

Book Reviews

Jon C. Pevehouse, *Democracy from Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Figures, tables, 262 pp.; hardcover \$75, paperback \$29.99.

It is well known that democratization has taken place in waves, meaning that groups of countries have undergone regime transitions more or less simultaneously. It is also known that democratization has taken place in clusters, meaning that countries that experienced regime transitions were frequently located close to others that were undergoing the same process. Waves underline the significance of time as an explaining factor, whereas clusters underscore the importance of geography. This book deals with the latter: its main goal is to show how, as concerns democratization, geography matters; or rather, institutionalized geography.

As is sometimes said, a good indicator of the probability for any given country to be a democracy is its distance from Brussels. The saying refers to a correlation between geography and political regime that is arguably due to a recent international artifact: the European Union. The EU, however, is not just one more regional organization but the most developed and plausibly unique case of regional integration. It is notable that integration processes are completely absent from Jon Pevehouse's book. His argument addresses regional international organizations, independently of whether they are security or economically oriented and regardless of the depth of their constitutive agreements. His proposition is that regional organizations can facilitate transitions to democracy as well as the survival of democracy; and the crucial variable is not the type of the organization but its democratic density. By this concept, Pevehouse means the percentage of permanent members that are democratic.

The international dimensions of democratization were relatively neglected in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, the seminal, path-breaking book edited by O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead in 1986. Gradually, they would later recognize this flaw and conduct further research in order to address an issue that, after the end of the Cold War, earned greater visibility. The most elaborated rejoinder was *The International Dimensions of Democratization*, edited by Whitehead in 1996 and enlarged in 2001. In it, the chapters by the editor and Philippe Schmitter advanced four mechanisms through which international processes could affect domestic transitions: contagion, control, consent, and conditionality. The only one that referred more specifically to

regional factors was contagion, the others being, so to speak, geography-blind.

Pevehouse now goes one step further. Building on his previous work, published mainly in top journals in the last five years, he argues that regional organizations can and do exert an important influence on the democratization processes of their member countries. In order to prove this influence, he has to show that the effects allocated to regional organizations are due neither to automatic contagion nor to the exclusive action of regional major powers. In addition, he needs to demonstrate that similar effects are not to be expected from global organizations such as the UN or international financial institutions such as the IMF.

He does this through a combined quantitative-qualitative methodological strategy. First, he runs diverse statistical tests to show that regional organizations are associated with both democratic transitions (regime change) and democratic consolidation (regime survival). Controlling for contextual variables and testing rival hypotheses, he finds a high level of correlation between belonging to (or joining) a regional organization and the first stage of a transition; namely, liberalization. The correlation is also highly positive for consolidation, but not so expressive for the second stage of a transition; namely, completion (from partial democracy to full democracy).

The second part of the strategy is to perform a group of case studies aimed at unearthing the causal mechanisms behind the statistical association. The author selects six cases in Europe and Latin America: Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Paraguay, Peru, and Turkey. The absence of African or Asian cases is explained as a corollary of the theory: as these continents feature few regional organizations, and those that exist possess low democratic density, no systematic influence on their member countries is expected.

Let us focus first on the statistical tests. They define the variables precisely, are thoroughly run, utilize different databases in order to double-check, and address every conceivable rival hypothesis that one can think of. Furthermore, their results are robust and mostly significant. The impression the reader is left with is that little objection could be raised against the author's claim. The problem is that in the process of building his case, Pevehouse exposes the weaknesses of similar statistical analyses that he uses as input for his argument. For example, are military regimes more prone to breakdown than personalistic or single party regimes or the other way around (as Gasiorowski concludes with Pevehouse's agreement)? In a similar vein, is level of development a good predictor of democratization or not? More closely related to the book's topic, does past experience with democracy bode well for the probability of completing the transition, or not? Furthermore, does a high amount of ethnolinguistic diversity have little influence on the

completion process (as Pevehouse contends) or negative influence? These examples raise the very uncomfortable questions of whether available data series are reliable and how appropriate current statistical methods are for this kind of research.

The case studies open up the “high correlation” black box and guide the reader into the causal processes behind it. Although this part of the research is based wholly on secondary sources, this hardly affects the strength of the argument, as it is not intended to prove the association but to illustrate its underlying causes. Pevehouse proposes two sets of mechanisms, one for explaining transitions and the other for consolidation. Three transition mechanisms are initially advanced: pressure by other members of the regional organization, acquiescence effects, and legitimation of an interim regime. It should be noted that acquiescence effects have two aspects: preference lock-in, by which the ruling elite seeks to signal its commitment to democratization through anchoring its country to a credible institutional setting; and socialization, by which domestic actors are “re-educated” by their regional counterparts into the virtues of democracy.

Following analysis of the cases of Hungary, Peru, and Turkey, an additional mechanism is added to the list: financial assistance, which was manifest in the Hungarian case. So far, so good. Most of the mechanisms Pevehouse lists resemble those advanced by Whitehead and Schmitter: pressure and assistance can be understood as conditionality, whereas acquiescence clearly likens consent. Likewise, legitimation could be equated to contagion. However, the innovation introduced by this book is analytical rather than conceptual: it shows that these mechanisms operate at the regional level, not at an upper (global) or lower (bilateral) level.

The consolidation mechanisms are also initially three: binding of losers and winners, psychological legitimation and audience costs, and bribery of societal groups. After the cases of Greece, Paraguay, and Guatemala are analyzed, an additional mechanism is presented: institutional change, which appeared in the Greek case. The finding that mechanisms not previously foreseen turn up only in the European cases (i.e., Hungary and Greece) may imply that the EU has built devices that are not available to other regional organizations. The author hints at this possibility but does not explore it further. In any case, the most effective mechanism displayed by the case studies on consolidation is the binding of losers: this kind of conditionality is a powerful deterrent to antiregime forces, because any benefits of the organization would end should democracy falter.

There is a case, however, that does not follow the path predicted by the theory: Turkey. Although it does fit the model as regards transition to democracy or, better, redemocratization, it does not follow suit when

it comes to consolidation—or just survival. The author deals frankly with this exception and suggests a series of alternative hypotheses that could explain the mismatch between expectations and outcomes. Two stand out: geostrategic importance and domestic threat calculation.

Geostrategic importance is located at the international level. It concerns the evaluation that the regional organization and its member states make of the role performed by the country in question: if it is considered crucial to the organization's goals, the risk of alienating its new government may hamper the desire to preserve the democratic regime. Domestic threat calculation is located at the domestic level. It concerns the calculation that the costs of a coup, as high as the regional organization may raise them, do not match the perceived benefits. This opens a new avenue of research. Pevehouse has competently explained how regional organizations promote and protect democracy and which of them are abler to do so; he also indicates that more research is necessary to better understand when they intervene. In any case, realist arguments should be considered as defining the boundary conditions within which regional organizations intervene and, eventually, succeed.

A final remark is in order. The author affirms that "the success of regional institutions arise[s] from their ability to create both positive and negative incentives for domestic actors," meaning that the interaction is not exclusively top-down. To the contrary: regional organizations act through influencing the cost-benefit calculations of domestic actors, both pro- and antidemocratic, and serving as a forum for anticoup neighbors to rally and pressure. But they can also be instrumentalized by domestic actors, who may use them to promote regime change or to increase democratic longevity. "Democracy from above" constitutes, therefore, a strong image that does not do justice to the book's argument. It is from within the state that the "above" organization is called to work.

This is a well-thought-out book. Although it has evolved from a Ph.D. dissertation, it is a mature piece of work that addresses every question that may emerge from its reading. The author never loses track of his main argument while he successfully addresses most of the criticism and counterhypotheses that he should certainly have faced during the research process. All concepts are carefully defined, the hypotheses are clearly specified, and the reasoning is flawlessly structured. For anyone interested in the relationship between democracy and regional organizations, this book is certain to become the keystone for years to come. Furthermore, it will constitute a benchmark for those who consider that bridging the gap between comparative politics and international relations cannot wait any longer.

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