic of modes of transition. The notions that transitions are formative moments setting polities on particular paths, that regime change occurs through a variety of means which can be specified and clustered into a limited number of 'modes of transition' and that these different identifiable paths help to shape the post-transitional regime in distinctive ways lie at the heart of theories of democratization (Stepan 1986; Karl 1990; Karl and Schmitter 1991; Valenzuela 1995; Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Linz and Stepan 1996). While authors have used diverse labels and means to identify these paths, modes of transition are usually distinguished by factors such as the identity of the primary agent of change or the degree of control the outgoing rulers exert over the process, on the one hand, and their different strategies based on variations in the respective role of accommodation and conflict, on the other. For example, in Karl (1990) and Karl and Schmitter (1991), this

specification of ‘modes of transition’ and their hypothetical impact produce four categories: (1) ‘pacted’, (2) ‘imposed’ (either externally or internally), (3) ‘reformist’, and (4) ‘revolutionary’. This means that more than one equilibria can be reached to bring about democracy; it can even mean, more definitively, that the logic of transition cannot be reduced solely to a ‘cooperative’ game in which the balance between supporters and opponents is relatively equal – a description which does not apply to all modes.

Because orthodox quantitative studies have been unable to capture any pattern of relationship between modes of transition and the durability of democracy, scepticism has been expressed about the significance of different modes of transition for subsequent democratic consolidation. This scepticism has been buffered by the apparent experience of democracies born out of different types of transitions processes that do not seem to support what has been called the ‘birth defects’ or ‘original sin’ hypothesis. The most devastating critique of the significance of these various modes is that of *equifinality.* Contrary to all initial expectations, many polities have successfully negotiated, struggled, forced or manipulated their way to democracy, and they seem to have done so irrespective of their differing modes of transition. Except for some cases of imposition, when either outgoing rulers or occupying foreigners may exert such strong control over the process that they can virtually write the new rules of the game, it does not seem to make much difference whether the transition was hammered out between incumbent softliners and moderate challengers or thrust upon the *ancien régime* by the mobilization of mass publics. Thus the proposition that modes of transition matter for the subsequent process of democratization has been cast in doubt.[22] If they do not matter at all or if they simply ‘wash out’ when dealing with democratic durability, as Przeworski (1991) claims, then it would make sense to abandon the search for the impact of different modes of transition.

But this is not the case. Modes of transition are critical junctures in the long process of institutional accumulation; they are key moments in which the fragments and parts of the new regime are constructed, with each fragment becoming ‘an incentive for the addition of another’ (Sklar 1987, p. 714). The point is that they do not take place in a vacuum but instead reflect

uncertainty about existing power relations and the 'possibilistic' manner in which they may or may not be subsequently reconfigured. They are highly contextualized and interactive with other factors (for example, the type of autocratic rule) and their different impacts, if they exist in some systematic way, are likely to be indirect and identifiable only in conjunction with these other factors. In effect, they help to produce specific 'packages' of the formal rules and informal arrangements that make up democracy, or what Schmitter (1995b) calls 'partial regimes'. Thus what matters is not simply the construction of a single political institution but rather how a number of new political institutions (or older resurrected ones) relate to each other. For this reason, the significance of different modes cannot be assessed by examining, say, a particular type of electoral system separate from the structure of the executive, the party system, the nature of civil–military arrangements, the extent of human rights protection or the rules of decision-making. The fact that different modes of transition do not seem to have an independent discernible effect on the durability of democracies, at least when measured quantitatively, misses this essential point: one particular mode of transition should not (and does not) correlate significantly with the consolidation of democracy, especially when defined narrowly as the durability of democracy.

Instead, different modes of transition can lead to what appears to be the same outcome, and the same mode of transition in different contexts can produce different outcomes. Capturing this reality, as Schneider (2003) has creatively demonstrated, poses enormous challenges for orthodox quantitative work. Take, for example, the argument that because three different modes of transition in Latin America (an 'imposed' transition in Brazil, a 'pacted' transition in Venezuela and a transition with clear features of both imposition and pacts in Chile) produce the same apparent outcome (a consolidated presidentialist regime) any relationship between the mode of transition and a presidentialist or parliamentary regime is false. This ignores the point that these identifiable modes may help to explain why these three countries have been so 'differently presidentialist' as well as why their forms of institutionalization and (in the case of Venezuela) de-institutionalizaiton have occurred in the ways that they have. In Brazil, the fact

that the military dominated the transition meant that it could extract a heavy price for leaving power: by blocking Latin America's first experiment in parliamentarism and (with the help of its allies) shaping the new political rules in ways that protected conservative clientelist strongholds through a dysfunctional combination of presidentialism, multipartism and localism. In Venezuela, while the formal rules were presidentialist in its pacted transition in 1958, the two leading parties continued to behave in a consociational manner, adopting the habit of pact-making to reduce competitiveness, demobilize alternative collective actors, fix basic policy orientations and in effect create an enduring political cartel – features that eventually led to the dramatic demise of its traditional party system. In Chile, Pinochet's initial control over the transition forced the opposition to accept the legal framework of the old regime, thus creating entrenched authoritarian enclaves that substantially restricted democracy,[23] but this very action combined with Pinochet's miscalculation over the outcome of a plebiscite provided the impetus for the formation of a broad-based and 'concerted' opposition that has resulted in a democracy characterized by both 'imposed' and 'pacted' features. Thus what appear to be (and in many ways are) similar outcomes are in fact differentiated by formal institutions and informal rules whose creation reflects the power relations characteristic of different transition modes.

Confusing the problem further is that the same mode of transition can produce very different outcomes, making it difficult to test whether any one path, for example a 'pacted' transition, is preferable.[24] The theoretical basis for the superiority of pacted transitions rests on their central properties of constant negotiations between authoritarian incumbents and the opposition as well as the presence of explicit and interlocking agreements about the polity, the economy and, when applicable, civil/military or identity-based arrangements. This permits actors to foster mutual trust, respect each other's vital interests and build a new political community through their construction of a commonly agreed upon set of institutions. Thus a pacted transition in Spain produced a broad agenda of economic and political reforms in the form of the Moncloa Accords and spawned an ambitious process of bargaining that became the preferred mechanism for conflict resolution in the so-called 'Spanish model'[25] (Linz and Stepan

1996). It also proved to be a superior device for peacefully moving post-apartheid South Africa to democracy through explicit agreements over proportional representation, decentralization and the constitutional process (Sisk 1995). But pacted transitions, at least in the context of high oil rents, have produced frozen institutional arrangements that have entrenched social divisions, reduced competitiveness, blocked innovation and ultimately subverted democracy – as the case of Venezuela poignantly demonstrates (Karl 1986). Testing the alleged superiority of pacted transitions can only be done when taking into account the larger social context and the quality of choices that are made.

These methodological problems do not mean that the significance of modes of transition cannot be determined or that the effort should be abandoned. There is cumulative qualitative evidence to buttress the claim that the mode of transition has an important impact on whether and how democracies consolidate – although whether these paths lead to different identifiable and enduring types of democracy and whether this has some enduring significance for the quality of democracy remains to be seen. This does not mean that different modes of transition necessarily leave permanent or irreversible legacies ('birth defects'); nor does it signify that they are the only factor affecting the possibility and pace of democratic consolidation. But their impact can be seen traced through distinguishable channels, most especially through the choice of particular institutions (see, for example, Geddes 1996; Offe 1998; Elster, Offe and Preuss 1998; Bastion and Luckham 2003). There is also evidence to demonstrate that where mass publics are considerably more involved in the transition the subsequent scope of contestation is greater (Collier in this volume) and the patterns of market regulation and distribution may be fairer (Bruszt in this volume). Furthermore, even under circumstances where the transition is almost entirely an elite affair, different modes of transition can affect the management of elite conflict and competition (Munck and Leff 1997).

Yet, as we have seen from the examples above, these outcomes are not easy to tease out. Non-decisions or 'roads not taken' may be as important as decisions leading to democratic consolidation (for example, the blocking of parliamentarism in Brazil); the process that

characterizes different modes may be as important as the outcomes produced (for example, the intensive and continuous bargaining that defines pacted transitions in Spain and South Africa); and rational intentional design, based on political and economic calculations may result in unintended and even opposite consequences from those planned – as Pinochet (through his lost plebiscite) and the Polish Communist Party (through its insistence on a strong presidency and majoritarian rule) both painfully learned. For these reasons, the application of orthodox quantitative methods to test the significance of the mode of transition threatens to obscure a fundamental insight challenging institutional approaches to politics, which is that actors make choices about institutions and not just within them. Regime change fundamentally involves choices about institutional transformation that subsequently structures political interaction, and these choices, in turn, embody the rapidly changing power relations captured by modes of transition. But because these choices may or may not produce the results intended by their designers; the preferences of institution builders cannot be discovered by simply 'reading backwards'. In this respect, the study of different modes of transition is a healthy counterbalance to the tendency to separate the consequences of core institutions from the study of their origins.

Thus far, the tools of analysis of transition have been heavily tilted in favour of case narratives, and the most fruitful research has given priority to small N and medium N comparisons because they permit the sort of carefully constructed narrative and process tracing needed to capture the rapidly changing role of actors and to incorporate the extraordinarily dynamic and complex interactions between them (for example, O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Linz and Stepan 1996; Kitschelt 1999). These studies differ from earlier classics in the retroactive study of regime change because they incorporate a broader range of countries and even bring whole new regions into the debate, pay more attention to smaller countries and cases that have previously played no role in theorizing about successes and failures in the establishment of democracy and even compare democratization across time (Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens 1992; Collier 1999). However, they have not

necessarily focused specifically on the impact of different modes of transition.[26] Schneider (2003, pp. 256–257), in what is certainly one of the most promising developments to date, has used an advanced version of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to identify clusters of important variables and distinguish between remote and proximate effects in the transition process. This has led him to reframe the research question, asking: Given a certain context, which mode of transition enables actors to choose the most appropriate institutional configuration for successful democratic consolidation? But, even with this and other promising leads, we still do not have definitive answers to these core assumptions of 'transitology'.

Starting a democracy, democracy as a start

Regime change and, more specifically transition from autocracy towards democracy, is now a distinct area of scholarship. Despite the considerable progress in theory-building, empirical observation, research design and methods that I have discussed here, the sub-field still faces very real hurdles in inferring and integrating rival theories, not to mention imprecisions in conceptualization and deficiencies in measurement. Nevertheless, whatever challenges remain ahead, research on democratization is not threatened by a type of political science that is esoteric (at best) and irrelevant (at worst). Instead, it mirrors rather closely its dynamic, complex and uncertain subject matter. Because nearly half the globe, including China and most of the Middle East and North Africa, has yet to experience democracy, because the wave of democratizations that began in 1974 seems to have crested since 1994, and because the spectre of democratic backsliding or breakdown still haunts polities in all regions of the world, the transition paradigm, enhanced by all of the critiques that have been and will be made of it, should remain for some time a vivid and strong research agenda (Teorell and Hadenius 2004, p. 35).

What is still unexplored – theoretically or empirically – is whether the same arguments made about the transition from autocracy (and hence for analysing 'abnormal' politics) and the consolidation of democracy (and hence for analysing 'normal' politics) might also be applied to

explain the emergence, consolidation and survival of different types of authoritarian regimes. In other words, can we distinguish between the dynamics that lead to the onset of authoritarian rule and those that sustain such rule in terms similar to those we use to differentiate between the overlapping phases of democratic transition and consolidation? Or is it the case that autonomous political factors bear more weight in the former, while structural and institutional variables play more of a role in explaining regime change to autocracy? In other words, are there generic properties of regime transition, regardless of the direction that it takes?

At first glance, the differences would seem to outweigh the similarities. Democracies rest on voluntary consent to political domination; autocracies promote the application of involuntary coercion by authorities. Democracies depend on the engagement of a large number of persons – ideally on the citizenry as a whole – who have to be consulted, allowed to vote, deliberate and express their opinions, and thus transitions towards them are bound to be especially complex and unpredictable. Autocracies only need to listen to the preferences and coordinate the behaviour of a selected few; uncertainty can drop considerably if only one side has the weapons. Nevertheless, the notion that all regime transitions share generic properties that distinguish them from regime consolidations would help to explain why scholars who had previously studied breakdowns of democracy (for example, Linz and Stepan 1978) so strongly emphasized the autonomous role of political variables while those who examined the manner in which autocracies sustained themselves tended to stress long-term socio-economic variables (O'Donnell 1973; Cardoso and Faleto 1979). It would also explain why so many of these former 'structuralists' embraced voluntarism when faced with explaining transitions from autocracy and have subsequently returning to their more deterministic roots as they examine the possible consolidation of democracy. As any person who has lived through one can attest, regime transition is electrifying; with consolidation, in contrast, politics have 'become boring'.[27]

For the practitioners and promoters of democracy, 'transitology' has proven to be especially relevant to those who grasp its essence.[28] It has 'told' them that they may be able to construct democracy in unfavourable settings and do not have to wait until the structural or

cultural conditions are right. It suggests that they would be well advised to focus on the identification and strengthening of 'democratic agents' both inside and outside the previous autocracy, and especially on political strategies ('modes of transition') that are geared to the specific context of each country. It is based on the assumption that there are different ways to be democratic, that identical formulas (for example, 'presidentialism versus parliamentarism') can produce quite different results in different contexts, and that the presidentialist model so often favoured by US democracy promoters is especially flawed in heterogeneous or highly conflictual states. Practitioners might also learn that efforts to promote democracy indirectly by raising the level of development, by deregulating capitalism, or even by strengthening more competitive private sectors, whatever their other potential merits, may contribute very little to *creating* new democracies. On the contrary, market liberalization that takes place in the context of strong pressures for democratization tends to produce better markets and, therefore, better democracies.

Finally, these agents of democracy should be humble enough to recognize that many transitions are accidental or unintentional, and even those that seem to be consciously devised and imposed can end up becoming 'designer disasters'. This is especially true when the large-scale external use of force is involved, which has so often proved counterproductive. Because transitions are about rapidly shifting and highly specific power relations and understandings, only the best, most experienced and least ideological area experts can help make use of what are very fleeting political opportunities. Should they embark on intentional regime change, especially in unfavourable neighbourhoods, they will usually have to negotiate with extremists of all sorts. Especially in violent settings, democracies are not built by democrats alone and they are not always built by democratic means. If democracy promoters do not heed these lessons where some type of transition from authoritarian rule has been initiated, the failure to originate a new democracy is most often a problem of strategic choice, not the absence of preconditions – an observation with special poignancy for Iraq.[29]

Perhaps the most important contribution of 'transitology', in both theory and praxis, has been to lighten the burden of pessimism over the possibility of democratization that prevailed in more authoritarian periods when a long list of necessary and sufficient prerequisites (almost never present and only fulfilled by a small number of stable Anglo-American democracies) implied that the demise of autocracies would simply produce other autocracies. *Transitions from authoritarian rule* and the works that followed imbued both academics and activists with 'a bias towards hope,' the same sense of optimism that Albert Hirschman (1971) conveyed in his approach to economic development. Rather than searching for probabilities, its authors adopted a 'possibilist' approach, understanding democratization as something that can be attempted, cultivated and even flourish under the most unfavourable conditions – with a little fortuna and a bit of *virtù.* This optimism, in itself, may have helped to alter slightly the odds of democratic success in different parts of the world as the emphasis on strategic choice rather than structural constraints has been taken up.

At a time when democracies disappoint around the world, when reneging on human and civil rights commitments is widespread, when the records of delivery to citizens is often mixed at best, when scholars speak of 'desencanto', 'low level equilibriums', 'the crisis in representation', 'the demise of citizenship' and 'democracy without the people', it is important for those pushing to deepen democracy to keep in mind that established democracies took a century or more to reach their current levels of accountability and transparency – and that they still have far to go. Moreover, it is ordinary people, sometimes taking extraordinary risks, who help to bring democracies into being and who stand by them when they are threatened – most often by their own political elites (Bermeo 2003). As we have learned, starting democracy is hard and, as we are learning, democracy is just a start.

Whatever the ultimate impact of this latest wave of democratization there is no question that the current mix of consolidated democracies, unconsolidated democracies and hybrid regimes (*democraduras*) has far exceeded the initial expectations of the generation of scholars whose obsession was to get rid of authoritarian rule. 'None of the countries we are studying

have the conditions that the literature tells us are requisite for democracy,' Philippe Schmitter remarked at the initiation of the *Transitions* project, 'and if we accept the odds established by all previous attempts at democratization in Latin America since 1900, two out of every three of our potential transitions are soon doomed to fail.' Sometimes it is nice to be wrong.

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[1] The author wishes to thank Philippe Schmitter – without whom this article really would never have been written! For this and much more…

[2] See Joseph Tulchin's remarks at the 25th anniversary of the Transitions project.

[3] One indicator of the growth in these types of studies is the appearance of two journals devoted solely to them, *The Journal of Democracy* and *Democratization*, both of which appeared during the most recent wave of democratization.

[4] This phrase was used in the conference as well as the preface to the 1986 four-volume study.

[5] One of the constant critiques of O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) is that they assumed countries in transition were always transitioning towards democracy, but they were explicit that regime transition could lead in many different directions. The authors of the *Transition from authoritarian regimes* study could also not have anticipated at the time that all of the cases in the study from both Southern Europe and South America would (happily) become democratic. While this assumption was made by academics and policymakers who 'consumed" this literature, it was not a feature of the work itself. See in particular the debate between Carothers (2002) and O'Donnell (2002) on this question as well as the debate between McFaul (2002) and Karl and Schmitter (2002)

[6] Munck and Verkuilen (2002, p. 11) note that this narrowness is especially true of the Polity index created by Gurr and his associates as well as of a number of other data sets.

[7] Diamond (2002, p. 27) estimates that there were only about half a dozen regimes in 1974 (less than 5 per cent) that were undemocratic but with multiparty elections and some degree of political pluralism. Today, somewhere between a quarter to a third of all regimes meet this criterion – in his estimation between 45 and 60. In proportional terms, they have increased more rapidly than democratic regimes.

[8] This was the assumption of O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986) and was made more explicit in Karl (1990), Diamond (1992), Karl and Schmitter (1993) and many other works.

[9] This work shows that there is no statistical correlation between a country's level of development and the likelihood it will experience a transition to democracy.

[10] Note that controlled elections in the Middle East are generally confined to the non-oil or poorer hydrocarbon-producing countries: Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco – countries more vulnerable to outside pressure. In general, not even highly controlled elections are held in the rich oil countries – unless, like Kuwait, they are the result of extensive international pressure. While this seems to be changing (for example, Iran and Iraq) as a result of intensive foreign intervention in the region, the observation regarding the delayed timing still holds. The phrase electoral 'underachiever', though not this argument, comes from Stepan and Robertson (2004).

[11] Howard and Rosseler (2004) note that the emergence of a strong opposition is the key factor in their statistical study of why competitive elections are held in authoritarian regimes.

[12] See O'Donnell (1997). For more on the discussion of consolidation, see Schedler (1998), Diamond (1999), and Schmitter and Guilhot (2000). Note that there is no consensus on the factors that prevent or deter consolidation: some argue that excessively pluralist societies are unable to consolidate, while others point to the relative weakness of civil society or political parties, neo-liberal economic policies and especially the sequencing of reforms, too little equality, or state decay.

[13] As Schmitter (1995, 539) writes: 'Regime consolidation consists in transforming the accidental arrangements, prudential norms, and contingent solutions that have emerged during the uncertain struggle of the transition into institutions, i.e., into relationships that are reliably known, regularly practiced and normatively accepted by those persons or collectivities defined as the participants/citizens of such institutions.'

[14] See especially the debate between Bunce (1995a, 1995b), Schmitter and Karl (1994), and Karl and Schmitter (1995), which eventually clarified the importance of both similarities and differences in generating comparative theory. The initial controversy over the application of transition theories may have been stronger among scholars studying this geographic region because what was known as Sovietology developed in relative isolation from general political science – largely for ideological reasons. As Chandler (1994, p. 5) notes: 'As totalitarianism was the antithesis of democracy, there could be no possible common ground. Thus the USSR was seen as an isolated system, rather than an extreme on a continuum." Bringing these cases into a discussion of democratization and failed democratization is one antidote for overcoming these origins.

[15] There is a common assumption in much of the literature on democratization that Latin America has a relatively homogenous population, which is incorrect. (See, for example, Grey 2004). But the mobilization of indigenous people and other ethnic or religious minorities has generally happened after the transition to democracy. Thus, while ethnic difference has not posed the same problem during transitions in general, with the exception for example of the Miskito Indians in Nicaragua, ethnic mobilization and the more fair and just resolution of the representation of minority (or even majority) peoples is perhaps the key issue in the countries of the Andes (Van Cott 2003). On the relative importance of multiple nationalisms, see Bunce (2003).

[16] Crime represents the biggest threat to democratic survivability in some countries. In El Salvador, for example, in 1999, 55 per cent cited crime as a justification for the toppling of democracy, double any other reason (Seligson, Cruz and Córdova 2000, p. 156)

[17] In Bosnia, for example, because the Dayton Agreement necessarily concentrated on ending the fighting and ensuring the compliance of extremists, a major opportunity was lost to build a more durable and inclusive legal framework.

[18] See note 15.

[19] This has been changing dramatically – but not in time to affect the types of institutions built during the initial transition. According to the World Bank, poverty increased from 2 per cent in 1988 to 21 per cent in 1998 after the economic collapse that accompanied the initial years of transition in post-communist countries. But while absolute poverty rates – based on a $2 per day poverty line – characterize the poorest countries of Central Asia and almost 20 per cent of Russians, few people in Central and Eastern Europe live below this line. At the same time, the Gini coefficient – a common measure of inequality – increased by more than 50 per cent in a number of CIS countries, and by 80 per cent in Russia. In contrast, the increase was far smaller in Central European countries. Inequality in many Central European countries is similar to that of the Scandinavian and Northern European countries, while many CIS countries are approaching levels of inequality seen in Latin America (see World Bank 2000). But even with these changes, it will take time for post-communist countries to build the deeply rooted oligarchic patterns characteristic of Latin America.

[20] Boix claims that greater economic equality both causes countries to democratize and sustains democracy, principally because democracy is less costly for elites where societies are already more equal.

[21] Munck (2004, p. 8) points out that such methods often use caricatures of the theories discussed in the transitions literature and focus on a narrow range of independent variables largely because they can be quantified. While affirming their contributions in other areas, and occasionally in the study of transitions, he notes that such approaches use additive and linear models that misrepresent causal relations and rely on large N data sets consisting of one observation per case per year that cannot capture the nuances, complexity and intensity of strategic interactions.

[22] As Tavares de Almeida (2005) writes: 'After twenty years, it is difficult to sustain that the mode of transition was an important variable to explain the limits and pitfalls of democracy.' She argues that the 'original sin' hypothesis has been proved incorrect.

[23] The new democratic regime accepted Pinochet as commander-in-chief of the army for eight years – the only dictator to continue to rule after a transition. It also had to accept nine senators appointed by the military, a national security council with strong powers and strong military representation, an electoral law that favoured right wing parties, and a packed supreme court.

[24] Bermeo's (2003) conclusion is that pacts also help to prevent the breakdown of democracy. See her enlightening discussion on pages 234 to the end.

[25] This is a misnomer. The pacted model of transition was first Venezuelan and Felipe Gonzalez learned its parameters in trips to Caracas when he was in the opposition. For this reason, this should be called the Venezuelan model!

[26] While massive case-based evidence exists that can be brought to bear on assessing this, it has not been either systematized or compared. Toerell and Hadenius (2004) argue that an effort in this direction has the potential for producing more credible and testable hypotheses that, in turn, might permit larger-n studies to overcome the poor explanatory fit of their short-term models. But this is unlikely to resolve the problem of context.

[27] Comment by Philippe Schmitter, undated.

[28] While Carothers (2002) has called for its end, note that he is talking about how practitioners, especially democracy promoters in the US foreign policy establishment, have interpreted 'transitology'.

[29] Thus, rather than attribute what may prove to be a failure in 'regime change' in that country to the manifestly unfavourable context – distorted development, dependence on oil, ethnic heterogeneity,

ineffective state institutions, Muslim exceptionalism, successive defeats in war, the absence of prior experience with democratic rule – a more convincing explanation might be found in the profound failure of strategic planning at nearly every turn.

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