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## *Review Article*

# HOW DID EUROPE DEMOCRATIZE?

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Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson. *The Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Charles Boix. *Democracy and Redistribution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Ruth Berins Collier. *Paths toward Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Charles Tilly. *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650–2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

### INTRODUCTION

WHEN we pause to reflect on the tangle of challenges and dilemmas currently facing democratization efforts across the globe, the successful emergence of democracy in the largest countries of Western Europe in the last part of the nineteenth century looks truly remarkable. Occurring in the reactionary shadow that followed the French Revolution, facing new and not entirely understood economic dislocations and absent the certainty of carrying out reforms with the “democratic transition” playbook in hand, the relative *success* of democratic reforms in late-nineteenth-century Europe should strike contemporary political scientists as nearly an unfathomable puzzle.

Indeed, how was democracy achieved in Europe? This article reviews four books that make clear that the advent of democracy in Europe in the late nineteenth century was not the exceptional and overdetermined outgrowth of modernization as traditionally portrayed by comparative scholarship. Instead, as these works demonstrate, the muddled political reality of nineteenth-century Europe was marked by its own share of uncertainties, fears, and concessions that are often thought to be

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symptomatic exclusively of contemporary democratization. It is true that the movement toward universal male suffrage, the increased accountability of executives to elected national parliaments, and the institutionalization of civil rights did mark a dramatic reordering of political authority in Europe's "democratic age." But questions remain. How were these difficult institutional innovations achieved under what may not in fact have been the most promising of conditions? And are there lessons to be learned from this experience for contemporary efforts at democratization?

The traditional narrative of Europe's democratization follows a familiar though misleading periodization that suggests that Europe's path to democracy was difficult but exceptional and achieved under nearly inescapable "forces" of history. Preceded by feudalism, absolutism, and the age of revolution, it was during industrialization and the "age of democracy," so the traditional account runs, that most major Western European countries successfully made the hard-fought democratic transition, crossing the "threshold" of democracy where the main qualities we now attribute to democracy were put in place. Indeed, the central empirical puzzle in this narrative is how the democratic reversals of the interwar period were even possible in the first place, given that democracy had appeared so secure in the world's most advanced economies.<sup>1</sup> As a result, despite the ebb of democracy's first wave in the middle of the twentieth century, it is typically thought that there still existed between the 1820s and 1920s a self-contained and coherently identifiable period in which a "wave of democracy" recast national political institutions and gave rise to new national political "orders" that were fundamentally distinct from what had preceded them.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally, exceptions to the general thrust of history are recognized. Usually noted as examples of "nondemocracy" quietly persisting throughout the period are Prussia's three-class voting system as well as the relative powerlessness of Germany's national parliament; southern Italy's clientelism and rampant vote buying; Napoleon III's Bonapartism, which weakened parliamentary institutions; and Britain's exceptionally intricate and restricted rules of franchise and electoral

<sup>1</sup> See Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 1966); Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Gregory Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyn Huber Stephens, and John Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> The notion of a "democratic wave" and the dates of democracy's first wave draw on Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

registration that were intended to minimize participation. But these are all typically regarded as deviations at the margins of the broader trends of the age.

The four books that this article reviews suggest that rather than deviations, the antidemocratic currents cutting across Europe's democratic age were key parts of the democratic age itself. If we give proper weight to the presence of antidemocratic rules, institutions, and practices that were often invented and institutionalized during Europe's age of democratization, we can revise the dominant narrative of European exceptionalism. Moreover, we can draw lessons from Europe's turbulent age for our own in which efforts at democratization so often result not in smoothly functioning liberal democratic regimes but instead in "illiberal democracies," "competitive authoritarian regimes," or "hybrid regimes," where democratic and antidemocratic institutions, rules, and practices coexist.<sup>3</sup>

It is here that we see the most provocative insight generated in the four books under review: regime change even in the important European historical cases so often held up as the paradigmatic models of successful "transitions" to democracy were messier and more ambiguous than typically thought. Democratization in Europe, like elsewhere, did not simply represent the wholesale replacement of one regime for another but often entailed and—perhaps required—combining democratic reforms with microlevel formal and informal *undemocratic* elite safeguards, including undemocratic upper chambers, gerrymandered electoral districts, clientelism, and corrupt voting registration rules. As in contemporary cases of regime change, such safeguards had unintended and contradictory consequences. Perhaps aimed to reduce the "uncertainty" of democratic competition for nondemocratic elites so their power and influence would not be threatened, such measures may also ironically have bolstered democracy by securing traditional elite support for minimally democratic procedures. In short, the "mixed" outcomes of democracy's first wave are not so dissimilar from the experiences of contemporary cases, and—as the books under review make clear—there might be much to learn from a two-way interchange.

The reader should be warned that the four books under review often raise these points only *indirectly* as they address three important issues that contribute to our broader understanding of the plot line of how

<sup>3</sup> See Larry Diamond, "Elections without Democracy: Thinking about Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002); Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002); Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003); Andreas Schedler, "The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002).

Europe democratized. As political economists, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (A&R) as well as Carles Boix make major contributions to several areas, including to the question of how shifting patterns of income inequality created an “opening” or opportunity for democratic reforms; Ruth Berins Collier investigates the question of whether elites or the working class were the more decisive actors to take advantage of this “opening.” Finally, Charles Tilly and A&R raise a third issue: what is the process by which democracy is secured? Taken together, these accounts explore the three key questions of democracy’s emergence: what gives rise to the opportunity for institutional change; who are the most influential actors and what motivates these actors; and what is the actual process by which democracy is secured? This review is structured around these three questions, highlighting throughout how these accounts guide us in rethinking the concept of democratization itself.

### I. WHAT PROMPTS DEMOCRATIZATION?

Most accounts of democratization begin with a difficult but useful question: what prompts the “opening” in which democratic reforms are possible in the first place? For a variety of sensible reasons, political sociologists and political scientists have tended to develop arguments that highlight economic change as the decisive trigger behind episodes of democratization, rather than a range of plausible alternatives such as collapse of empires or natural disasters.<sup>4</sup> Clearly inspired by the coincidence in timing between the industrial revolution and democratization in Europe, modernization theory in the post–World War II period aimed to confirm the same basic insight, demonstrating the cross-national correlation between national GDP per capita and democracy. Economic development, it was thought, transformed societies, reducing scarcity and altering cultural values—all making democratic transitions more likely and democracies more stable.<sup>5</sup> But beginning with Barrington Moore (1966), and moving more recently to Przeworski and Limongi (1997), the precise causal underpinnings of the positive relationship between national wealth and democracy have been questioned.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The idea that economic organization drives political change is a central assumption of what Andrew Janos calls the classical paradigm of social theory; see Janos, *Politics and Paradigms* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Among the many, two standard accounts of modernization theory that emphasize the impact of economic change on scarcity and cultural change and hence democratization are S. M. Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960); and Gabriel Almond and James S. Coleman, *The Politics of Developing Areas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

<sup>6</sup> Moore (fn. 1); Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, “Modernization: Theories and Facts,” *World Politics* 49 (January 1997).

Two of the books under review (Boix and A&R) seek to come to terms with this debate by positing an alternative set of mechanisms that successfully resurrect structural theories of democratization that highlight economic change in prompting democratic transition. But the arguments do so not by focusing on aggregate levels of scarcity and the forces of cultural change but by focusing instead on an alternative causal pathway centering on how shifting patterns of *income inequality* connected with economic development give rise to the opportunity for democratization.

BOIX, *DEMOCRACY AND REDISTRIBUTION*

Carles Boix has the ambitious aim of developing a “unified model” of political transitions that can account for “the occurrence of democracies, right-wing authoritarian regimes and revolutions leading to civil war and communist or left-wing dictatorships” (pp. 2–3). The work adopts the assumptions and tools of rational choice theory. The aim is to develop and test an account of regime transition that is rooted in economic development but that presents alternative mechanisms to modernization theory’s sweeping but underspecified claims. The result is an impressive, theoretically coherent account of regime change. Boix argues that two factors associated with GDP per capita but with “causal primacy” over it can account for the correlation between national wealth and democracy and can explain the anomalous deviations of, for example, oil-rich countries that tend to be authoritarian. The two factors—economic inequality and asset specificity—are at the center of his analysis. As economic inequality declines with economic development, Boix argues, democracy becomes less threatening to nondemocratic leaders. Since democracies, by definition in Boix’s framework, reflect the preference of a wider spectrum of citizens than do nondemocracies, they tend to tax the rich and redistribute more. The antidemocratic resistance of nondemocratic leaders (who are presumed with little empirical evidence also to be “the rich”) stems from the fear of costly redistribution; as inequality declines, the potential costs of redistribution reach a point where they are below the costs of repression. It is in these moments that a democratic transition is possible.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Boix’s second variable, asset specificity—or to use other terms, the mobility of the main assets in a society (for example, capital invested in the agrarian sector tends to be less mobile than human or

<sup>7</sup> This portion of Boix’s framework, like large portions of A&R’s, clearly builds on the influential Meltzer-Richard model; see Allan Meltzer and Scott Richard, “A Rational Theory of the Size of Government,” *Journal of Political Economy* 89, no. 5 (1981).

physical capital)—determines the likelihood of democratic transition. If elites control immobile assets such as land or oil, they fear that democratization will bring heavy taxation that they will not be able to evade. When economic assets become more mobile and less specific, as tended to happen with industrialization and economic development in nineteenth-century Europe, elites do not fear taxation to the same degree. Elites, again, are not as threatened by the costs of democracy.

A crucial and intriguing part of Boix's causal story centers on the question of the impact of the middle class on democratization (pp. 47–52). Introducing a *third* collective actor (“the rich,” “the poor,” and “the middle class”), the analysis uses the same logic to introduce a complication: if the middle class becomes wealthier with economic development and the rich and the poor remain in relatively static positions, the gap between the rich and the middle shrinks; as a result, the costs of redistribution specifically targeted to the middle class decline relative to the costs of repression specifically targeted at the middle class. The consequence? A cross-class alliance is possible. That is, nondemocratic wealthy elites may embrace what Boix calls “limited democracy,” granting limited suffrage to the middle class. It is only when the gap between the poor and the middle also shrinks that what Boix calls “universal suffrage” will be possible.

Boix's argument has bold theoretical ambitions; he asserts that it is for these two reasons—declining inequality and declining asset specificity—that economic development in northwestern Europe in democracy's first wave tended to trigger democratization. Additionally, his account is intended to explain the gradual nature of European democratization. Finally, his argument might also explain barriers to democratization, both historically and in the contemporary world. Historically, his account makes sense of why agrarian elites, such as nineteenth-century Prussian Junkers, attempted to block democratization. In the contemporary world, his account explains why wealthy but inequitable and/or sectorally asset-specific countries such as oil-rich economies tend not to be democratic. With these bold theoretical ambitions, Boix demonstrates the empirical value of his argument through two large-N analyses between 1850 and 1990 and two national case studies. The large-N analysis codes regimes dichotomously (democracy versus authoritarianism) and then seeks to account for the probability of transition from authoritarianism to democracy with a range of indirect measures of his main variables; the two national case studies of nineteenth-century Switzerland and the United States show that in

subnational cantons and states where inequality was lower, the franchise was less restrictive.<sup>8</sup>

The argument is ambitious, parsimonious, and finds some empirical support. There remain, however, two important areas that deserve further attention. First, where does the demand for democracy come from? This is important because, given Boix's framework, the wealthy make concessions only when concessions are demanded. It is true that Boix highlights the mobilization of "the poor" as a crucial variable—if more organized, democracy will be demanded. But this is not a complete answer for the following two reasons. First, given the logic of the rest of the argument, declines in inequality that make democracy more "acceptable" to the wealthy would also reduce the demands from the poor for democratization in the first place. Boix, for example, is probably correct that the compression in wage structure in pre-World War I Britain "eased the costs of transition" (p. 39), making the 1918 turn to universal suffrage possible. But how does this framework explain the persistence of demands for universal suffrage in the face of declining inequality? If declining inequality is such a crucial variable, how can it explain both increased demands for redistribution and increased willingness of elites to accept the costs of redistribution? And, second, what if the demand for democracy does not always emerge "from below" as the result of the poor clamoring for redistribution? It could be argued, for example, that Britain's 1832 Reforms as well as the subsequent reforms throughout the period were not motivated by fights over redistribution between the conveniently parsimonious and highly stylized class actors of Ricardo's tripartite model of society but instead emerged from conflicts among the real institutional actors of bondholders, direct taxpayers, and government officials over control of the state.<sup>9</sup> Or, similarly, perhaps democratic reform itself was not an effort to buy off the poor or the middle class but instead was an elite-driven process of institutional reform from above aimed at stamping out corruption, the costs of elections, and other flawed political institutions.<sup>10</sup> If such alternative accounts of the driving forces for democratization are at all plausible, how useful would the proposed model remain?

<sup>8</sup> In the last, empirical chapter of the book, Boix explores the autonomy of political leaders and analyzes the sources of asset specificity and inequality. He argues that structural reforms such as agrarian reforms tend to be ineffective because they are blocked for the same reason democratization is blocked (pp. 219–22).

<sup>9</sup> This point is suggested by Niall Ferguson, *The Cash Nexus* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 194–95.

<sup>10</sup> This is the impression that emerges from the enormously useful work by Charles Seymour, *Electorate Reform in England and Wales* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1915).



Another intriguing point that remains not fully addressed is the following: what determines the particular forms of “limited democracy”? In the European context, as Boix notes, democracy tended to emerge gradually (p. 52). While empirically correct, the statement conceals as much as it reveals. What was the precise institutional content of “limited democracy” in Europe in the nineteenth century? How did it vary from country to country within Europe? That is, why in some cases, such as late-nineteenth-century Britain or Italy, was franchise restricted while civil liberties were expansive and parliaments were powerful, whereas in other cases, such as nineteenth-century Germany, nearly all males could vote but parliamentary power and civil liberties were severely restricted? And, most importantly, what were the sources and consequences of these variations? The choice was not simply, as Boix implies, whether to grant universal voting immediately or to co-opt the middle class with limited voting rights (the choices are revealingly labeled “universal suffrage” and “limited democracy”). As a quick scan of Europe’s political landscape in the late nineteenth century indicates, traditional elites had a much wider range of tools of manipulation at their disposal. In addition to rules governing who could vote, elites could manipulate civil liberties, reduce the power of national parliaments, or assert the power of nonelected bodies, all with the aim of combining democratic reform with institutions or rules that mitigated some of the undesired consequences of reform. The point: if gradualism was a crucial part of the story of democracy’s emergence in Western Europe, it is important that we specify the *content* of this gradualism, so that we are clear about what precisely is being explained.

ACEMOGLU AND ROBINSON, *ECONOMIC ORIGINS*

Acemoglu and Robinson’s (A&R) ambitious work is a massive *and* thorough account that explores many of these same questions. In the first five chapters the authors lay out a broad approach to studying democratic and non-democratic politics that centers around the familiar ideas of the median voter theorem (see especially chap. 4) and the problem of credible commitments (see chap. 5). With these tools in hand, A&R address a wide range of theoretical issues, including the impact of the middle class on democratization (chap. 8), the influence of the structure of an economy on democratization (chap. 9), and the implications of globalization for democratization (chap. 10). To do justice to each of their contributions would require a full-length review exclusively on their work. Instead, here I focus on their contributions to two areas: the impact of inequality on democratization and the role of “concessions” in securing democratization.

To investigate the impact of inequality on democratization, A&R, like Boix, utilize assumptions and tools of rational choice theory to revisit democracy's first wave, as well as more recent democratization experiences. Unlike Boix, however, A&R's account is mostly theoretical, employing illustrative examples throughout to highlight the empirical resonance of their arguments. The relevant actors in the proposed framework are the rich (who also are assumed to be the powerful), the middle class, and the poor, though the empirical relevance of these categories is largely assumed and not demonstrated.<sup>11</sup> The preferences of these actors are straightforward: the rich fear democracy because of the potential costs of redistribution, the poor want democracy in order to gain redistribution, and the middle class typically wants a restricted democracy.

The argument follows from the assumptions. The rich in nondemocracies always face the threat of revolution but the poor who possess a numerical majority cannot get everything they want (redistribution) because—and it is here where A&R innovatively diverge from Boix—the rich have three options: (1) policy concessions (immediate redistribution), (2) democracy, or (3) repression. Because control of power is “transitory” over time, the poor will not accept the first option (redistribution) because there is no guarantee of future redistribution in a context where the rich still dominate the political system. Which of the remaining two options—repression or democracy—will be selected by the political elite depends largely but not exclusively on factors associated with level of socioeconomic development: *degree of economic inequality* and *structure of societal income*.<sup>12</sup>

While the authors make distinctive and important contributions to a wide range of issues, I focus here on the singular contribution A&R make to the study of the relationship between economic development, inequality, and democratization. The argument proceeds in two steps. First, the authors conceptualize democracy as a fight between two main actors—the rich and the poor. Using the 1832 Reform Act as their defining illustrative example, A&R depart from Boix by arguing that democratization is typically achieved not when it is *least threatening* to

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, there appears some reason to believe that rather than being a preexisting sociological category, the very concept and significance of the “middle class” was created by the process of democratization itself. See, for example, Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class, 1780–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> In the discussion below, I focus on the former variable rather than on the latter, though a significant portion of the book does deal with the latter, as well as with the impact of globalization. In large measure, the arguments of Boix are very similar to those of Acemoglu and Robinson in emphasizing how less mobile sectors of the economy will be resistant to democratization. See Acemoglu and Robinson, 287–320.

the rich but instead when the threat of unrest and revolution from below are of great concern to the rich. A&R had argued in earlier work that increasing economic inequality, sparked by industrialization in nineteenth-century Britain, for example, made the threat of revolution so severe that the wealthy were willing to make institutional concessions of democracy.<sup>13</sup> Economic inequality, according to A&R, made democratization more likely, not less likely. In the book, which offers an updated version of the argument, A&R have added nuance to their argument, noting that if economic inequality passes a certain threshold, then the governing nondemocratic elite has more to lose via costly redistribution and hence will likely resort instead to repression. This, then, is a dilemma of economic development and democratization in democracy's first wave. On the one hand, increasing economic inequality, associated with economic development, increases the demand for democracy. On the other hand, this same economic inequality makes the wealthy elite less willing to make democratic concessions. What then is the relationship between economic inequality and democratization?

A&R propose a clever solution to the dilemma, one that borrows from Simon Kuznet's conceptualization of the relationship between inequality and development. In A&R's view, the relationship between economic inequality and democracy is not monotonic; rather, the relationship resembles an inverted U-curve. At low levels of inequality (such as Singapore, A&R note), there are limited demands for democracy and hence no democracy, and at extremely high levels of inequality (such as El Salvador or Paraguay), the elites are not willing to make institutionalized concessions of democracy since they have so much to lose and would rather repress their citizens. Hence, democratic regime change is most likely at what they call "middle levels of inequality" (p. 35). This framework, it is argued, can explain the timing of democratization in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Yet, despite the proposed solution, a key theoretical question remains. What precisely counts as a "middle level" of inequality? A&R's argument, as evidenced by the comparison of Singapore and El Salvador, is focused on *absolute levels* of income inequality at one moment in time. The analyst determines "high" and "low" via cross-sectional comparison. But at the microlevel, where real decisions are actually made, does this make any sense? An alternative perspective might assert that it is the creation of new *types* of people, rather than their relative in-

<sup>13</sup> Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, "Why Did the West Extend the Franchise?" *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115 (November 2000).

come per se, that incites the demand for democracy and the willingness to make democratic reforms. That is, “income inequality” might simply be a proxy for broader changes in social structure. For example, in assessing whether to demand or resist democracy, would collective actors compare present levels of inequality to the probably unknown situation of other countries, or would they actually compare the present level of inequality, longitudinally, to past and future expectations? A country with cross-nationally low levels of inequality might be ripe for revolt, despite A&R’s expectations, if inequality had, over time, increased rapidly. In short, one cannot simply read off of national aggregate levels of income inequality at one moment in time to tell the story of democratization. Rather, we see that what matters just as much as any “measurable levels” of inequality are the perceptions and possible *misperceptions* of real individual and collective actors embedded in changing social structures.

To be fair, A&R begin to address some of these ambiguities of the varying possible meanings of the concept of inequality in the *second* step of their analysis. There they also introduce a third actor—the middle class (chap. 8). Given the same logic as above, A&R identify different reasons centered around inequality for why a growing middle class bolsters the prospects of democratization. The basic argument asserts that as the middle class grows, the median voter is wealthier, reducing the risk that full democracy will bring excessively high taxation on elites. Using a series of extensive games, the argument proceeds in two steps. If the middle class is the main revolutionary threat, then the relevant measure of inequality is how wealthy the middle class is vis-à-vis the wealthy. Thus, if the middle class is relatively poorer, a nondemocratic elite faces a serious threat from the middle class and will therefore choose the option of dividing the opposition by granting “partial democracy”—that is, by enfranchising the middle class but excluding the poor. If the revolutionary threat comes from the poor, however, a poor middle class, according to A&R, prompts a reaction of repression (pp. 262–78), blocking even partial democratization.

Yet two broader points remain. First, as the authors themselves recognize, the notion of inequality itself is messy and depends in part on the perceptions of actors. The push for democratization may therefore result from forces not so easily captured by the possibly anachronistic categories of the “middle class,” the “rich,” and the “poor” all fighting over “redistribution.” Second, rather than simply “democracy” versus “repression” as the chief possible outcomes, A&R complicate their analysis by introducing the outcome of “partial democracy,” which is

narrowly conceived as a mode of excluding the poor from voting. As with Boix, A&R seem to rely heavily on the British empirical referent and the gradual expansion of the franchise in 1832 and 1867, where voting rights were a primary means of elite manipulation. But, again, as the authors themselves note in chapter 6, there are additional important institutional mechanisms of gradualism that can be used to reduce the impact of democratic reforms. But by not systematically exploring the types and range of safeguards, empirical anomalies come into view.<sup>14</sup> A familiar theme thus emerges: since “partial democracy” is one of the chief outcomes that any account of European democratization must explain, identifying the precise institutional content of gradualism and the distinctive forms it takes may be crucial for understanding when democracy is possible and whether democracy will survive.

In sum, Boix and A&R have done theorists of democratization the service of rearticulating structural theories of democratization by utilizing a set of simplifying assumptions about actors, preferences, and possible regime outcomes. In both cases, the abstractions reinvigorate structural approaches to democratization insofar as they present more precise hypotheses that might explain the relationship between economic development and democratization. Their accounts thus mark an advance on two fronts. First, their accounts improve upon the agentless structural functionalism implicit in modernization theory by reasserting the primacy of collective actors’ resources, preferences, and strategies. Second, rather than positing only two possible outcomes—democracy and repression—the outcome of partial democracy is introduced into the analysis. It is these theoretical and conceptual advances that suggest, ironically, where the analysis is incomplete. First, it is arguable that the actors—the rich, the poor, and the middle class—are conceptualized so abstractly in these accounts that they risk suffering precisely the same absence of agency that mars modernization theory. There is after all no systematic empirical evidence on how the structural variables of inequality and asset specificity actually play themselves out with real actors, which is where the causal action is said to lie. Second, while partial democracy is introduced into the analysis as a crucial outcome worth

<sup>14</sup> For example, because conventional wisdom asserts that late-nineteenth-century Britain was “more democratic” than Imperial Germany, the authors mistakenly imply that Britain’s franchise was extended earlier and more extensively than Germany’s (see A&R, 200). This is of course not empirically accurate. While other institutions in Germany, including its parliament, may perhaps have been less democratic than Britain’s, its franchise was in fact *more* generous earlier on and remained so until the twentieth century. See data in Peter Flora, Jens Alber, Richard Eichenberg, Jürgen Kohl, Franz Kraus, Winfried Pfennig, Kurt Seebohm, eds., *State, Economy, and Society in Western Europe, 1815–1975* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1983).

explaining, the precise institutional makeup of what constitutes partial democracy is not explored, leaving a central feature of the landscape of democracy's first wave seriously underconceptualized.

## II. WHO ACTUALLY PUSHES FOR DEMOCRACY?

Despite these caveats, the accounts do present, broadly speaking, a set of useful propositions on how economic change shifts the underlying conditions in a society, giving rise to an opening, or opportunity, for democratization. But, moving away from the highly stylized collective actors in these accounts that are dubbed "the rich," "the poor," and "the middle class," who precisely are the crucial actors that seized the opportunity to actually push for and achieve democratic reforms? Who are the carriers of democratization? In his classic statement, Barrington Moore famously asserted, "No bourgeoisie, no democracy." While at first glance unambiguous, Moore's claim sparked generations of debate that continue today.<sup>15</sup> What was the precise relationship of social actors in democracy's first wave? In this section, I will briefly summarize two competing positions on these questions by discussing Ruth Berins Collier's effort to synthesize the arguments. Again, I will argue that to provide an effective answer to the questions raised about which actors and coalitions of actors pushed for democratization, we must be more empirically sensitive to the combination of small-scale democratic reforms and undemocratic concessions that were often settled upon before any single wholesale democratic transition.

### COLLIER, *PATHS TOWARD DEMOCRACY*

Ruth Berins Collier rightly notes in her impressively concise summary of twenty-seven national cases across two centuries that there are two different perspectives on the relationship of elites and the working class to democracy. The first, associated with Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens's critique of Barrington Moore, asserts that capitalism was connected to democratization via pressure from below from the "working class"—social groupings produced by capitalism.<sup>16</sup> In a view that A&R also explicitly endorse, democratization was about pressure from below, wresting power from nondemocratic political elites. This account, advocated by A&R, mirrors a long-standing strand in the historiography of British political development that it was "working-class

<sup>15</sup> See Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (fn. 1).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

agitation” or even middle-class agitation in the form of the Reform League that prompted democratic reforms.<sup>17</sup>

A second perspective focuses on party competition among elite actors. From this perspective, famously argued by Himmelfarb for the British case, democratization was a strategy from above for electoral gain, a route to securing political power among competing political elites.<sup>18</sup> From this perspective, democracy is achieved via elite negotiation, not as a concession to threats from below. Advocates of this perspective discount the democratizing impact of the Reform Act of 1832 and typically point to cases such as Britain’s 1867 Reform Act, where electoral interests are more clearly identifiable.

In her book, Ruth Berins Collier attempts to balance these two perspectives, centering her analysis around the question: what role did the working class play in democratization? Rejecting the overly dichotomized nature of this debate, Collier comes to two findings. First, in the first wave of democratization, the working class played much less of a role than is normally assumed; second, in the most recent, “third wave” of democratization, the working class played a more important role. Beyond establishing a different causal weight for the working class in each period than is normally asserted, she also thus makes a broader point about democratization more generally: there are multiple pathways to democratization and multiple clusters of actors and strategies that give rise to democratization. There is no single unilinear path to democracy. But beyond simply saying the world is “complex” (isn’t it always?), she goes on to actually specify a finite set of coalitional patterns that can be seen in the two waves of democratization she studies. In particular, in democracy’s first wave, she identifies three broad patterns that differed from nation to nation in the nineteenth century. In *middle sector democratization* liberal or republican groupings push for inclusion from traditional elites. In *electoral support mobilization* those in power (conservatives or liberals) extended the franchise to the working class for purposes of political competition. The third pattern, found in early-twentieth-century Europe, is called *joint project democratization*; it en-

<sup>17</sup> One defining statement of this perspective is found in Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists* (London: Routledge, 1965). It is worth noting that it is a thesis that finds much more support in the 1832 Reform Act than in the 1867 Reform Act, where both historians and political scientists have long recognized the existence of—but have tended to dispute the importance of—revolutionary agitation, noting that in all important Hyde Park riots of July 1867 there were no deaths and the major destruction was limited to the flower beds of Hyde Park. See, for example, the discussion in John Walton, *The Second Reform Act* (London: Methuen, 1987), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, “The Politics of Democracy: The English Reform Act of 1867,” *Journal of British Studies* 6 (November 1966).

tails labor working with liberal parties for democratic reforms. Overall, Collier asserts, labor played a relatively smaller role in helping countries across the democratic threshold than is normally argued.

How does Collier identify these patterns scanning the same empirical terrain that has long led historians and political scientists to such different findings? She does so by utilizing several methodological innovations. First, she compares across two different waves of democratization and across two continents not normally compared, allowing her to see patterns among cases that otherwise simply seem anomalous. Second, unlike most previous accounts of democracy's first wave, she sets clear conceptual/measurement benchmarks that allow her to identify a single precise moment of democratization, using explicit criteria that allow her to pinpoint what precisely was happening politically at each moment a country crossed what she calls the democratic "threshold." She considers democratization as the "adoption" of what she defines as the three institutional attributes of democracy: universal male suffrage, an autonomous legislature, and civil liberties. Her empirical analysis focuses on the subset of cases in which democratization pushes a country past the democratic threshold, that moment when a country possesses *all* three institutional attributes. Armed with this definition, she asks: was it the working class that was the key collective actor at the specified threshold moment? Or, alternatively, were liberal parties and government elites the key actors? The benefit of identifying the precise threshold of democracy is that she can identify which actor was decisive *at the moment* a country crosses the dichotomous democratic threshold. Hence, by expanding her comparative frame and being more explicit about the coding of cases, she reaches new conclusions.

By arguing for and identifying multiple patterns or pathways of democratization, Collier untangles the puzzle of why well-informed and careful political scientists and historians can disagree so vehemently on whether elite competition or pressure from below prompt democratizing changes. As she argues, much of the disagreement comes from the fact that each scholar is considering a different narrow empirical slice: if one were to look exclusively at 1867 Britain or 1912 Italy, one might conclude confidently that it is elite competition that always drives democratization. If, by contrast, one were to look exclusively at 1918 Germany or, say, 1832 Britain, one might just as confidently conclude that it was exclusively fear of revolution that explains democratizing reforms. Collier seeks to solve this problem by focusing on a wider range of national cases but always only at the threshold moments at which politics might be considered to have become "democratic."



But have scholars of democracy's first wave focused on the right episodes of democratization? Should we really focus on *only* the very small subset of democratization episodes when the threshold of full democracy was crossed? Does not such an essentially dichotomous measure of democratization blind us to potentially important and theoretically revealing cases of democratic reform in otherwise nondemocratic systems? Indeed, if, as Collier argues, democratization entails "introducing democratic institutions" (p. 24), then should we not look to *any* episode that introduces universal male suffrage, executives responsible to an elected parliament, or the institutionalization of civil liberties, regardless of whether this occurs before all three attributes of democracy are present together? That each of these dimensions of democracy often developed at cross-purposes to each other in democracy's first wave might precisely be an important phenomenon to explore. Indeed, since, as Collier argues, democratization proceeded in democracy's first wave incrementally over the course of the whole century, perhaps we should be looking at as many episodes of democratization as possible across the century. The question would then be: what were the coalitional dynamics underpinning these other less visible institutional reforms that occurred *before* the threshold of democracy was crossed?

In sum, identifying the coalitional underpinnings of democratic reform is a crucial area of research and represents an important move away from static analyses that only identify "conditions" of democratization. Collier identifies three pathways across the "finish line" of democracy and finds that in its first wave, elites played much more of an important role than scholarship traditionally recognizes. But, if we want to understand the process of democratization, should we look only at the finish line? Or should we adopt a different unit of analysis—that is, any episode of democratizing reform, no matter what the broader regime looks like? Clearly, for example, none of the three coalitional patterns that Collier identifies explains Napoleon III's readoption of universal male suffrage for France in 1851 or Bismarck's surprising adoption of universal male suffrage for Germany in 1867 and 1871.<sup>19</sup> Rather than discarding these cases as anomalous, perhaps we should pause to reflect on the meaning of these for our conceptual and measurement schemes as well as for our theories of democratization. The disagreement be-

<sup>19</sup> Among the many accounts of these two episodes, two of the best are found in Raymond Huard, *Le suffrage universel en France, 1848–1946* (Paris: Aubier, 1991); Andreas Biefang, "Modernität wider Willen: Bemerkungen zur Entstehung des demokratischen Wahlrechts des Kaiserreichs," in Wolfram Pyta and Ludwig Richter, eds., *Gestaltungskraft des Politischen: Historischen Forschungen* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1998), 63:239–59.

tween Collier's emphasis on elites and, for example, A&R's on threats from below can be conclusively untangled only if we align our concept of democratization, as a gradual and incremental process, with empirical measures of democratization that actually capture this concept.

### III. HOW IS DEMOCRACY SECURED?

If analysts could agree on the conditions that give rise to democratic "openings" as well as on the configuration of collective actors who actually bring democracy into existence, a third part of the causal chain would still require specification: the actual *process* by which democracy is secured. Assuming that elites and working-class agitation are key parts of the story (but remaining agnostic on their relative weight), we still must ask: are democratic reforms achieved through violence, concessions, or some combination of the two? Political scientists and sociologists have long been sensitive to the provocative insight that though democracy may essentially be a method of solving conflict nonviolently, the *creation* of democracy may require the violent disruption and transformation of society.<sup>20</sup> Is political revolution from below necessarily part of the process of securing democracy? If so, why? What kind of violence is necessary? How much violence is necessary?

The role of violence and contention in democratization plays a central role in the analysis of Charles Tilly and in several key parts of Acemoglu and Robinson's (A&R) work. Both sets of authors seek to answer the questions asked above. But while Tilly essentially sees the role of contention at this midrange as unambiguously beneficial for democratization, A&R in several key chapters build their analysis on a different set of assumptions, leading them to more guarded conclusions.

#### TILLY, *CONTENTION AND DEMOCRACY*

The novelty of Charles Tilly's work on democratization is immediately made apparent by his unconventional use of language. The reader unfamiliar with Tilly's turn to "causal mechanisms" over the past five years might at first experience a slight sense of disorientation. But cracking the code is very much worth the effort because he offers a new take on the relationship of violence and democratization.<sup>21</sup> He rejects ap-

<sup>20</sup> Just as key parts of the research agenda on the link between economic development and democratization were shaped by Barrington Moore, so too has his work in this area been influential. In Moore's framework, without political revolution from below, economic development might lead to malevolent revolutions "from above."

<sup>21</sup> The work also is full of insights on a set of other topics, but I focus largely on his contributions in this area.

proaches that emphasize either overly distant “origins” and “conditions” or overly proximate political entrepreneurs who through various tricks of “engineering” can make any society democratic. Instead, Tilly asserts that we must look for medium-term “causal mechanisms,” which when combined make democratization likely.

The centerpiece of the argument is deeply sociological: to make a country democratic, fundamental *societal* changes are necessary. The intentions of the actors are not particularly relevant because democratic change emerges as a by-product of other processes. Using primarily a comparative study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France and Britain, as well as the underexplored first wave case of nineteenth-century Switzerland, to illustrate the argument, Tilly argues that there are multiple pathways to democracy but that these multiple pathways all experience a similar configuration of societal changes. These various societal changes can be summarized, according to Tilly, with two labels—“changes in trust networks” and “changes in categorical inequality.” These changes prompt changes in the arena of “public politics” and give rise to democratization.<sup>22</sup>

On the first point—“changes in trust networks”—Tilly argues that to democratize, a government must do two things: dissolve preexisting societal networks that provide protection (found, for example, in patron-client ties that typically sustain people in high-risk endeavors such as education, marriage, and trade that thus insulate individuals from government); and create new, politically connected networks of trust to link subjects and government.

The second crucial, broad mechanism is the lessening of categorical inequalities in society. Tilly intends here not merely economic inequality as traditionally measured, for example, by Gini-coefficients, but also the reduction in “durable” and “caste” inequalities (for example, black/white, man/woman) between categories of people. His formulation, which might serve as the basis for a sociological amendment to A&R’s concept of inequality, argues that categorical inequalities block democratization in two ways. First, if the limits of citizenship correspond to categorical boundaries, democratization is by definition blocked. Second, the existence of categorical inequalities provides incentives for political leaders to offer exclusive private protection to insiders. A series of more microlevel mechanisms promote equalization or at least prevent inequality from shaping public politics, including, for example, the equalization of assets and the elimination of legal restrictions on property holding.

<sup>22</sup> The onset of the first two mechanisms in *reverse* can lead to dedemocratization.

Both of these broader mechanisms (elimination of preexisting trust networks and decline in categorical inequality) prompt institutional changes that define democracy for Tilly, as follows: (1) an increase in the breadth and equality of participation, (2) a reduction in arbitrary power, and (3) an increase in protected consultation. But if the elimination of preexisting trust networks and declines in categorical inequality are so critical for prompting these institutional changes, what triggers these two mechanisms themselves?

It is here that we see the importance of contention and violence: in brief, it is *violence* that disrupts entrenched societal practices, networks of trust, and categorical inequalities. Tilly argues that violence and contention in their various guises shatter societal structures that conspire against democratization. Revolution, as Moore argued, is essential. But Tilly goes beyond the narrow conceptualization of equating violence with revolution to identify four types of public violence that all undo the mechanisms that block democratization: conquest, confrontation between societal actors, revolution, and colonization. Each of these distinctive types of violence unleashes or triggers the mechanisms that prompt democratization. Preexisting trust networks are demolished and new ones with direct links to public politics are established. Categorical inequalities are dislodged or become irrelevant for public politics. In short, it is only in the face of deep, violent, and disruptive social change that a set of causal mechanisms that gives rise to a transformed and democratic public politics is triggered.

But are there limits to this argument? Does not too much violence or social transformation disrupt too much? Are preexisting private trust networks always incompatible with democratization?<sup>23</sup> These questions are not answered directly, but Tilly's framework nevertheless directs our attention to the important relationship between violence and democratization.

#### ACEMOGLU AND ROBINSON, *ECONOMIC ORIGINS*

Acemoglu and Robinson's (A&R) account of democratization also focuses on the threat of revolution (see especially chap. 6) and thus takes up some of these questions. A&R share with Tilly the insight that violence, contention, and the threat of both are ironically crucial for democratization. Unlike, for example, Carles Boix, who implies that democracy emerges precisely as threat of violence declines, Tilly and A&R share the view that democratization is not an elite-negotiated

<sup>23</sup> Tilly does speculate that there is probably a "high point" beyond which the absorption of private networks reduces democracy, but he does not specify precisely where this point is.

affair but rather is a response to changes that emerge from below. Beyond this single commonality, however, there are four important differences between A&R's analysis of violence and Tilly's that ultimately lead A&R to a more cautious perspective on the role of violence in democratization.

First, A&R implicitly reject Tilly's relational notion of causality—that outcomes are the unintentional by-products of social interaction. In fact, A&R's argument is premised on the proposition, as discussed above, that collective actors intentionally pursue outcomes on the basis of high levels of knowledge of the distributional consequences of their choices—the rich and the poor respond to proposals for democratization in predictable ways because of their knowledge of its consequences. Whereas Tilly explicitly rejects too much emphasis on what he calls “cognitive mechanisms” (p. 17), A&R's account presumes precisely these mechanisms. In this sense, while both aim to identify micro-foundations or “mechanisms” of democratization, the causal logic of the arguments differs.

Second, partly as a consequence of this divergence in terms of the causal logic of the arguments, violence in A&R's account has a different *function* than it does in Tilly's. Because, as Tilly sees it, the intentions of actors are less decisive than are inadvertent consequences of social interactions, contention and violence become important insofar as they activate democratizing disruptions in the basic structure of society. In Tilly's account, violence can fundamentally transform society. By contrast, for A&R, violence, or to be more precise, “the threat of violence,” is important largely as a signaling device, as a source of information that prompts an intentional change in strategy on the part of those who run nondemocratic governments. In this sense, in A&R's account, threat of unrest plays not a “social transformation” function but rather an informational function of compelling the rich to consider a range of options—concede, democratize, or repress. Absent mass unrest, the constraint of revolution is never activated, leaving the rich, in A&R's terms, with *de jure* and *de facto* power. It is only because of unrest that democratizing reforms are ever activated. In this sense, Tilly's account is deeply sociological, whereas A&R's is narrowly political.

Third, because of the different function played by violence in their account, A&R conceptualize the ideas of “violence,” “unrest,” and “revolution” differently than Tilly does. Whereas Tilly, who is primarily interested in how violence transforms society, has an expansive conception of violence (conquest, colonization, revolution, and confrontation), A&R have a much narrower conceptualization. Because they are interested not in the society-transforming effects of violence but instead in

the “signaling” that unrest and the threat of revolution from the poor sends to the governing, their focus is exclusively on the *threat of violence and unrest* from the poor. Elites, that is, make concessions when frightened by the prospects of unrest. Because the transformative effect of violence is not the focus of analysis, the authors’ notion of violence focuses on the changes in strategy prompted by its “threat”; the actual consequences of violence are not central to their analysis.

Finally, the most crucial difference between the two accounts centers around the question: to what extent is the revolutionary overturning of existing political institutions and elites *always* conducive to democratization? In Tilly’s more sociological framework, as discussed above, the more privatized networks are weakened and the more categorical inequalities are dissolved (or at least blocked from inscribing themselves into political institutions)—or, in other words, the greater the *social transformation*, the more extensive the democratization. In A&R’s account, by contrast, because the threat of unrest serves to prompt a change of strategy on behalf of nondemocrats (and not to assure social transformation), the authors take a different perspective on contributions of revolution to democracy. Indeed, A&R make the important argument that if democratization means that all existing institutions and elites are displaced in revolutionary fashion, nondemocratic elites might be more likely to use repression to stave off this dire outcome, thereby blocking any democratization. If, by contrast, predemocratic traditional elites are assured some form of disproportionate institutional power in a democracy, or, in Tilly’s terms, if some vestiges of private trust networks and categorical inequality are left intact, this “will enable a peaceful transition to democracy by making repression less attractive for elites” (p. 181). Democratization, A&R argue, might ironically be bolstered when coupled with protected spheres of influence. A&R formulate this provocative point in a temporally confusing fashion, writing that the “nature of democratic institutions may be crucial for explaining why some societies democratize and others do not” (p. 32). If the authors mean by this that specific institutional arrangements such as an upper chamber, a gerrymandered electoral system, a powerful bureaucracy, and proportional representation can be utilized to secure elite control in exchange for other democratic institutions, then their position is provocatively different from Tilly’s. By assuring that the elite does not lose complete control of a country’s political institutions, the elite will be more willing to make concessions.

There must, in other words, be limits to revolution. A&R, however, recognize that this strategy is a “double-edged sword” (p. 182). It is

here that we see a crucial dilemma of democratization. Too much of a transformation of power risks prompting nondemocratic elites to block democratization altogether; too little transformation is not sufficient to guarantee democratization or to buy off the revolutionary inclinations of those seeking democratization. A balancing act of sorts appears to be necessary. Although A&R do a great service by identifying the fact that such a balancing point exists, they do not identify where precisely this balancing point lies. Which concessions to old elites are most effective at garnering their long-term support for democratic institutions? Which concessions are less effective? The authors do not directly answer these difficult questions but instead say that institutions tend to be “historically determined” (p. 210). The authors are clearly interested in what they call the “gray zones” in which concessions and democratic reform are used simultaneously. But their own analytical frame (that posits the three mutually exclusive options for elites of repression, policy concession, or democratization) increases the difficulty of making any claims about these so-called gray zones.<sup>24</sup> In short, the authors raise an important theoretical question. But given the mismatch between their rich theoretical aims and their method, it is a question they ultimately cannot answer.

#### IV. THE WAY FORWARD: DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The four books under review in this article do the important work of bringing democracy’s first wave “back in” to mainstream political science through the formulation of new and often innovative theory. The four works address three central questions that must be answered when studying democracy’s creation: what prompts democratic openings; who are the most important actors pushing for democratization; and once undertaken, how is democracy secured? But when viewed alongside each other, each also reveals the shortcomings of the others. One shared gap deserves further examination. In answering the three questions above, the authors frequently return to the concept of “partial democracy.” Yet, though a crucial pivot in understanding the puzzle of why democracy emerged *gradually* in its first wave, this core concept of “partial democracy” is itself left largely undefined and treated as residual category lying loosely between authoritarianism and democracy.

In this final portion of this review, I argue that if we look behind the label of “partial democracy,” we find a proposition that could give us the

<sup>24</sup> It is precisely these gray zones that authors such as Thomas Carothers have suggested should be the focus of contemporary scholarship. See Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002).

conceptual tools to more effectively ask and address questions about the causes of democratization. Above all, we see that it is critical to conceptualize the process of democratization itself more carefully. Especially in the context of Europe's historical experience, democratization was not a synchronized transformation in which all *three* dimensions we now attribute to the concept of "democracy" moved in lockstep. Rather, democratization was more frequently marked by what we might call an *asynchronic* dynamic in which the different dimensions of democracy—universal suffrage, parliamentary autonomy, civil rights—were created at different times possibly for different reasons, and the intersection of the different institutional configurations may have had important but unanticipated consequences.

The concept of *asynchronic regime change* offers a different take on how we think about democratization for three interrelated reasons. *First*, the different institutional arenas normally encompassed by the concept of "democracy" (voting, civil rights, and executive accountability) may possess no single ordering principle with a single institutional logic. Any slice of a single "political regime" at a particular moment in time may be constituted by institutions and rules that function according to diverse and possibly conflicting logics. For example, as noted above, universal male suffrage in Germany coexisted with and, it could be argued, ironically may have blocked efforts to strengthen a weak national parliament by leaving a very narrow liberal electoral constituency in place. By contrast, in Britain, Belgium, and Italy a restricted franchise assured greater electoral strength for liberal parties whose chief priority was bolstering parliamentary autonomy. *Second*, coexisting political institutions within a single political regime are thus often created sequentially and may have distinctive antecedents. For example, the coalition of interests pushing for a strong parliament in Britain and Germany differed from the coalition of interests that pushed for universal suffrage or the introduction of the secret ballot precisely because different features of each regime were created at different times. *Third*, each of the discrete set of institutions in a political regime has its own "feedback" effects that generate different outcomes that do not neatly conform to the intentions of the advocates of reform. For example, the progressive advocates of universal franchise in Germany or Britain might never have suspected that their agenda could potentially undermine other parts of their agenda, including parliamentary sovereignty or civil liberties.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> For example, 1878 German antisocialist laws, restricting the third dimension of democracy (right of assembly, freedom of press, and so on), were intended to counteract any future growth of the Social Democratic Party, whose relatively early electoral success might ironically be attributed to the generosity of the suffrage.



In short, such a perspective thus has the potential to highlight some unappreciated difficulties that countries face when democratizing because political elites do not simply face the choice of “repression” or “reform.” Rather, political elites face a much wider menu of choices.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, these choices are likely to intersect in unanticipated ways, triggering potentially important but unforeseeable consequences. Most important, the *conceptual* innovation that a political system can be democratized while certain key subspheres are left, at least temporarily, in the hands of old elites helps us reformulate the *theoretical* questions raised above. Do different types of coalitions emerge around specific types of democratizing reforms? Which combinations of reforms and safeguards might be useful for securing democracy? Which combinations might in the long run come back to haunt the stability of democracies?

#### FUTURE RESEARCH

Future *empirical* research thus might productively shift attention away from trying to explain dichotomously defined regime outcomes such as “democracy” or “authoritarianism” at one moment in time (say the interwar period) and instead adopt a microlevel orientation that seeks to explain the development of national combinations of reform and safeguards and how these combinations contribute to the long-run consolidation of democracy. Three questions could structure such an enterprise. First, what is the range of combinations of reform and safeguards that occurred during episodes normally described as democratic? Second, what explains the different nationally distinctive combinations? Third, what are the long-term consequences of these patterns of reform/safeguard for the subsequent development of democracy?

Two broad types of comparative research puzzles can be used to demonstrate the direction in which these questions push us. First, given that neither Germany nor Britain was, according to most definitions, a full democracy in the 1870s, what explains why Germany had universal male suffrage but a weak national parliament and Britain had limited suffrage but a strong parliament, and what consequences did these combinations have for the subsequent development of democracy in the two countries? A second example: looking at the messy combination of concessions and reforms in France and Germany in 1871, could one have predicted (or can one explain) the relative consolidation

<sup>26</sup> This is one of the chief insights of the “transitions” approach to democratization. See O’Donnell and Schmitter, “Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies,” in O’Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

of democracy in France and its relative weakness in Germany by the interwar period?<sup>27</sup> In order to explore these issues, it is necessary to unpack the very outcome of democratization itself into its various dimensions. Only by doing so can we see which of the various combinations of restrictions on democratization serve to facilitate or harm movement toward successful democratization.

Future research must therefore begin by overcoming the deep mismatch between concept and measures that continues to mark the field, a mismatch that has profound theoretical consequences because we have been blinded to important but largely unexplored episodes of democratization. On the one hand, all scholars of this period would agree that *conceptually* there was typically no “moment of transition” in democracy’s first wave, unlike in later waves of democratization. In nearly every case, the main thrust of at least one democratizing reform—the implementation of universal male suffrage, parliamentary sovereignty, or civil liberties—occurred long *before* any democratic threshold (where all three were present) was reached. For example, Germany had universal male suffrage fifty years before it is considered to have become “democratic”; Britain had parliamentary sovereignty nearly one hundred years before it is considered to have become “democratic.” These cases are not exceptional. In nearly every case a gradual process of democratization occurred over the *longue durée* of the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, despite the conceptual recognition of the incremental nature of democratic reform in its first wave, scholars of the period in their empirical analyses have continued to use *measures* that are either strictly dichotomous or that conflate the different dimensions of democratization: though interested in the process of democratization, Collier tends to rely on a snapshot of the moment when *all three* attributes are present (p. 23). Similarly, A&R note that they are interested in the “gray zones” of democratization, but for purposes of analysis they assume countries are either “democratic” or “nondemocratic” (p. 18). And Boix, in his analysis, borrows Przeworski’s dichotomous coding scheme (pp. 66–67) that codes a case such as Imperial Germany as authoritarian despite universal male suffrage but also uses the single measure of “franchise restrictions” to assess degree of “democracy” for other cases (pp. 118–28). In short, while scholars are conceptually on the same page that democracy can be “partial,” empirical analysis proceeds as if it is not. The consequence of this gap is that a whole range

<sup>27</sup> See Thomas Ertman, “Democracy and Dictatorship in Interwar Western Europe Revisited,” *World Politics* 50 (April 1998).

of important “episodes” of democratization has remained invisible to traditional scholarship on first wave democratization.

But how do we go about actually studying the *longue durée* of democratization—the broadly contrasting fates of, say, democratization in nineteenth-century Germany, Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, or, for that matter, any set of cases in the nineteenth century? At first glance this indeed appears to be an empirical challenge. But if democratization entails, as Collier argues, “introducing democratic institutions” (p. 24), then we can adopt a new unit of analysis to look to *any* episode that introduces universal male suffrage, executives responsible to elected parliament, or the institutionalization of civil liberties.<sup>28</sup> A sample but selective list of “democratization episodes” that have been hidden behind the veil of the notion of a democratic threshold might include the following:<sup>29</sup>

- the United Kingdom’s end of severe administrative restrictions on freedom of the press around 1830
- Belgium’s adoption of responsible government in 1831
- Sweden’s end of severe administrative restrictions on freedom of the press in 1838
- Italy’s adoption of responsible government in 1852 (and reaffirmed in 1861)
- Norway’s adoption of responsible government in 1885
- France’s readoption of universal male suffrage in 1851
- Germany’s adoption of universal male suffrage in 1867 (and reaffirmed in 1871)
- Britain’s ballot act that secured the secret ballot in 1872
- Belgium’s electoral reform to secure the secret ballot in 1877
- Germany’s electoral reform to secure the secret ballot in 1903

By adopting a new unit of analysis (“democratizing reform”) that expands the range of cases that “count,” we can (1) identify different coalitional patterns for different types of democratizing reforms within democracy’s first wave, and (2) identify how safeguards were combined with these reforms in each episode. One could imagine, for example, that the coalitional dynamics behind the move to universal suffrage in

<sup>28</sup> Or, even within these three categories, we might focus on the emergence of what arguably are causally discrete features within each that did not emerge simultaneously. For example, within the category of universal suffrage are four distinctive innovations that may have different causal origins: (1) direct voting, (2) equal voting, (3) the secret ballot, and (4) universality of voting rights. For an overview of the nonsimultaneous emergence of these four features of electoral regimes see data in Flora et al. (fn. 14).

<sup>29</sup> This list, incomplete but suggestive, is part of a larger data set of democratizing events I am developing. A source for some of these democratizing events is Stefano Bartolini, *The Political Mobilization of the European Left* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 321, 349.

a context where a powerful national parliament already exists might be very different from the coalition of interests that would support increasing the power of a parliament in a period when the franchise is highly restricted. Similarly, the coalition of interests pushing for the secret ballot or freedom of association might differ as well, depending on whether universal male suffrage already exists. Given that distributional consequences of each of these reforms differ in possibly predictable ways, the coalition of interests would also differ. Finally, after disentangling the various elements of democratization, we can see that the *sequencing* of democratic reforms might itself generate different coalitional dynamics.<sup>30</sup> All of this, however, remains invisible unless one disaggregates the concept of democratization into its various features in order to measure how it unfolds over time differently from one context to the next.

## V. CONCLUSION

As the books under review make clear, Europe's nineteenth-century democratization, which occurred in the shadow of industrialization, the emergence of new classes, and the threat of revolution, provides rich material for contemporary debates because our own debates are so often concerned with the role of inequality, economic change, and violence in prompting democratic reforms. The works reviewed here push the scholarly agenda forward in three main ways. First, the four books open scholarly interchange between the study of different waves of democracy. Second, the works also sometimes generate novel hypotheses and synthesize existing arguments on a set of specific issues—inequality, violence, and class alliances—that should be at the heart of the study of all waves of democracy. Third, less directly, the four works suggest a different way of conceptualizing the democratic outcomes we might want to explain.

On this last point, the books instruct us that rather than assuming that all the dimensions of a political regime are synchronized, we ought to focus on explaining what I have called *asynchronous regime change*. As Dahl observed long ago, the different elements of democracy (civil liberties, responsible executives, and universal suffrage) do not always

<sup>30</sup> One could ask, for example, does the sequence in which the amalgam of democracy is created matter? Did it matter, for example, that Britain institutionalized its democracy in one sequence (civil liberties, responsible executive, universal suffrage), while the United States followed a second sequence (responsible executive, universal male suffrage, civil liberties), and Germany followed yet a third sequence (universal male suffrage, responsible executive, civil liberties)?

travel together.<sup>31</sup> But moving one step beyond Dahl, one can argue that democracy emerged historically as an amalgam of discrete institutional reforms that at times *undercut* each other. For example, in order to understand democracy's first wave, it is clear that it is essential to consider the individual elements of democracy and how sequencing varied from country to country. More broadly, since the same tensions between different features of democracy arguably exist whenever democracy is created, a focus on the individual elements of democracy and their interaction is always essential, especially in our own age, where the pressure for securing political and civil rights simultaneously is so strong. Indeed, such a perspective may illuminate the dynamics behind the contemporary "hybrid" and illiberal regimes that have recently been attracting so much scholarly attention.<sup>32</sup>

This type of approach thus offers a broad, alternative conceptualization of democratization and regime formation, one that may help answer old questions and help formulate new ones about both historical and contemporary instances of democratization. Why are some areas within a regime democratic while other areas not? What are the coalitional underpinnings of each of these different reforms? What determines the various combinations and sequences of democratic reforms? What consequences do these combinations of concession and reform actually have for democratic consolidation? By looking at the microlevel combination of rules that govern participation, competition, and civil liberties, a richer range of outcomes worth explaining comes into focus.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 33–40.

<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the notion of asynchronous regime change may offer a conceptual "lens" to examine the causes and consequences of "subnational authoritarianism" prevalent in nineteenth-century Germany. See Edward L. Gibson, "Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries," *World Politics* 58 (October 2005); on the U.S., see Robert Mickey, "Paths out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944–1972" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2005).