Stories, Identities, and Political Change

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Processes and Mechanisms of Democratization

Aristotle described democratization as a perversion. In a constitutional government, when the majority substituted its particular interest for the community’s general interest, self-serving rule of the many—democracy—resulted. In his analysis of political forms, Aristotle went on to specify processes promoting a majority’s pursuit of its narrow interest; for example, the rise of demagogues and the increase of a polity’s size beyond the limits of mutual acquaintance. He also allowed that revolution could convert a tyranny or an oligarchy (his names for degenerate forms of monarchy and aristocracy) directly into a democracy. Aristotle’s Politics does not offer a causal theory sufficient to specify the process by which today’s Uganda or Uzbekistan could become democratic. It does, however, provide an exemplary model of theoretically coherent explanation. It goes far beyond mapping the initial conditions and sequences of events that constitute paths to democracy. It actually features causes and effects.

Explicitly identified causes and effects, in contrast, rarely grace recent discussions of democratization. Instead, analysts of democratization favor path tracing. No doubt detecting a path’s existence makes a crucial move toward learning how to walk it. But even an excellent map does not teach plodding urbanites how to climb mountains. A commendably earnest search for visibly viable paths to democracy has skewed recent investigations away from causes to necessary and sufficient conditions. By now we have a plethora of conditions that someone has found to be associated with the onset of democracy and precious little idea of causal processes that generate such associations.

As a preliminary effort, to be sure, a search for conditions under which democratic polities emerge (or, for that matter, disappear) forwards the explanation and

production of democratization. It helps specify exactly what investigators must explain. If, for example, democratization always occurs in the company of widening splits within ruling oligarchies (that is, such splits are active candidates for necessary conditions of democratization), a valid causal story will most likely connect democratization with such splits. Search for closely associated conditions also rules out many bad explanations simply by showing that they are incompatible with existing cases; if, for example, a population’s generalized trust often rises from very low to very high after democratization begins, then previously existing high levels of generalized trust lose credibility as general causes of democratization. Specifying what must be explained and ruling out bad explanations contribute significantly to any explanatory inquiry. But they do not in themselves constitute explanations.

What does Explanation requires identification of recurrent causal mechanisms that democratize a polity, plus specification of conditions that affect emergence and concatenation of these mechanisms. This chapter grows out of an effort to specify the various conditions and processes that promoted or blocked democratization in different parts of Europe between 1650 and the present. The chapter identifies possible mechanisms in democratization, then specifies likely conditions affecting their emergence and concatenation. It concentrates on relational mechanisms and processes, those connecting citizens with each other and with agents of government. It works its way backward through the broad causal sequence schematized in figure 14.1. Read forward, the diagram says the following:

- A variety of changes here bundled together as “regime environment” activate mechanisms that in turn generate incremental alterations in public politics, inequality, and networks of trust.
- Changes of inequality and of trust networks have independent effects on public politics.
- Regime environment also produces occasional shocks in the form of conquest, confrontation, colonization, or revolution.
- Such shocks accelerate the standard change mechanisms, thus causing relatively rapid alterations of public politics, inequality, and networks of trust.
- Whether incremental or abrupt, those alterations interact.
- Under rare but specifiable conditions those alterations produce democratization.
- Democratization is a special condition of public politics.

The point of the chapter is to unpack, clarify, and make plausible such an argument.

The argument proceeds on six fundamental assumptions: (1) If democratization occurs, the process does not take place on the scale of millennia (with the implication that it can only happen in places that have accumulated a favorable environment very gradually) or on the scale of months (with the implication that canny social engineers can build it rapidly almost anywhere), but at a scale in between, most likely over years or decades; (2) prevailing circumstances under which democratization occurs vary significantly from era to era and region to region as a function of the international environment, available models of political organization, and predominant patterns of social relations; (3) not just one, but multiple paths to democracy exist; (4) most large-scale social environments that have ever existed and the majority of those that exist today contain major obstacles to democracy; (5) yet such obstacles diminish rapidly under specifiable circumstances; (6) democratization has rarely occurred, and still occurs rarely, because under most political regimes in most social environments major political actors have strong incentives and means to block the very processes that promote democratization.

If all six of these assumptions hold, attempts to specify universally applicable necessary and/or sufficient conditions for democratization will invariably fail. In that case, our best alternative is to look for widely applicable democracy-promoting causal mechanisms, then to identify variable conditions for their emergence and
concatenation. In this view, any explanation of democratization must include a serious account of mechanisms that reduce the standard obstacles.

Ironically, a successful version of such an inquiry could plausibly produce a single prescriptive model for intervention to promote democratization, thus fostering the illusion of a single path to democracy, a unique set of necessary and sufficient conditions. It could do so either because in the present social environment one of many historically possible causal paths is much more feasible and attractive than the others or because once-viable conditions for all the others have now disappeared. Few of us will choose to reenact long, violent struggles against tyranny or oligarchy if gentler paths to democracy have opened.

Warning: We are now embarking not on a fact-finding mission but on a conceptual and theoretical excursion. This chapter presents neither precise hypotheses nor evidence for its arguments. It does not review the vast recent literature on democratization. Nor does it attempt to synthesize arguments or findings in that literature. It makes rash declarations without qualification or illustration. It draws on insights gained in my own effort to make sense of democratization on those rare occasions when it occurred over the last four centuries of European history. It sketches a way of thinking about democratization and states the case for a different explanatory strategy from the one most recent students of democracy and democratization have employed.

How will we know democratization when we see it? Working definitions of democracy divide into three overlapping categories: substantive criteria, emphasizing qualities of human experience and social relations; constitutional criteria, emphasizing legal procedures such as elections and referenda; political-process criteria, emphasizing interactions among politically constituted actors (for reviews and critiques, see Bermeo and Nord 2000; Collier and Levitsky 1997; Dawisha 1997; Heller 2000; Sheller 2000; Warren 1999). Substantive definitions have the inconvenience of leaving deeply contested whether any concrete regime actually qualifies as democratic, and if so, for whom. Constitutional definitions have the inconvenience of raising questions about discrepancies between official rules and their practical enforcement. Political-process definitions have the dual inconveniences of unfamiliarity and complexity, hence of greater distance from the everyday discourse of politicians and citizens.

Shouldering the inconveniences, my own preferred definition falls squarely within the political-process category. For present purposes, a regime is democratic insofar as it maintains broad citizenship, equal citizenship, binding consultation of citizens at large with respect to governmental activities and personnel, as well as protection of citizens from arbitrary action by governmental agents. I prefer such a political-process definition on the grounds that (1) it captures much of what theorists of democracy from Aristotle onward have been trying to describe without the usual inconveniences of substantive and constitutional definitions; (2) it clarifies causal connections between popular struggle and democratization, a much misunderstood but crucial relationship; and (3) it locates democracy within a causally coherent and more general field of variation in characteristics and practices of regimes.

Let me excavate the political-process definition of democracy to expose its foundations. Regimes, as schematized in figure 14.2, consist of governments and their relations to populations falling under their claimed jurisdictions (Finer 1997). Singling out constituted collective political actors (those that have names, internal organization, and repeated interactions with each other), we can distinguish agents of government, polity members (constituted political actors enjoying routine access to government agents and resources), challengers (constituted political actors lacking that routine access), subjects (persons and groups not currently organized into constituted political actors), and outside political actors, including other governments. Public politics consists of claim-making interactions among agents, polity members, challengers, and outside political actors.

Regimes vary, among other ways, in breadth (the proportion of all persons under the government's jurisdiction that belong to polity members), equality (the extent to which persons who do belong to polity members have similar access to governmental agents and resources), consultation (the degree to which polity
members exercise binding collective control over governmental agents, resources, and activities, and finally protection (shielding of polity members and their constituencies from arbitrary action by governmental agents). Breadth, equality, consultation, and protection change in partial independence of each other; authoritarian populist regimes, for example, have commonly created relatively broad and equal polity membership in combination with limited consultation and little protection.

To simplify matters, nevertheless, we can combine breadth, equality, consultation, and protection into a bundle of variables we call protected consultation. (Readers who prefer numerical formulations can think of it this way: We standardize our assessments of breadth, equality, consultation, and protection on the full range of historical experience in each regard, assigning 0 to the lowest value ever observed and 1 to the highest value, then multiply the four ratings into a single score that will likewise vary from 0 to 1.) When protected consultation reaches high levels (say, 0.8 on our combined scale), we begin to speak of democracy. Strictly speaking, then, democratization is not a consequence of changes in public politics but a special kind of alteration in public politics. Figure 14.1 represents public politics and democratization as two separate boxes simply to stress the causal problem at hand: What produces those alterations of public politics that increase protected consultation?

If democracy entails high levels of protected consultation by definition, as a practical matter it also requires the institution of citizenship. Citizenship consists, in this context, of mutual rights and obligations binding governmental agents to whole categories of people who are subject to the government's authority, those categories being defined chiefly or exclusively by relations to the government rather than by reference to particular connections with rulers or to membership in categories based on imputed durable traits such as race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. (Thomas Janoski reaches for a similar conception in defining citizenship as "passive and active membership of individuals in a nation-state with certain universalistic rights and obligations at a specified level of equality" [1998, 9].) At higher levels of protected consultation, we begin speaking of democratization. Democratization means any net shift toward citizenship, breadth of citizenship, equality of citizenship, binding consultation, and protection.

Our analytic problem, then, is to discover how and why regimes make net moves toward protected consultation, especially those net moves that bring them into the narrow zone of citizenship and democracy. Since many regimes that edge toward democracy later veer away, we can hope that solution of our primary analytic problem will also help explain why de-democratization occurs.

One last definitional matter. Governmental capacity is the extent of governmental agents' control over changes in the condition of persons, activities, and resources within the territory over which the government exercises jurisdiction. Beyond a very small scale, no democracy survives in the absence of substantial governmental capacity. That is true for both internal and external reasons. Internally, maintenance of protection, consultation, equality, and breadth against the maneuvers of powerful domestic actors who have incentives to subvert them rests on substantial governmental capacity.

Externally, governments lacking substantial capacity remain vulnerable to subversion, attack, or even conquest by bandits, rebels, guerrilla forces, and outside governments. From the perspective of its large noble class (although certainly not from the perspectives of its merchants and peasants), eighteenth-century Poland's government gleamed with protected consultation. It notoriously lacked capacity, however, so much so that rebellions of Cossacks and others from within its perimeter and conquest by Russia, Prussia, and Austria from without choked off its existence as an autonomous state from 1795 to World War I.

Figure 14.3 schematizes a line of reasoning that follows. Where low governmental capacity and little protected consultation prevail, political life goes on in

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**Figure 14.3** Effective Democratization
fragmented tyranny: multiple coercive forces, small-scale despots, and competitors for larger-scale power, but no effective central government. The diagram's opposite corner contains the zone of citizenship: mutual rights and obligations binding governmental agents to whole categories of people who are subject to the government's authority, those categories being defined chiefly or exclusively by relations to the government rather than by reference to particular ties with rulers or membership in categories based on imputed durable traits such as race, ethnicity, gender, or religion.

At point A of the diagram's triangular citizenship zone, a combination of little protected consultation and extremely high governmental capacity describes a regimented state, one we might call totalitarian. Nazi Germany illustrates political processes at that point. At point B, protected consultation has reached its maximum, but governmental capacity is so low the regime runs the risk of internal and external attack. Nineteenth-century Belgium never reached that point, but veered repeatedly toward it (De Neckere 1997). Point C—maximum governmental capacity plus maximum protected consultation—is probably empty because of incompatibilities between extremely high capacity and consultation.

This line of reasoning leads to my sketching a zone of authoritarianism in the diagram's upper left, overlapping the zone of citizenship but by no means exhausting it. It also suggests an idealized path for effective democratization giving roughly equal weight to increases in governmental capacity and protected consultation up to the point of entry into citizenship, but then turning to deceleration, and ultimately mild reduction, of capacity where protected consultation has settled in.

Figure 14.4 sets limits on real histories of democratization by sketching two extreme paths:

A strong-state path, featuring early expansion of governmental capacity, entry into the zone of authoritarianism, expansion of protected consultation through a phase of authoritarian citizenship, finally, the emergence of a less authoritarian, more democratic, but still high-capacity regime; in European historical experience, Prussia from 1650 through 1925 came closer to such a trajectory than most other states.

A weak-state path, featuring early expansion of protected consultation followed only much later by increase in governmental capacity at the large scale, hence entry into the zone of effective citizenship from below; although few European states followed this trajectory very far because most of them that started succumbed to conquest or disintegration, Switzerland—shielded from conquest by mountainous terrain, rivalries among adjacent powers, and a militarily skilled population—came closer to this extreme than most other European regimes.

All real European histories fell within the extremes, most described much more erratic courses with reversals and sudden shifts in both dimensions, and the vast ma-
CHANGE IN PUBLIC POLITICS

What of changes in relations between governments and people living under their jurisdictions? Without significant transformations in the arenas of inequality and networks of trust strictly governmental changes toward democracy remain either unstable or nonexistent. Nevertheless, democratization necessarily includes shifts in relations between governments and their subjects, as well as among constituted political actors in public politics. We are looking for change mechanisms that directly promote creation of citizenship as a distinctive relation between governmental agents and subjects; broaden citizenship by comparison with the total population under the government’s jurisdiction; equalize citizenship among those who qualify; expand binding claims by citizens over a government’s agents, activities, and resources; and finally, strengthen citizens’ protections against arbitrary action by governmental agents.

Broadly speaking, then, we are searching for causal mechanisms that enlarge the network of relations among political actors collectively controlling governments and equalize positions within such networks. Likely mechanisms include the following:

- Coalition formation between segments of ruling classes and constituted political actors that are currently excluded from power
- Mobilization-repression-bargaining cycles during which currently excluded actors act collectively in ways that threaten survival of the government and/or its ruling classes, governmental repression fails, struggle ensues, and settlements concede political standing and/or rights to mobilized actors
- Extraction-resistance-bargaining cycles in which governmental agents demand resources currently under control of nongovernmental networks and committed to nongovernmental ends, holders of those resources resist, struggle ensues, and settlements emerge in which people yield resources but receive credible guarantees with respect to constraints on future extraction
- Central co-optation or elimination of previously autonomous political intermediaries
- Bureaucratic containment of previously autonomous military forces
- Dissolution or segregation from government of nongovernmental patron-client networks
- Imposition of uniform governmental structures and practices throughout the government’s jurisdiction

Each of these mechanisms poses further explanatory problems—for example, what processes dissolve nongovernmental patron-client networks, and why. But this inventory of proximate causal mechanisms in itself clarifies how and why broad, equal citizenship with binding consultation and protection come into being. All of them promote establishment of categorically defined rights and obligations directly connecting citizens to agents of government. Most of them also inhibit the pursuit of control over governmental activities, resources, and personnel by other means than those categorically defined rights and obligations.

CATEGORICAL INEQUALITY

Changes in categorical inequality require a bit more conceptual discussion than does the familiar topic of governmental change. Social categories consist of a boundary and a set of relations across that boundary; for example, the boundaries and relations that define such pairs as women/men, whites/blacks, or citizens/foreigners. Boundaries are usually incomplete, and areas away from boundaries, ill-defined; while at the frontier the distinction Arab-Jew takes on great salience and defines relations stringently, there are plenty of circumstances when it doesn’t matter, and away from the point of confrontation it becomes less clear which people really qualify as Arabs (what about Arab Christians?), which people really qualify as Jews (what about Ethiopian adherents to Judaism?).

When relations across the boundary in question regularly produce greater advantages or fewer disadvantages for the parties on one side, we can speak of categorical inequality. The extent and character of categorical inequality in the population subject to a given government’s jurisdiction significantly affects prospects for democratization. Where the limits of citizenship correspond to a widely operating categorical boundary (for example, an ostensibly racial boundary), that fact in itself constitutes a major obstacle to democratization. Widespread categorical inequality within the subject population, furthermore, increases incentives and capacities of participants in favored categories to turn the governmental apparatus to their own private ends, thus promoting the perversion of aristocracy that Aristotle called oligarchy.

Inequality can coexist with democracy just so long as it remains outside the sphere of public politics. Today’s parliamentary monarchies often sustain relatively democratic institutions despite their categorical separation of royal families and aristocracies from the rest of the population. Conversely, inequality threatens democracy to the extent that its categorical relations reproduce themselves as divisions within public politics. Deep material inequality with respect to gender, race, lineage, or age usually translates into political inequality and thereby hinders democratization. But moderate levels of categorical inequality remain compatible with democratization so long as substantial insulation between public politics and other areas of life exists.
Four very general mechanisms interact to produce categorical inequality: exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation (for extended discussion, see Tilly 1998). Exploitation involves capturing control over a value-producing resource, imposing a distinction between owners and nonowners of the resource, enlisting the effort of nonowners in the production of use value by means of that resource, and yielding to those who contribute their effort less than the value the effort in question adds. Opportunity hoarding likewise involves capturing a value-producing resource, but excluding others from access to it, and collecting rents from that control. Emulation is borrowing of organizational forms, in the present case organizational forms that already have categorical inequality built into them.

Adaptation, finally, is alteration of social routines and relations in ways that depend on the presence of unequal categories and presume their persistence. Exploitation establishes inequality between owners and nonowners, opportunity hoarding creates inequality between insiders and outsiders, the two of them often reinforce each other (as when employers recruit favored workers exclusively from a single ethnic category), but emulation and adaptation lock either or both into place.

Governments involve themselves doubly in categorical inequality. First, they generally reinforce forms of exploitation and opportunity hoarding that manifestly benefit their dominant political actors. Not only do they enforce property laws and exclusive rights to niches, but also they support emulation and adaptation that sustain existing forms of exploitation and opportunity hoarding. Second, they themselves construct systems of exploitation and opportunity hoarding, for example, by conscripting young men for military service in wars that produce gains for rulers but not for soldiers and by establishing exclusive licenses to dispense religion or medicine.

Democracy is a special case of exploitation and opportunity hoarding, the case in which the bulk of a population belongs to the ruling classes, the government produces substantial collective goods, and categorical access to protected niches results from binding consultation of citizens. As the late Mancur Olson (1982) intuited but did not quite articulate, oligarchical ruling coalitions divert governmental activity and production in general from the common good. Olson saw most such coalition formation, including the creation of cartels and massive labor unions, as a hindrance to collective rationality because it kept free markets from adjudicating outcomes. Still he offered two insights that illuminate the process of democratization. First, coalitions approaching the whole population—democratic ruling classes—favor the production of genuinely collective goods (cf. Körpi 1983). Second, wars, revolutions, and other wholesale political housecleanings break up existing coalitions, thus providing unusual opportunities for political and economic reconstruction. We can use those insights.

Democratization entails dissolution or broadening of narrow coalitions among beneficiaries of exploitation and opportunity hoarding as well as creation of new, broad coalitions among beneficiaries. The presence of broad, relatively equal citizenship does not guarantee democratization, since it remains compatible with utter subjection to tyrannical and arbitrary authority; my earlier diagrams made just such an argument. But without substantial citizenship, formation of broad ruling coalitions faces insuperable obstacles.

What reduces the inscription of generalized categorical inequality into public politics? We have already discovered a few mechanisms that alter relations between governments and people living under their jurisdictions. Some of those mechanisms do their work through transformations of durable inequality; that is the case, for example, with central co-optation and elimination of previously autonomous political intermediaries. What additional mechanisms might dissolve, enlarge, or replace coalitions benefiting from government-backed exploitation and opportunity hoarding? Here are some candidates:

- Dissolution of coercive controls supporting current relations of exploitation and opportunity hoarding
- Education and communication that alter adaptations supporting current relations of exploitation and opportunity hoarding
- Education and communication that supplant existing models of organization, hence alter emulation in the production of new organizations
- Equalization of assets and/or well-being across categories within the population at large

More generally, changes that reduce benefits of exploitation and opportunity hoarding and/or increase the costs of their enforcement promote disintegration in existing systems of categorical inequality, and hence reduce obstacles to democratization in currently undemocratic regimes.

**NETWORKS OF TRUST**

The third arena that is crucial to democratization contains networks of trust. Trust is the knowing exposure of valued future outcomes to the risk of malfeasance by others. Risk is threat multiplied by uncertainty. People frequently confront short-term risk without creating elaborate social structure; on their own they leap raging rivers, engage in unsafe sex, drive while drunk, or bet a thousand dollars. When it comes to the long-term risks of reproduction, cohabitation, investment, migration, or agricultural enterprise, however, people generally embed those risks in durable, substantial social organization. To that extent, they trust others—they make the reduction of threat and/or uncertainty contingent on the performance of other people they cannot entirely control. Such sets of relations to others constitute networks of trust.

When people commit themselves to risky long-term enterprises whose outcomes depend significantly on the performances of other persons, they ordinarily
embed those enterprises into interpersonal networks whose participants have strong incentives to meet their own commitments and encourage others to meet theirs. Such networks often pool risks and provide aid to unfortunate members. They commonly operate well, if and when they do, because members share extensive information about each other and about their social environment, because third parties monitor transactions among pairs of members, and because exclusion from the network inflicts serious harm on members who fail to meet their commitments (for more individualistic accounts of the same phenomena, see Besley 1995; Burt and Knez 1995; Burt 1998; Gambetta 1993; Granovetter 1995; Greif 1994; Land 1994; Paxton 1999; Shapiro 1987; Warren 1999; Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994). Trade diasporas, rotating credit circles, skilled crafts, professions, lineages, patron–client chains, and religious sects often exhibit these characteristics. They couple easily with control over systems of exploitation and, especially, opportunity hoarding.

Through most of human history, participants in networks of trust have guarded them jealously from governmental intervention. They have rightly feared that governmental agents would weaken them or divert them to less advantageous ends. Powerful participants who could not entirely escape governmental intervention have created partial immunities through such arrangements as indirect rule. Less powerful participants have characteristically adopted what James Scott calls weapons of the weak: concealment, foot-dragging, sabotage, and so on.

Democratization, however, entails a double shift of trust. First, within the political arena citizens trust the organization of consultation and protection sufficiently to wait out short-term losses of advantage instead of turning immediately to non-governmental means of regaining lost advantages. Second, citizens build into risky long-term enterprises the assumption that government will endure and meet its commitments. Both are extremely rare circumstances over the long historical run. Within any regime that is not currently democratic, their realization faces enormous obstacles.

What mechanisms might reduce those obstacles? Here are some possibilities:

- Creation of external guarantees for government commitments
- Governmental incorporation and expansion of existing trust networks
- Governmental absorption or destruction of patron–client networks
- Disintegration of existing trust networks
- Expansion of the population lacking access to effective trust networks for their major long-term risky enterprises
- Appearance of new long-term risky opportunities that existing trust networks can’t handle
- Substantial increase of the government’s resources for risk reduction and/or compensation of loss
- Visible governmental meeting of commitments to the advantage of substantial new segments of the population

In general, these mechanisms promote acceptance of government and political participation as the least bad alternative.

CONQUEST, CONFRONTATION, COLONIZATION, AND REVOLUTION

Changes in public politics, inequality, and trust networks obviously interact. Most of the time they interact to block democratization. Under most circumstances, for example, increases in governmental capacity encourage those who already exercise considerable political power to divert governmental activity to their own advantage and incite participants in trust networks to reinforce those networks while shielding them more energetically from governmental intervention. Under what circumstances might we nevertheless expect government, inequality, and trust networks to move together toward democracy? Reflecting on European experience over the last three centuries, I see four recurrent circumstances that have sometimes activated multiple democracy-promoting mechanisms: conquest, confrontation, colonization, and revolution. All involve abrupt shocks to existing social arrangements.

Conquest is the forcible reorganization of existing systems of government, inequality, and trust by an external power. In the history of European democratization, the most famous example is no doubt conquest by French revolutionary and Napoleonic armies outside of France, which left governments on a semidemocratic French model in place through much of Western Europe after Napoleon’s defeat. Re-establishment of France, Germany, Italy, and Japan on more or less democratic bases after World War II rivals French revolutionary exploits in this regard. Conquest probably promotes democratization when it does because it activates a whole series of the mechanisms enumerated earlier, notably including the destruction of old trust networks and the provision of external guarantees that the new government will meet its commitments.

Confrontation has provided the textbook cases of democratization, as existing oligarchies have responded to challenges by excluded political actors with broadening of citizenship, equalization of citizenship, increase of binding consultation and/or expansion of protection for citizens. Nineteenth-century British rulers’ responses to large mobilizations by Protestant Dissenters, Catholics, merchants, and skilled workers fit the pattern approximately in Great Britain, but by no means always—and certainly not in Ireland. Confrontation probably promotes democratization, when it does, not only because it terminates a mobilization-repression-bargaining cycle but also because it generates new trust-bearing coalitions and weakens coercive controls supporting current relations of exploitation and opportunity hoarding.

Colonization with wholesale transplantation of population from mother country to colony has often promoted democratization, although frequently at the cost of destroying, expelling, or subordinating indigenous populations within the colonial territory. Thus, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand began
European settlement with coercive, oligarchic regimes, but rapidly moved some distance toward broad citizenship, equal citizenship, binding consultation, and protection. (Let us never forget how far short of theoretically possible maximum values in these four regards all really existing democracies have always fallen; by these demanding criteria, no near-democracy has ever existed on a large scale.) Colonization of this sort probably makes a difference not merely because it exports political institutions containing some rudiments of democracy but also because it promotes relative equality of material condition and weakens patron-client networks tied closely to the government of the colonizing power.

And revolution? As England’s Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689 and the Russian revolution of 1905 illustrate, revolutions do not universally promote moves toward broad, equal citizenship, binding consultation, and protection. Let us take revolutions to be large splits in control over means of government followed by substantial transfers of power over government. As compared with previous regimes, the net effect of most revolutions over the last few centuries has been at least a modicum of democratization, as here defined. Why so? Probably because they are able to activate even a wider range of democracy-promoting mechanisms than do conquest, colonization, and confrontation.

Revolutions rarely or never occur, for example, without coalition formation between segments of ruling classes and constituted political actors that are currently excluded from power. But they also commonly dissolve or incorporate non-governmental patron-client networks, contain previously autonomous military forces, equalize assets and/or well-being across the population at large, and attack existing trust networks (for recent descriptions, reviews, and syntheses, see DeFronzo 1991; Foran 1997; Goldstone 1991; Goodwin 2001; Keddie 1995; Lupher 1996; Paige 1997; Selbin 1993; Tilly 1993). Thus, we arrive at an unexpected synthesis of Mancur Olson and Barrington Moore: Revolutions sometimes sweep away old networks that block democratization and promote the formation of governing coalitions far more general than those that preceded them. Any such conclusion will, of course, be intensely controversial in the present state of knowledge; a whole intellectual industry has grown up to challenge assessments in this vein of the French and Bolshevik revolutions (see, for example, Furet 1995; Malia 1998, 2001). All the more reason to take my arguments as an invitation to research and critical synthesis rather than as forgone conclusions.

Figure 14.1, with which we began, summarizes the research program that flows from these arguments. It consists of examining the following:

1. How environments of different sorts of regimes affect (a) their likelihood of experiencing different sorts of shocks, (b) the sorts of change mechanisms such shocks activate
2. How those change mechanisms and their interactions affect inequality, networks of trust, and public politics
3. How, when, and why alterations of this sort produce democratization

The program is vast but promising. It has powerful attractions: a focus on causal accounts, compatibility with highly variable causal processes, and an open invitation to proceed at many different scales, from a single crisis to continental history.

**WHAT’S AT STAKE?**

The inquiry has serious intellectual and political stakes. If the line of analysis I have recommended is roughly correct, scholars and political leaders who seek keys to democratization should stop looking for the elusive realm called “civil society” and abandon attempts to strengthen it—except insofar as the changes of public politics, categorical inequality, and networks of trust I have sketched actually identify what they have been looking for. Nor should they worry much about whether a given country has a previous history or collective memory of democracy. Instead they should be scrutinizing interactions among governmental institutions, trust-bearing networks, and systems of inequality.

The analysis raises doubts about the importance of generalized attitudes or political cultures, no matter what their content. It attributes far greater influence to understandings and commitments embedded in crucial social ties: culture, yes, but in daily practice and tight integration with social relations. It recommends converting current investigations of social capital into close studies of change in trust-bearing networks. It suggests that model democratic constitutions will make little difference to the actual content of politics without deep changes in categorical inequality and/or its insulation from public politics. It downgrades such differences as presidential versus parliamentary rule and two-party versus multiparty systems except as signs of prevailing power struggles. It singles out civilian control over military force and containment of material inequality as crucial steps toward democracy.

If this chapter’s arguments are correct, monitoring of change should focus on democracy-promoting mechanisms rather than on public opinion or election results. The arguments challenge political designers to study those mechanisms and to invent devices that will activate them less brutally than conquest, confrontation, colonization, and revolution. Most of all, the analysis presented here gives reasons for mistrusting self-descriptions of political leaders in ostensibly democratizing countries. All the more reason for bringing systematic evidence to bear on its assertions—if only to prove them all wrong.

Where now for the work of explanation? A sixfold agenda flows from this chapter’s observations:

1. Analysts of democratization must shift their gaze from necessary and sufficient conditions to causal sequences, from static comparisons of multiple cases to dynamic analyses of transformations, from epidemiology to physiology.
2. Researchers must sort out, cull, refine, augment, test, modify, and codify the miscellaneous democracy-promoting mechanisms so casually proposed here.
3. We must examine whether the three arenas of public politics, inequality, and trust-sustaining networks interact to promote democratization, if and when they do, in something like the manner sketched here.

4. The place of shocks associated with conquest, confrontation, colonization, and revolution deserves much more systematic attention.

5. Someone must synthesize these many elements into partial but verifiable causal models of concrete democratization processes.

6. At that point, researchers can reconsider such vexed questions as the relationship between democratization and interstate war by looking at causal mechanisms instead of elusive correlations (Mansfield and Snyder 1995; Ward and Gleditsch 1998).

If these lines goad a few bright researchers into reexamining democracy-promoting causal mechanisms, they will have served their purpose.

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So What?

In my little corner of the intellectual world, “so what?” questions usually come up when a researcher has produced a reliable finding whose significance neighboring specialists can see. How does the researcher then explain to people outside that small circle why they should care about the finding? This book has not produced “findings” in any strong sense of the word, but its formulations, claims, assertions, and observations require some of the same justification. Do they provide a viable vision of anything important? Should readers who have not already spent their lives fixated by intersections of stories, identities, and political change care about what has happened in the previous fourteen chapters?

Yes, they should. At a minimum, anyone who cares about how what people loosely call “identity politics” works should care about the issues this book addresses. Many people regard identity claims primarily as a form of self-expression, or even of self-indulgence—what others do when they are too comfortable, too confused, or too distressed for serious politics. I have argued, on the contrary, that identity claims and their attendant stories constitute serious political business. Invention of the social movement, for instance, facilitated the staking of claims in the name of previously unrecognized political actors. At various points in U.S. history, for example, social movements helped establish opponents of slavery, enemies of alcohol, women, African Americans, gays, Vietnam veterans, and indigenous peoples as viable political actors.

Nationalism provides another example. During the nineteenth century, nationalist identity claims (whether bottom up or top down) began to make a serious difference to who would hold state power and who would not. Political
rights and obligations themselves depend on negotiated claims linking members of established political categories, which means that they, too, involve identity claims. Battling out accepted answers to the questions “Who are you?” “Who are we?” and “Who are they?” with widely accepted stories to back those answers is no self-indulgence; it plays a consequential part in public politics. Available answers to the questions affect the very feasibility of democracy.

Or so I have claimed. This book falls far short of proving its claims. Its main contributions are to identify weaknesses in existing ideas about various forms of identity politics, then to present and illustrate a program for doing better. The program involves regarding transactions among social sites (including persons) as real and examining how such transactions actually work in a variety of political settings. It calls for the identification of robust causal mechanisms and processes that operate similarly in disparate circumstances but produce different large-scale outcomes depending on their combinations, sequences, and initial conditions.

If you have worked your way through this book chapter by chapter, you have seen the program in action repeatedly. You have seen analyses of transactions among major British political actors including government officials (chapters 4, 5, and 7), among French movement activists, government agents, and political parties (chapters 4 and 9), among nationalists, their rivals, national governments, and international agencies (chapters 7 and 12), among claimants to power in the collapsing Soviet Union (chapters 8 and 12), among Indian officials, local powerholders, and religious activists (chapter 9), among rulers, armies, and taxpayers (chapters 10 and 13), between state officials and ordinary citizens (chapters 11, 13, and 14). The cataloging of mechanisms and processes becomes most explicit in chapter 14’s analysis of democratization. But throughout the book mechanisms and processes explicitly listed in that chapter—coalition formation, mobilization-repression-bargaining cycles, governmental absorption and destruction of patron-client networks, and so on—do a significant part of the explanatory work. The challenge is to pin down those mechanisms and processes, verify how they operate, and examine the effects they produce in different combinations, sequences, and initial conditions.

More specific agendas emerge for the study of stories, of political identities, of political change, and of their interactions. In each case, we need new work on two classes of problems: generation and constraint.

1. **Generation.** What causes the processes involved to (a) begin, (b) change? How, for example, did the identity “European” acquire sufficient force that old established states would dissolve national currencies in favor of the Euro and former socialist regimes would reshape themselves in the capitalist image as a step toward admission to the European Union?

2. **Constraint.** Once they are in operation, how do the processes affect social behavior (a) on the small scale, (b) on the large scale? For example, at what point and how should we expect participants in European social movements routinely to make claims on behalf of categories that span long-established national boundaries?

On the whole, my arguments in previous chapters have made clear with an entrepreneurial-interactive account of generation and constraint: Political entrepreneurs draw together credible stories from available cultural materials, similarly create we-they boundaries, activate both stories and boundaries as a function of current political circumstances, and maneuver to suppress competing models, but interaction among parties to struggle alters stories, boundaries, and their social reinforcements. In this regard, my account resembles John Walton’s conclusions concerning the narratives of public history:

Public history is constructed, not, in the main, for the purposes of posterity or objectivity, but for the aims of present action (conquest, social reform, building, political reorganization, economic transformation). Narratives make claims for the virtues of their individual and institutional authors, often as counterpoint to rival claimants. They characterize the past in certain ways for the purpose of shaping the future. The ability of narratives to effect change depends in the first instance on their institutional power; whether they are produced by a powerful church, conquering state, fledging town, or contending voluntary associations. (Walton 2001, 294)

Something like this process does often occur. But such an account has an excessively instrumental bias. It offers no explanation of the fact that most would-be political entrepreneurs fail most of the time. Nor does it provide a satisfactory explanation of day-to-day interactions around political identities, much less why people sometimes risk their lives in the course of those interactions. Clearly, we need more subtle and comprehensive explanations of generation and constraint.

In the case of stories, we have a few clues concerning generation. Although no one lives without stories, interacting people create new stories about their interaction after the fact, as they terminate sequences and seal agreements. In that regard, political stories resemble peace treaties, commencement addresses, memoirs, annual reports, and labor-management contracts. To be sure, materials for stories come largely from existing cultural repertoires. Viable new stories reassemble familiar elements. Certifying agents such as elders, peers, public authorities, and international organizations monitor stories and often provide models for their proper construction.

Nationalist stories, for example, bear striking resemblances from one part of the world to another. They speak of shared culture, longstanding tradition, connectedness, common geographic origin, and distinctness from others with whom the claimed nation might be confused. Those common properties do not spring from primordial consciousness, but from a body of nationalist models and practices that have spread through the world since 1789. Still we have no convincing general account of the process by which the specific contents of politically consequential stories—nationalist or otherwise—form and gain credibility. Nor do we have a persuasive account of change in prevailing stories. Similarly, we lack a compelling and comprehensive explanation for generation of the particular boundaries, relations, and stories that constitute political identities.

As for constraint, how do stories and identities produce their effects? In the construction and deployment of politically effective stories, what happens at the small
scale of an individual or a pair of individuals, at the large scale of a state or a national movement, and in the interaction between those scales? Three bad answers readily spring to mind. The first is that stories directly alter individual consciousness in closely similar ways across individuals, before individual consciousness aggregates into collective consciousness. The answer is bad because it provides no account of how exposure to stories interacts with previous learning across individuals who have varied considerably in previous experience. We could, after all, plausibly expect such individuals to adopt different, even contradictory, stories. How does relative uniformity in public storytelling come about? Much less does the aggregation of individual consciousness explain how people who have their doubts about shared stories nevertheless cooperate in their public promulgation?

The second commonly proposed bad answer is that society does it. Those stories that serve society as a whole or (more likely) reinforce the interests of dominant groups come to prevail. This second answer is woefully inadequate because it invokes a dubious agent—society as a whole or a unified dominant group—and begs the question of how that agent does its work. Holistic ontologies keep returning to social science in such forms as evolutionary models and world-system analyses (see, for example, Sanderson 2001; Chase-Dunn 1998). But their vagueness with respect to agency—who does what to whom, why, and how—has greatly diminished their popularity among social scientists at large. That vagueness renders society—does-it answers as unhelpful explanations for the prominence of stories and identities in political change.

A third frequent bad answer credits culture, as the repository of collective experience, with the production of constraint. The answer is even worse than the first two because it combines their defects: It begs the question of how culture—that is, shared understandings and their representations in objects and practices—changes as it invokes a dubious agent. Like "society does it," the cultural answer fails to specify how that agent creates its effects in social life. Unquestionably, available culture figures importantly in political storytelling and identity politics. People undoubtedly draw on previously known representations and practices as they struggle with each other. But how? Since struggling people are constantly modifying their definitions of who they are and what they are fighting about, exactly how does culture constrain them?

Let me suggest three possible good answers as alternatives to the bad answers. Call them entrepreneurship, creative interaction, and cultural ecology. The three would take future work in somewhat different directions, but they would not necessarily yield incompatible results.

Entrepreneurship? We might improve the crude entrepreneurial account of previous chapters by following up analogies with intellectual, artistic, and religious schools. In those fields investigators usually discover strong network effects, polarization effects, and mutual reinforcement of common culture, with brokers both connecting and dividing crucial actors (see, for example, Abbott, 2001a; Collins 1998; Knoke 1990; White 1992, 1993). We have certainly seen glimmers of the same effects in our surveys of identity politics. In the British social movement politics on which previous chapters have repeatedly drawn, for example, offstage connections among such entrepreneurs as William Cobbett and Francis Place clearly affected which stories and identities became prominent in successive campaigns for parliamentary reform.

Creative interaction appears most visibly in such activities as jazz and soccer. In these cases, participants work within rough agreements on procedures and outcomes; arbiters set limits on performances; individual dexterity, knowledge, and disciplined preparation generally yield superior play; yet the rigid equivalent of military drill destroys the enterprise. Both jazz and soccer, when well executed, proceed through improvised interaction, surprise, incessant error and error correction, alternation between solo and ensemble action, and repeated responses to understandings shared by at least pairs of players. After the fact, participants and spectators create shared stories of what happened, and striking improvisations shape future performances. We have seen creative interaction at work, for example, in the process by which solemn processions and presentations of petitions evolved into street demonstrations. If we could explain how human beings bring off such improvisatory adventures, we could be well on our way to accounting for how sets of interacting people store histories in contentious repertoires, conversation, rights and obligations, war and peace, and similar phenomena.

Cultural ecology? Social life consists of transactions among social sites, some of them occupied by individual persons, but most of them occupied by shifting aspects or clusters of persons. None of the sites, goes the reasoning, contains all the culture—all the shared understandings or representations—on which transactions in its vicinity draw. But transactions among sites produce interdependence among extensively connected sites, deposit related cultural material in those sites, transform shared understandings in the process, and thus make large stores of culture available to any particular site through its connections with other sites. Thus, we might discover that identity politics creates its illusions of unity by means of incessantly negotiated interchange among distinct sites, then fixes its illusions by means of collectively produced stories. We have noticed signs of cultural ecology, for example, in James Scott's and Viviana Zelizer's documentation of dispersed local knowledge as a counter to uniform top-down templates.

Consider entrepreneurship, creative interaction, and cultural ecology to be three cloudy mirrors held up to narrative and identity processes from different angles. Analysts of stories, identities, and political change face the challenge of clearing the mirrors or creating better glasses. Improved vision should help us explain how the world's peoples are creating new identities, acting as if they believed their own shared answers to the question "Who are you?", and creating consequential stories about the past, present, and future of the world.