

DEMOCRATIZATION AND POLITICAL ELITES or
POLITICAL ELITES AND DEMOCRATIZATION or
THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE ROLE OF ELITES or
THE ROLE OF ELITES IN DEMOCRATIZATION or
DEMOCRATIZATION: THE ROLE OF ELITES

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This entry could be brief. From a strictly etymological perspective, the transition from autocracy to democracy should involve moving from “the rule of one person (or small group of persons)” to “the rule of the people (or to that segment of the people possessing equal political rights as citizens).” In the former, the government consists of a political elite clearly demarcated from and not accountable to the population; in the later, either there is no elite and citizens govern directly or they govern indirectly through agents chosen by them, but who only rule *pro tempore* and depend periodically on their explicit consent. As the result of such a change in regime, there should be a complete change of elite personnel and structure. Moreover, the ensuing governing elite (or non-elite) is expected to pursue different policies benefitting different segments of the population.

From a realistic perspective, the role of elites and their policies in the process of regime transformation are not so simple. Once it is recognized that all “real-existing democracies” (REDs) depend crucially on the role of representatives who

act as intermediaries between the citizens and their rulers – some of whom, either directly in presidential regimes or indirectly in parliamentary ones, become the rulers – then, the difference between autocracy and democracy is bound to be less dramatic. Instead of rule by a few vs. rule by all, we have “rule by some politicians” or “polito-cracy” as the outcome. These newly empowered representatives inevitably form an elite institutionally separate from the electorate that has chosen them competitively or the selectorate that has chosen them for their reputation. For, in REDs, not all representatives are elected and act in the name of political parties. Many, probably most of them, are selected by various publics and act through civil society, i.e. a myriad of interest associations, social movements and advocacy groups – which only very rarely hold competitive elections to choose their leaders.

Moreover, not uncommonly and especially through the latter channels of interest and ideational representation, many actors in the “new” democratic elite will be inherited from the *ancien régime*. If this were not enough, as we have been reminded by numerous theorists and empirical researchers, these elected or selected politicians may form a **class** to which there are formidable barriers to entry by competition or a **caste** whose members collude to avoid competition from outsiders and/or succeed in invoking conformity by convincing the people of their unique and hegemonic “right to rule.”

More recently, another factor has intervened to complicate this mediated relation between citizens and rulers, namely, the trend toward the professionalization of the nature of representation and, hence, the status of politicians – in both political parties and civil society. Initially in liberal democratic theory, it was presumed that the tenure of politicians was limited in time and commitment, either by the outcome of competition between political parties or by personal choice when the winners (elected or non-elected) decided to return to their original life situations. In short, politicians were presumed to live “for politics,” not “from politics.” In well-established democracies, this trend toward the latter has already been extensively documented; in newly-created democracies, it seems to set in very quickly as the amateurs at the beginning of regime transformation become professionals by its end.

If this were not enough, all REDs depend on non-democratic elites that are embedded in the so-called “guardian institutions” of the state – agencies, commissions, directorates, boards, central banks, courts, administrative staffs and so forth – that may be delegated certain powers by democratic elites, but are expected to take their binding decisions based on their expertise –civilian or military – and, therefore, deliberately protected from the vicissitudes of political competition. Needless to say, the continuity of these elites is likely to be even greater during and after the transition from autocracy to democracy than that of elected or selected political representatives.

The Mode of Transition

What is crucial to explaining the outcome in this ambiguous process of elite transformation is the mode of transition – how a given polity changes from autocracy to democracy. Ever since Machiavelli, students of politics have known that this interim between regime-types constitutes a very distinctive moment – one that he argued even required a distinctive science of politics. Its most salient characteristic was the much greater degree of uncertainty (he called it *fortuna*) during which not only the actions of actors were much more difficult to predict, but also the rules of the game were unknown. Although in his case, the transition went in the opposite direction – from republican to princely government – the generic situation is similar when moving from autocracy to democracy. And the implication is identical. During the period when one regime is in demise or transforming itself, what becomes much more important than during “normal times” -- when *necessità* was embedded predictably in a pre-established and hegemonic set of rules -- are the autonomous choices of actors (he called it *virtù*) in choosing and institutionalizing a new set of rules. *Ergo*, not only may the period of transition result in a change of the ruling elite (or for Machiavelli, the single ruler), it also provides the agents involved with an unusual degree of discretion in making these choices.

The literature on regime transition prior to the recent wave of democratizations that began in the mid-1970s was scarce, but it conveyed a simple message. There were two possible modes of transition, conveniently exemplified by Great Britain

and France respectively. In the former, RED came about over a long period of time through a series of **reforms** as the result of which the previous monarchic autocracy gradually and incrementally changed its rules to incorporate successive groups of the population that had been denied the full rights of citizenship. This involved a dual process of relatively peaceful mobilizations by those excluded and relatively flexible responses from those already included in the political process. In the latter, RED only came about – again over a lengthy and tumultuous period – as the result of successive **revolutions** when the previous autocratic regimes refused to respond to or even to recognize the demands for inclusion coming from below and as a result of the accumulated frustration of these demands the excluded groups resorted to collective violence which periodically was successful in deposing the ruling autocracy. The implication of this ambidextrous literature for elites was clear. In reformed transitions, there would be a considerable continuity in their composition; in revolutionary ones, the previous elites would be deposed – killed, imprisoned or driven into exile – and a new elite would emerge from the struggle itself. Needless to say, in practice, the contrast between the two was not so dramatic – but still significant. In the former, elites circulated; in the latter, they jumped.

Since the mid-1970s (at least until the “Arab Spring” of 2008), most of the attempted transitions did not conform to either of the two historical alternatives. Revolutions became rarer (and did not result in a regime resembling a RED such as Iran) or illusory (when the accompanying violence was confined and did not produce an irreversible change in the entire composition of elites such as Romania). Reformist transitions faded in significance due either to the effective resistance of entrenched elites or their improved capacity for co-opting the forces of opposition. What emerged were two other types: the **pacted transition** and the **imposed transition**. Neither was completely novel. The former had characterized the transition to democracy in Venezuela after 1958; the latter could be said to have been the case in West Germany and Japan even if the imposing power was exogenous and took the form of military occupation by a victorious democracy.

The Change in Modes

The common distinguishing feature of these more recent transitions is that they come from above – in contrast to the two “classic” modes which were driven from below by excluded, non-elite actors. Both imposed and pacted cases are initiated, monitored and controlled (to differing degrees) by pre-existing elites – either in the government or jointly with the opposition.

In the case of imposed transitions, the process usually starts from an internal division within the ruling class or caste in which the “soft-line” faction becomes dominant and chooses to initiate changes in the rules by liberalizing public policies – for example, by tolerating greater press freedom or diminishing arbitrary imprisonment – and by introducing some democratic procedures – for example, by convoking elections with limited participation and candidates or allowing the formation of civil society organizations. The objective is usually some sort of hybrid regime that has many of the surface manifestations of an RED, but not the accountability to citizens that lies at its core. Its minimal version has been baptized a *dictablanda*; its more extensive one, a *democradura*. Such a limited change in regime will be successful under two conditions: (1) the soft-liners remain capable of containing or marginalizing their hard-line opponents; (2) the opponents to the regime are unsuccessful either in mobilizing their own supporters or outsiders in civil society.

Many of the post-1974 transitions fall into this category. In Latin America, Brazil was the most notable example. The military dictatorships of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru shared many of its characteristics, although all experienced much more significant mobilization and violence from below making them decidedly mixed cases. In Asia, Taiwan and later Indonesia had predominantly top-down transitions. But it was the post-1989 cases of transition from Soviet-style autocracies, e.g. Albania, Belorussia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, the Baltic republics, where this mode was most prevalent. The leading actors initiating and attempting to control the change in regime came from within the previous regime, i.e. from a fraction within its ruling party or its security apparatus. Some of these post-communist transitions were quickly aborted when the new rulers simply changed their rhetoric to one of nationalism

and democracy while perpetuating autocracy, e. g. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

In the case of pacted transitions, the process again is contingent upon internal elite divisions – this time not only among rulers, but also among their opponents. Whatever the reason (and they are not uniform), the soft-liners within the government and the moderates in the opposition form an alliance by agreeing upon a common set of rules designed to reduce the intrinsic uncertainty of the transition in regime – and to prevent its being captured by either of their more extreme factions. The content of this foundational pact varies according to the specifics of each case – for example, whether the autocracy is military or not – but usually includes at least the following items: a mutual commitment not to resort to violence or to encourage intervention by outsiders, an agreement to share offices and to make (or not make) policies according to some pre-established and usually proportional arrangement, and an amnesty with regard to crimes committed under the previous autocracy. For this to happen, it is essential that the elites involved – inside and outside the previous autocracy – are successful in delivering the continued compliance of their members/followers to the restrictions agreed upon.

Both of these elite-dominated modes of transition have their potential perverse effects and critical moments. The **imposition of democracy** depends ultimately on the perception of legitimacy of the ensuing regime by its citizens. The fact that it is intended to protect the status and power of specified components of the *ancien régime* by selectively inserting non-democratic rules and reservoirs of power renders it vulnerable once the uncertainty of the transition itself has been overcome and actors have settled into the trenches of normal political behavior. Moreover, with the increasingly globalized nature of political discourse, the diffusion of universalistic norms regarding human and civil rights will undermine national level arguments of political exception or cultural difference. At some point in time, imposed democracies will have to reform themselves to conform to more general expectations concerning democracy – and this may prove difficult depending on ensuing changes in the power of those elites protected by such enclaves of autocracy. The **negotiation of democracy** by pacts is less likely to be

challenged eventually on grounds of legitimacy, since compromise among elites is almost as legitimate as majority rule in many conceptions of democratic practice. These cases – usually the most successful in institutionalizing rules for political competition and accountability – risk the opposite. The politicians who draft these rules and consent to them during the transition will soon discover that they are congenial to protecting their tenure in power by discouraging challenges from those outside the initial deal and by encouraging collusion among insiders. They will therefore be tempted to prolong the pact beyond its immediate utility during the transition and convert it into an enduring feature of the ensuing regime. Such an institutionalized oligarchy not only runs the greater risk of corruption and mismanagement due to the absence of ‘free and fair’ competition and reliable mechanisms of accountability, but it should also be less capable of responding to internal transformations and/or to external shocks.

Some Empirical Observations

As a purely empirical matter, it should be noted that most historical attempts at democratization – regardless of the mode of transition – have been unsuccessful and resulted in a return to some form of autocracy. Very few polities have made it to democracy the first time they tried. Since 1974, however, when over 70 countries have made such an attempt beginning in Southern Europe and Latin America and extending to Eastern Europe, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, very few have reverted overtly to autocracy. And several of those that did (usually by military coup) subsequently returned to some form of democracy – however imperfect. Guinea-Bissau, Nepal, Bangladesh, Georgia, Philippines, Honduras, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, and Ukraine would seem to be cases-in-point. Many more have made it to some form of RED. This has especially been the case in Latin America where from being virtually completely autocratic at the end of the 1960s (with the lonely exceptions of Costa Rica and Colombia), the entire continent (except for Cuba) now relies on political elites chosen by reasonably honest, competitive elections for their top executives. Asia has experienced several successful regime transitions with significant (and peaceful) changes in ruling elites since the 1970s: South Korea, Taiwan and, so far, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Malaysia and Singapore have yet to cross

this critical threshold. Elsewhere, the outcome remains uncertain – presumably, because entrenched oligarchies have been reluctant to give up or even to share power: e.g. Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar, Cambodia. And, of course, the region has some of the most obvious out-right autocracies in North Korea, China, Laos and Vietnam. The African picture is one of proportionately fewer attempts at democratization and less success; hence, of greater elite continuity. But even there some transitions have produced consensual turnovers in ruling elites: e.g. Senegal, Ghana, Kenya and, most recently, Nigeria. Many of the others have managed to create some kind of hybrid regime, e.g. Angola, Ethiopia, Camerouns, Togo, Ruanda, Burundi, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Sudan, with frequent elections, predictable results and entrenched ruling elites. Two (South Sudan and Somalia) simply remain “unconsolidated” without having produced any predictable set of rules, rulers or even state structures. The recent experiences in the region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) where the modes of transition were more violent and mass-driven seem to have inverted this generally favorable trend. Either these attempts reverted to autocracy very soon, *vide* Egypt, or they degenerated into protracted civil war and unconsolidated autocracy, *vide* Syria and Yemen. Only in Tunisia which followed the reform path more than the revolutionary one (and which was later supplemented by some pacting) has the outcome been a fledgling RED.

Some Speculative Hypotheses

One intriguing hypothesis is that this change in the odds of success trends is due to ensuing changes in the identity and composition of political elites. First and foremost, this may reflect developments in their respective military elites since their response is almost always crucial to the outcome of whatever strategy is adopted. Not only have the military become more professionalized, but more importantly they can no longer be assured of external support for their intervention, especially since the end of Cold War rivalry between the two super-powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, made their international allegiance much less significant. In several cases in both Southern and Eastern Europe, membership in NATO and participation in UN and EU peace-keeping missions seem to have played a significant role in discouraging their intervention

in domestic politics. The military as individuals or as institution are no longer as likely to intervene or even to threaten the advent of real-existing democracy as it was only a few decades ago.

But even more significant may be the changing role of economic elites. In the early transitional modes of reform and revolution, the bourgeoisie played a crucial role by preferring the former to the latter and, therefore, by promoting democracy. Subsequently, however, when reform meant the redistribution of their income and wealth and revolution meant their elimination as a class, they more frequently intervened in favor of autocratic rule, sometimes even in collaboration with military or civilian elites in other countries. This was particularly the case in peripheral settings such as Latin America where capitalism was delayed and dependent in its emergence and, hence, more vulnerable to internal disruption and external threat. As capitalism became increasingly globalized and embedded in international and regional organizations, business elites – even in the periphery -- became less and less national in calculating their interests and exercising their power and influence. The nature of domestic regimes became less a source of physical threat and more a resource for profitable return. In this context, liberal, constitutional, representative democracies, i.e, REDs, that guaranteed the protection of property rights and ensured that political conflicts would be channelled through predictable channels of resolution were clearly preferable to autocratic ones – no matter how momentarily advantageous the repressive actions of the latter might be.

The most serious elite challenges to contemporary democratization may come not from military or economic elites. They may come from elites representing religious or ethno-linguistic minorities – often concentrated in sub-national political units dominated by majorities ruling at the national level. One of the most notorious weaknesses of democratic theory has always been that it has no explanation for the existence of the unit within which it is practiced: the (allegedly) sovereign and (allegedly) national state. And, even worse, there are no legitimate mechanisms for filling this lacuna. Plebiscites are irrelevant since the pre-established conditions of eligibility to participate in them almost invariably determine their outcome. When there exists no consensus among elites

representing the interests and passions of groups located within a given territory concerning its boundaries and identity **prior** to the attempt at democratization, then the only solutions to the choice of unit are conquest or compromise – and the former is rarely compatible with eventual democracy. Reaching a compromise during this period is, however, difficult since, suddenly, numbers count much more than under autocracy and so does location since an embryonic democracy must not only decide on voter eligibility (presumably without restrictions based on class, gender, religion, ethnicity, or wealth), but also must decide on the constituencies within which these votes are tabulated. Elites representing numerical minorities may have reason to feel threatened, especially if the decision rules are strictly majoritarian, but even more so if they are concentrated territorially in sub-units that are under-represented or dispersed across several sub-units where they are permanently minoritarian. At the extreme, elections become “ethnic, linguistic or religious censuses” that are destined to produce contested results, not infrequently, accompanied by violence.

Rotation in Power

The recent attempts at transition to democracy have not only been more successful, they have also been more eventful for the elites that participated in them. The previously successful cases of regime transformation in the Twentieth Century – most of them after or around World War I and World War II – resulted in a winning party or coalition that remained consistently in power for eight to twelve years, e.g. Norway, Finland, Ireland, Sri Lanka, Jamaica, India, as well as the Western and Southern European countries liberated from Nazi occupation. The hegemony of these founding elites was even longer in the cases of the defeated countries: West Germany, Japan and Italy. In the post-1974 transitions the pattern has been dramatically different. Instead of having a protracted electoral advantage rooted in their image as the founders of democracy (or, in some case, of the nation-state itself), the opposite has become the norm. The party winning the founding election is most often defeated in the subsequent one. Spain became the paradigm case when the initial winner, Adolfo Suarez and his UDC party, lost by a large margin in the second election and never

recuperated. The only two cases that come to mind when there was continuity in the initial ruling party were the Czech Republic and Chile. The most astonishing cases occurred in Eastern Europe when the former ruling Communist Party elite re-named and reformed itself and succeeded in winning several of the subsequent elections – despite what seemed to be the thorough public discredit of their previous performance.

The reasons for this reversal in the fortune of founding elites are obscure. At the top of the list one should probably put the intervening increase in citizen information and expectations. Not only are today's newly empowered citizens better informed about the performance of their own institutions and those of other comparable countries, but they also expect more from their newly founded institutions and the elites that run them. When it quickly becomes apparent that democratization as such does not lead to a greater volume or better distribution of benefits, and even that it comes with considerable “start-up costs” and “initial disruption,” they shift their attention (and vote) to some alternative elite – that also turns out to be disappointing. The Spaniards, as forerunners in this process, have coined a term for it: *desencanto*. What is important to retain, however, is that contrary to past experiences, this disenchantment with what the transformation to democracy has produced does not translate into support for some autocratic replacement for it. Something called “democracy” remains the preferred regime for almost all citizens – “the only game in town” – but its pursuit results in a much accelerated circulation in the elites running it. Revolutions are said “to eat their children;” transitions seem “to wear out their elites.”

Some Tentative Conclusions

1) During the transition from some form of autocracy to some form of ‘real-existing democracy’, the nature of politics and, therefore, the role of political elites is “abnormal,” i.e. intrinsically uncertain and not just risky as in normal times. Given the absence of accepted rules and predictable behaviors during such an interval, actors have unusually greater autonomy in making their decisions, especially with regard to choosing the rules of the game that will determine the nature of the emerging, but not yet established regime.

2) Therefore, political elites have even greater importance than during the usual lengthy periods of “normal” politics within established regimes, whether autocratic or democratic. However, these transitional elites are also more likely to be internally divided in their preference for the emerging rules and, hence, which elite or coalition of elites will eventually dominate and impose its rules is itself uncertain.

3) The mode of transition, how the regime transformation is made, has a distinct impact on political elites. The two “classical” modes: peaceful **reform** and violent **revolution** come from below and involve a substantial change in the composition of subsequent ruling elites, even a complete substitution in the latter case. The seventy or more attempted transitions since the mid-1970s have more often come from above, either by **pacts** between factions within the previous autocracy and its opposition or by **imposition** from a victorious faction within that *ancien régime*. Under these conditions, there likely to be a much greater continuity in the composition of political elites.

4) The uncertain dynamics of transition mean that the power resources that determine elite status are also likely to change. In particular, once founding elections are held and freedom of association secured, the sheer numbers and identities of citizens and their location in specific constituencies becomes more significant, not only in determining the outcome of elections or of competition for influence, but even more in influencing the nature and configuration of the very unit within which politics is conducted, i.e. the national-state and its sub-units.

5) For there is no democratic way in which the borders and identity of this unit can be determined. At best, these elements of stateness will have been established prior to the transition, virtually always by non-democratic and controversial means, and elites in and out of power will have adjusted to its existence. * However, once the attempt at democratization is initiated, it may become apparent that there is not just one, more or less coherent, political elite emerging from within the previous national unit, but several distinctive elites laying claim to different territories or identities along lines of cleavage relating to ethnicity, language, religion or previous patterns of discrimination. Needless to

say, if and when this occurs, the eventual formation of a political class willing to play according to rules of democratic competition becomes much more difficult. Compromise and power-sharing between elites (and them and their followers) is one solution, as is the rarer one of peaceful secession into separate national units. Unfortunately, the more frequent outcome is an effort at conquest by one elite and violent resistance by another – which makes democratization impossible until the armed conflict is resolved.

6) The transition is over when political elites have reached a mutual agreement on the rules concerning their competition for office and influence, and managed to convince their followers or the citizenry as a whole that these rules embody a form of democracy that is appropriate for their society and legitimate for their polity. * Needless to say, these rules vary considerably (and serve to create different types of democracy), but they are all rooted in what have become fairly common rules of citizenship without discrimination by gender, race, religion, ethnicity, language or wealth. Age discrimination has persisted, although it has tended to decline from 18 to 16. The most serious unresolved problem concerns the status of legally resident or “un-documented” foreigners, who have reached a considerable proportion of the resident population in many national societies. Most of the transitional democracies after the mid-1970s have tended to be net exporters rather than importers of these “denizens”; hence, they have ignored the issue – except for extending citizenship rights to their own nationals living abroad – which creates a new dimension to their elite structure since many of its members may no longer be subject to national obligations.

7) As we have argued, democratization is a dynamic process that can (and usually does) alter the resources available to actors in their competition for elite position and status. In the case of “top-down” transitions, the key initial resource is usually the capacity to deliver the compliance of members and followers during an otherwise highly uncertain period. Once the elementary freedoms intrinsic to the practice of RED -- even in the *dictablandas* imposed by a faction of the previous autocracy or the *democraduras* negotiated by the regime and part of its opposition -- become tolerated practice, the newly empowered citizenry will inevitably test their limits and seek to extend them. The result is often a loss of

control from above by founding elites and a mobilization of civil society from below that introduces new elites into the political process. This, combined with the increase in expectations triggered by even the most limited type of transition, may help to explain a 'peculiar' feature of recent democratizations, namely, the rapidity and frequency with which turnover in power via elections takes place.

8) On a purely probabilistic and historical basis, most attempted transitions to democracy have failed – usually due to the intervention of military elites (admittedly, often with civilian allies). This has become a much less likely occurrence since the mid-1970s. The reluctance or unwillingness of this elite to intervene goes a long way to explaining why so few overt reversions to autocracy have occurred. This cannot be attributed simply to a decline in their capacity to displace civilian elites. On the contrary, with the greater professionalization of armed forces and the continuous introduction of new and more efficacious weapons almost everywhere, the objective disparity between military and civilian elites to wield violence has increased. Nor does it seem attributable to increased divisions between branches of the armed forces. One factor of substantial importance would seem to be a shift in the international context since the end of the Cold War whereby *golpistas* know that they not only cannot rely on the same explicit or implicit support of outside powers, but that various international, especially regional, organizations are capable of mobilizing sanctions against such actions. * This does not mean that the spectre of armed intervention has disappeared, *vide* Thailand, Honduras, Egypt and several African polities, but it no longer haunts the process as much as in the past.

9) The role of economic elites has also shifted. Now that they can no longer rely on the military to “liberate” them from threats generated by democratic competition and now they have lost their strategic significance for outsiders due to the collapse of the (real or imagined) threat of communism, capitalists seem to have discovered that they can live with and even compete effectively within democracy, as long as it remains liberal in its restriction of the role of the state and constitutional in its protection of property rights. Given the imposed or pactured nature of most recent transitions, these conditions seem to assured from the beginning. Moreover, very few bourgeoisies are any longer strictly national,

depending only upon the labor and purchasing power of their fellow citizens. For reasons that seem more fortuitous than causal, the wave of democratizations that began in the 1970s coincided with the rising hegemony of neo-liberal economic ideology and the emergence of a globalized system of market exchanges, especially financial ones. This provided capitalists with additional degrees of freedom, both economic and political. They can secure their capital in a variety of sites outside their own democracy; they can use the threat of out-sourcing abroad to weaken the demands of labor; they can ally themselves with powerful multi-national firms which have direct access to their own and other polities; they can rely on appeals for support from regional and global inter-governmental organizations and arbitration systems. Even when Left-oriented parties come to power, they have proven cautious in wielding their powers of expropriation, redistribution and promotion of the rights of workers and labor unions – in the interest of reducing the risk of capital flight or decline in foreign investment. The “dirty secret” of most neo-democracies is that their economic and social policies have been much less consequential than in the past and expected in the present. In short, liberal or ‘real-existing’ democracy has once again become “the best cover for the bourgeoisie.”

10) Another challenge to democracy has come from oligarchy, the tendency for ruling elites to perpetuate themselves in power. The classic scenario is for them to use the resources of incumbency to skew the results of competition in their favor – all the more so, if those resources come from within the state and not just private parties, associations, movements or firms. However, as we have noted above, it has become more and more rare that the party or coalition winning the initial election is capable of winning the second or third one. It would seem either that incumbency resources are scarce in such neo-democracies or that the relevant publics have become less trusting or more demanding or both. The proliferation of constitutionally embedded term limits – usually two consecutive ones – has also contributed to the more frequent rate of turnovers in power. Efforts by incumbents in neo-democracies to falsify voter registration and electoral results have frequently been tried, but have often been frustrated by citizen rebellions, sometimes aided by the growing role of international observers.

The second scenario is for those entrenched in office to simply call off elections, dismiss parliaments and unilaterally augment their executive powers, sometimes by declaring a state of national emergency. These so-called *auto-golpes* by elected civilian rulers have been tried repeatedly, especially in Latin America and Africa, but many of them failed due to mass public reaction at the national level and pressures from international or regional organizations.

11) In all regimes, political elites interact with and become dependent upon each other and upon other elites. In Western Europe and, to a lesser extent, North America, the extension and consolidation of democracy was rooted to a considerable extent in the interpenetration of political parties and interest associations. Left-wing parties had their “sister” labor unions and cooperatives; right-wing parties had a somewhat looser relation with business and professional associations, as well as private firms. Thanks to this cooperation between political and civil society, these polities developed a particularly strong infrastructure of organized intermediaries – which proved subsequently resilient in most of them to the challenges of economic depression and international war. Contemporary neo-democracies are characterized by a much deeper separation of these two generic forms of representation and, hence, a weaker role for both of them. Their parties not only have much fewer members or even loyal followers than in the past, but the same is true for most associations representing class, sectoral or professional interests (if membership in them is not obligatory). So-called non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on the advocacy of various causes: gender equality, environmental sustainability, human rights, child welfare *e così via*, self-consciously describe themselves as not affiliated to any political party and their donors (often foreigners) insist that this divide be respected. The result is a structural weakness within the emerging political elite in what used to be one of the major elements of its strength and resilience.

12) But the greatest difference in elite identity and structure between past and present democracies lies in the emergence and spread of “selectorates” that have far outstripped in number and often in influence the “electorates” that have long presumed to exclusively recruit, certify and control the members of the political elite. These selected leaders come from a multitude of sources, but they all have

in common that were not elected to fill their positions and are not subjected to being “un-elected” as a constraint on their behavior. By far the most powerful of them inhabit and govern so-called “guardian institutions,” – institutions that have been delegated to perform important governing tasks and deliberately designed to be protected from the vagaries of democratic political competition. Historically, the earliest and most significant of these were the armed forces and, especially, their General Staffs. Elected elites might set the general “strategic” guidelines and periodically review their budgets, but for most purposes military elites were expected to select their personnel and make operational decisions “without political interference.” Supreme or constitutional courts are another form of guardianship that has spread rapidly through old and new liberal democracies. But the most rapidly expanding component of guardianship in contemporary democracies has been the proliferation of “independent central banks” and “independent regulatory agencies.” Presumed to be staffed by technocratic experts in their respective fields, they have usurped a wide range of policy areas that were previously within the domain of elected officials, or not politically regulated at all. And they are virtually un-removable – regardless changes in government or regime. If that were not enough, many of these agencies are closely affiliated with and supported by international and regional organizations that establish many of the rules that they are subsequently charged with enforcing at the national or sub-national level. A second source of “selectorate elites” comes from within civil society. Virtually none of the leaders of its myriad associations, movements and foundations have been elected competitively. Most have selected themselves and, by personal reputation or organizational performance, gained the support of consenting members or financial contributors. Needless to say, this is an elite that is much more likely to be affected by regime transformation; indeed, it is its mobilization that frequently drives the transition process further than originally intended. In other words, their external impact upon the political process may be democratic, but their internal status is not.

13) Notwithstanding the previous discussion, democratization is not just a product of political elites. Their initiatives, interventions, defections,

compromises, reassurances, agreements and disagreements may be less predictable and more consequential than in times of 'normal' politics, but they are all ultimately connected to the actions and reactions of ordinary citizens who are rapidly learning to exploit their greater access to diverse sources of information and to wield their newly acquired civic rights. During the transition, there may emerge some elites driven by purely idealistic or altruistic motives, but most of them tend to respond only when promised some benefit or threatened with some cost – and it is the mobilization of previously sub-ordinate masses that tends to change their respective incentive structures and action repertoires. *Virtù* in the Machiavellian sense involves precisely being able to understand this uncertain and rapidly changing set of rewards and threats, and to act accordingly in order to achieve the desired goal of political order. In his day, this meant a stable 'princely' autocracy; today, in more than seventy locations since 1974, this has meant an institutionalized form of 'real-existing democracy.' Not all aspiring democratic leaders are capable of capturing and interpreting the signals sent from below and, needless to say, those who can do not always make 'virtuous' decisions. On the front end of the process of democratization, success depends on converting this complex and fleeting set of rewards and threats into rules that political and other elites are willing to respect; on the back end, however, the viability of these compromises among elites will depend on whether citizens regard these institutions as legitimate, i.e. are willing to comply voluntarily with the constraints they place on their political behavior because they regard them as appropriate – materially and normatively.

Further Readings

On the definition of democracy

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