

Democratic theory provides us with conflicting visions rather than some uniquely authoritative answer to the questions posed here. Questions about democracy remain unsettled. But unlike any other period in its history, the authority of the basic democratic idea is virtually unchallenged in the modern era. Democracy (in some sense) triumphs even as disagreements proliferate as to what it is, or might be.

See also: Citizen Participation; Citizenship, Historical Development of; Citizenship: Political; Civic Culture; Democracy, History of; Democracy: Normative Theory; Electoral Systems; Public Opinion: Political Aspects; Voting, Sociology of

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Democratic Transitions

The study of democratic transitions focuses on the critical step in the history of democracy when a country passes a threshold marked by the introduction of competitive elections with mass suffrage for the main political offices in the land. Though a concern of thinkers since the late eighteenth century, it blossomed as a distinct area of scholarly research in the context of the wave of democratic transitions that swept through every corner of the world in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

1. The Subject Matter

Research on democratic transitions is part of the broader field of democratic theory that gains its distinctiveness from a sharply defined focus on elections. Indeed, the status of democratic transitions as a distinctive field of research is given by an undeniably Schumpeterian approach to democracy, which emphasizes the procedures that regulate the access to power. This delimitation of the subject matter did little to spur interest at the time university-based research was expanding dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s. Not only did the realities of world politics appear to devalue this line of research, but the Schumpeterian conception of democracy was widely out of favor. Even though some landmark studies on democratic transitions were published as early as 1960 (Lipset 1960, Rustow 1970), interest in democratic transitions took a back seat to other, more pressing or more valued concerns.

The status of research on democratic transitions, however, changed quite considerably thereafter. First and most important, the wave of democratization beginning in 1974 made the subject matter immediately relevant. In addition, the influential writings of Robert Dahl (1971) helped foster widespread acceptance in the social sciences of the erstwhile disparaged Schumpeterian view of democracy. Finally, the seminal work of Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (1986) did much to set the initial terms of the debate and give a strong impetus to research on the topic. With the boom in research on democratic transitions in the 1980s and 1990s, by the turn of the century research on democratic transitions had attained the status of an established field.

2. Research and Findings

The focus on a sharply delimited subject matter has a definite advantage, in that it has allowed research to concentrate on a fairly clear question: why have some countries had democratic transitions while others have not? Thus, an impressive basis of knowledge was generated quite rapidly through a succession of studies. Following in the wake of pioneering work on the transitions in southern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s and early 1980s (O'Donnell et al. 1986), major cross-regional analyses were conducted comparing Latin America to East and South East Asia (Haggard and Kaufman 1995), and southern Europe and Latin America to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Linz and Stepan 1996, see also Huntington 1991). Excellent region-based studies were produced, focusing on Africa (Bratton and van de Walle 1997), Eastern Europe (Beyme 1996, Offe 1997, Bunce 1999), as well as the three major regions of the developing world (Diamond et al. 1989a, 1989b, 1989c). Finally, impressive efforts were made to put the transitions of the last quarter of the twentieth

century in historical perspective, through cross-regional analyses of Europe and Latin America ranging across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, Collier 1999).

The richness of this literature is undeniable. Indeed, it offers a wealth of ideas on the causes of transitions, a great amount of nuanced data on very complex processes, and some fruitful comparative analyses that have generated a number of important and surprising findings. This literature has demonstrated that, contrary to the longstanding conventional view, level of economic development is not a good predictor of democratic transitions. It has also shown that democratic transitions do not occur through a single process but rather through multiple paths defined by factors such as the power and strategies of elites and masses and the source of impetus for political reform. Moreover, an important degree of cumulation of knowledge has been achieved through efforts to codify these distinct paths of democratic transition. A closely related finding involves the growing evidence that the path toward democracy that a country follows is strongly influenced by its type of old, nondemocratic regime. Thus, depending on the type of old regime, pacts may be a necessary condition for a successful transition to democracy, and nationalist movements may weaken, rather than enhance, the prospects of democracy. Finally, this literature has shown that issues of regime change are closely linked with those of the state, conceived in Weberian terms. In this regard, a key finding is the 'no state, no democracy' principle, which holds that processes of regime change that lead to state decay or state collapse reduce the prospects of democracy.

3. Explanatory Variables and Theoretical Integration

The considerable accomplishments of this body of literature notwithstanding, the agenda of research on democratic transitions faces some considerable challenges. One such challenge concerns the need for greater theoretical integration. The evolution of the literature on democratic transitions has been characterized by the frequent introduction of new causal factors considered critical to an explanation of why democratic transitions occur. These new explanatory variables sometimes reflect the experience of new cases of transitions to democracy, which have brought to light factors that had not seemed important in the cases until then considered. In other instances, the focus on new variables has been driven more by an effort to rescue insights from older bodies of literature. The downside of this theoretical fertility, however, is that the introduction of a large set of explanatory variables has given a somewhat disorderly quality to theoretical debates.

As challenging as the task of theoretical organization and integration is likely to be, it is facilitated somewhat because theoretical debates have evolved around a number of central axes. One main axis contrasts short-term factors and the choices made by actors (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Przeworski 1991) to medium-term factors, such as the characteristics of the old regime (Linz and Stepan 1996), and long-term, more structural factors, such as the mode of production or the model of development (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, Castells 1998). Another axis of debate contrasts elite-centered explanations (Dogan and Higley 1998) to mass-centered explanations, which focus either on class actors (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, Collier 1999), social movements (Foweraker 1995, Chap. 5, Tarrow 1995), or ethnic groups (Offe 1997, Chap. 4). Yet another axis contrasts political to economic determinants of transitions (Haggard and Kaufman 1995, Przeworski and Limongi 1997). And one more critical axis of debate opposes domestic factors to international factors (Whitehead 1996), an axis along which one might also locate explanations centered on stateness and nationality issues that might be labeled as 'intermestic' (Linz and Stepan 1996). Thus, the further development of a theory of democratic transitions is likely to hinge on efforts to build upon this implicit organization of the debate and to explicitly formulate a framework that integrates and synthesizes these diverse explanatory factors.

4. Data Collection and Comparative Analysis

Another challenge concerns the collection of data and the conduct of comparative analysis. The literature on democratic transitions has evolved in a way that has given primacy to selective rather than encompassing comparisons. The reason for this strategy is obvious, in that the comparison of a small number of cases can provide a sufficient basis for introducing new ideas into the debate and for doing so rapidly. Hence, this strategy has been well suited for the initial stages of theorizing. But this strategy has also had its downside. The key problem is that data has not been collected on all the explanatory variables across all the relevant cases. Indeed, though this literature has generated a great amount of nuanced data, researchers have not always been systematic enough in terms of gathering the same data for all the cases they analyze, let alone all the cases that are discussed in this literature as a whole. As a consequence, the ability of researchers to test their theories systematically and draw strong conclusions has been somewhat constrained.

The ability of scholars to engage in systematic comparative analysis, however, is hampered by a serious practical limitation. A review of the existing literature on democratic transitions shows that there is

a very steep trade-off in the level of nuance of data and hence the explanatory arguments tested as one moves from the literature based on intensive but relatively narrow comparisons of a small set of cases to the statistical literature based on a large number of cases. Thus, concerning the task of data collection and comparative analysis, a multitrack approach is highly recommended.

One such track would consist of the collection of data that can be used for statistical studies. In this regard, the challenge is to collect data, on a large number of cases, on factors other than the standard economic and institutional ones which have long been the staple of statistical analyses (e.g., Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Indeed, the full benefits of statistical tools are unlikely to be felt in the debate on democratic transitions until data sets are generated with information on the kind of actors involved in the process of democratic transitions, the choices these actors make, and the sequence of events whereby democratic transitions unfold. This is a formidable task but one with important payoffs and thus well worth pursuing.

Another track would consist of the application of the research strategy which has contributed so much to this debate, the intensive analysis of a small to medium number of cases, to some relatively unexplored questions. Though some significant works offer a historical perspective on the democratic transitions that have been the focus of the debate, those occurring in the last quarter of the twentieth century, much remains to be learned by cross-time comparisons as well as by a reanalysis of older cases of transitions in light of new theories. In addition, though some thought has been given to the differences and similarities between the explanations currently used to account for democratic transitions and the earlier explanations of democratic breakdowns (O'Donnell 1973, Linz and Stepan 1978, Collier 1979), very little has been done to pursue this potentially illuminating comparison in a systematic manner. Finally, a whole new perspective that needs to be developed concerns the cases of failed transitions. Indeed, while scholars of democratic transitions have learned a lot by focusing on positive cases, where transitions to democracy did occur, an important question that remains to be fully answered is: why did many countries that saw the collapse of old regimes during the last quarter of the twentieth century have transitions that did not lead to democracy? The continued use of qualitative methods, thus, is likely to be highly rewarding.

5. *The Need for Disaggregation*

As the new century begins, scholars of democratic transitions have a lot to build upon but also a lot to do. Thus, it is absolutely essential to devise ways of making this research agenda manageable. Many different options in this regard are available. One option that bears highlighting is suggested by the very definition of

a democratic transition offered at the outset of this article. This definition consists of three elements which countries may attain at different paces and in different orders: competitive elections, mass suffrage, and elections for all main political offices. Thus, even though democratic transitions are often portrayed as a single event, they may actually be studied as a series of events, a new perspective that has important implications. If research shows that countries follow different paths, characterized by different sequences of events, as Dahl (1971, pp. 4–6) has suggested, then the challenge facing scholars of democratic transitions might be disaggregated and hence broken down analytically and greatly facilitated. Indeed, if the challenge of explaining transitions could focus on the more manageable task of accounting for a number of influential patterns, the problem of theoretical integration would be simplified and data collection could be organized around a set of priorities. A fascinating but somewhat daunting agenda of research would thus be transformed into a fascinating and manageable agenda.

See also: Democracy; Democracy, History of; Eastern European Studies: Politics; Latin American Studies: Politics; Schumpeter, Joseph A (1883–1950); Soviet Studies: Politics

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Demographic Analysis: Probabilistic Approach

1. Random Variation in Demographic Behavior

Demography is one of the many fields of science where statistical theory can be put to good use. Typical events of interest to demographers are births, deaths, the formation and disruption of marital and nonmarital unions, and geographical migration. The quintessential determinants of demographic behavior are sex, age, and cohort or calendar period, and other typical individual-level factors are race, social and family background, ethnicity, religious orientation, labor-force participation, and educational attainment. There may also be contextual determinants, such as institutional settings, laws and regulations (including

public policies), and other collective features that individuals face. Aspects of aggregate behavior in the same population may also be important. (When many people already cohabit in nonmarital unions, individuals may find it easier to form such a union themselves. When divorce is common, dissatisfied spouses may find it easier to dissolve their own marriage.) To handle this multitude of features, individual demographic behavior is described in terms of event-history models where individuals move between predefined statuses under the influence of personal or group characteristics, of their own personal history, of contextual factors, and of period influences in the population they belong to.

Since any human population has finitely many members, there is an amount of random error in analytic procedures based on individual-level data. If life histories are selected in some random manner from a larger population, as in a survey sample, then some identifiable part of the error may be due to the sampling procedure, but another part is caused by the fundamental randomness of the individual process paths. Stochastic variation does not only arise from sampling variation in survey data, or from deliberate randomization of experiments. Whether the data were obtained for a sample or for the whole population segment in question is a separate issue. The size order of the random variation involved usually depends on the number of contributing individuals, not on whether the data comes from a sample survey or not. As was expounded by Westergaard (1880) more than a century ago and repeated many times over by people like Udry et al. (1979) and by Brillinger (1986) and his discussants, random variation is intrinsic to data on demographic behavior, just as it is for data from other social and behavioral sciences.

Demography may be special in that some of its data come from populations large enough to permit the investigator essentially to disregard randomness in the corresponding vital rates. In such cases, the challenge is to explain any irregularities in plotted curves of vital rates as local variations of substantive interest, or as caused by systematic registration errors. Significance tests and similar statistical tools may then become less important. This does not preclude random variation from being prominent in data from small populations and from smallish segments of national populations.

2. The Event-history Approach

In event-history analysis, demographic events are seen as transitions between states in a suitable state space. The factors that influence the transitions may be fixed or change over time, they may be exogenous to the individual history or endogenous to it, recorded in an available set of individual-level data, or unobserved causes of observable selectivity. Early behavior on a