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## CHAPTER ONE

# Introduction

AFTER FORTY-EIGHT YEARS of stable autocracy, Portugal suddenly exploded. Just past midnight, a banned song promising “It is the people who give the orders” played on Lisbon radio to launch the surprise junior officer coup of April 1974 (Raby 1988: 248). This event would both transform Portugal and inaugurate the greatest global expansion of democracy in history. Yet this was no coup by pro-democratic idealists. Military leaders soon split into bitterly opposed factions, with the dominant leftist group nearly transforming Portugal into a Marxist dictatorship. After his ouster, the first president shelled an artillery regiment in a failed comeback. Opposing citizen groups seized farms and factories, firebombed party offices, and mobilized for revolution (Hunt 1976; Ferreira and Marshall 1986; Bermeo 2007). Only after two years of “traumatic psychological, economic, and political shocks” (Maxwell 1995: 116) was a group of moderate officers able to counter coup and steer the country to democracy. As Huntington (1991: 3–4) writes, this was an “implausible beginning of a world-wide movement to democracy.” In fact, Portugal is so discordant with current theories of democratization that it’s the sole case of twenty-one transitions Ruth Collier (1999) was unable to classify. Yet I consider Portugal the ideal illustration of how democratization really happens.

Consider a very different transition: Taiwan. Rising isolation following its derecognition by the United States in favor of China convinced President Chiang Ching-kuo to liberalize the single-party regime in the mid-1980s (Dickson 1997; Rigger 2001). Central to this decision was the accurate belief that the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party would continue to win elections, first under competitive authoritarianism and then in the first democratic elections of 1996 (Hood 1997; Cheng 2008: 130). In fact, as of 2020, the party has controlled both the presidency and legislature in most years since democratization. Instead of violent instability and weakness, we find strength, most importantly a confidence among leaders that democratic competition did not mortally threaten the ruling party’s survival. The result was a strategic,

ordered accession to democracy, albeit one first prompted by international change.

Portugal and Taiwan illustrate two distinct *paths* to democratization, one following violent *shocks* and the other with a ruling party confident it can win democratic elections. I call the latter the *electoral continuity* path. These cases are not anomalies; I show that more than 9 in 10 democratic transitions since 1800 fit one of these two paths. Put another way, democratization almost never happens without a country first experiencing a major violent shock (such as a coup or civil war) or having a ruling party capable of winning power in democracy. This presents a stark contrast with popular images of democratization, as it shows that the preservation of autocrats in power and violent events typically viewed as antithetical to democracy are instead central to its foundation.

Despite their evident differences, Portugal and Taiwan also share some surprising logical connections. Both transitions followed significant *disruptions* to the autocratic status quo, respectively the 1974 coup and the international turmoil that prompted liberalization. These disruptions radically changed leaders' power calculations. In particular, both regimes democratized from a distinctive political context that *minimized the shift in power implied by democratization*. In Portugal, the regime was sufficiently divided that no stable autocratic project was viable. As a result, little power was sacrificed by accepting democracy. If anything, the final military leaders under Colonel António Ramalho Eanes maximized their long-term power by securing a right to veto legislation until 1982 and winning Eanes the presidency from 1976 to 1986. In Taiwan, KMT leaders calculated the party would thrive in democracy, again making democratization a tolerable choice.

These similarities are not coincidences. Examining the many cases that fit the two paths reveals an overarching theory of democratization that emphasizes regime power and the pivotal role of disruptive events like coups, wars, and elections. Although rarely intended to lead to democratization, these events upend stable autocracies and provide openings for democratic actors. If autocrats calculate they have little to lose from democracy and face sufficient pro-democratic pressure, then they accede to democratization.

This theory is compatible with many existing perspectives on democratization—such as providing a needed bridge between structure- and agency-centered theories—while challenging others. For instance, it implies that outside the specific political contexts defined by the paths, high-profile factors like protest, international pressure, and economic conditions rarely matter. More generally, a neglect of context has led to poor predictions and misunderstood cases of successful and failed regime change. The theory also points to new strategies for how domestic and international actors can restore momentum to the global expansion of democracy.

Combining the broadest qualitative and quantitative examinations of democratic transitions to date, this book aims to revise our understanding of

both the process and root causes of democratization. The book follows several years of qualitative study of all 139 democratic transitions from 1800 to 2014, covering thousands of sources and a diverse array of countries and actors. It spans the 1848 “spring of nations” and Greece’s 1862 overthrow of its Bavarian king to the Bolivian military’s ill-fated alliance with drug lords and ex-Nazis in the 1980s and Argentina’s folly in the Falklands War, all the way to Fiji’s post-coup democratization in 2014. In the process, it intertwines global events like the two world wars and the Soviet Union’s fall with the story of democratization.

Quantitative testing confirms that the starting conditions for the paths strongly predict democratization. For instance, satisfying at least one path condition (a recent shock or durable ruling party) makes democratization more than *seven times* as likely compared to satisfying none. I also introduce a novel mediation framework for testing country characteristics like economic development, natural resources, and inequality that illuminates *why* they do or do not predict democratization, addressing several outstanding puzzles. Lastly, results show that electoral continuity produces more durable and higher-quality democracies, with major implications for democracy’s future.

In this chapter, I overview the general logic and process of democratization, topics that are expanded upon in the following theory chapter. For clarity, I summarize the main arguments in six key theoretical claims and explain how they are empirically supported. I then discuss how the theory builds on the existing literature and the practical implications. In the methodology section, I discuss my approach to inference, including causation and alternative explanations. A plan of the book concludes.

## *Overview of the Book’s Theory*

### AN ALTERNATIVE LOGIC OF DEMOCRATIZATION

When Brazil’s military stepped down in 1985, a teary-eyed protest leader marveled that it was like witnessing “a miracle of nature” (Sun-Sentinel Wires 1985). He had a point. Since 1800, an autocracy’s annual chance of democratizing barely clears 1%. Since the United States’ founding, less than one in three country-years have been democratic,<sup>1</sup> and essentially none prior to this date.

From the beginning, it must be stressed that democracy itself is a political paradox. Democracy means equal electoral power for individuals with manifestly unequal economic and social resources. It means groups that could take power by force and rulers that could use their positions to dramatically

1. The figure is 33% using Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013 and 28% using Polity (Marshall and Jaggers 2017) with a threshold of 6.

advantage themselves in future elections choose not to. This sharply conflicts with our image of political actors ruthlessly maximizing their power.

Further reinforcing the paradox, a popular premise of scholars and non-scholars alike is that transitions bring a major shift in power from the old regime to the new (e.g., Moore 1966; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Bunce and Wolchik 2006; Haggard and Kaufman 2016). Autocrats and their allies lose, newly empowered parties and pro-democratic citizens win. But why do the losers let this happen? Why not fight to retain power like most autocratic regimes? One might reply that elite or popular forces coercively wrest power from the regime, leaving volition out of it, but this almost always produces a new autocracy, if only temporarily (Levitsky and Way 2012, 2013). Revolutions, coups, and protests that oust autocrats do not automatically install democracy. Rather, virtually every democratic transition culminates with a decision maker in autocracy (either a single leader or a small set of junta or ruling party leaders) accepting democratization, albeit perhaps reluctantly and under pressure.

So how is this “miracle” possible? This book proposes that the popular premise is wrong. Instead, democratization is most likely when the resulting shift in power is as small as possible, because leaders either are already weak in autocracy or believe they will be strong in democracy. If autocratic leaders calculate they have *little to lose* from democracy in long-term power and personal security, they will be less determined to resist it. When this is combined with strong pro-democratic pressure, autocrats concede to democratization. This does not require that power is the *only* thing rulers care about, but it does place it front and center. As a result, the less power autocratic leaders sacrifice by accepting democracy, the more likely it becomes.

The first component in this calculation is the leader’s current power in autocracy, with *power* defined as a combination of leader security and regime strength. Leaders want to survive in office and have the capacity to rule as they see fit. To be more precise, I define *leader insecurity* as the current likelihood that a regime’s leadership will be coercively overthrown, by either mass or elite challenges. I define *regime strength* as the institutional and material characteristics—including coercive capacity, internal cohesion, state penetration, and popular legitimacy—that help regimes govern and survive challenges. Strong regimes typically have more secure leaders, although a weak regime may be temporarily secure because it doesn’t face any organized challenges. Leader security is especially significant because autocrats face terrible personal consequences if they are coercively overthrown.

Unfortunately for democrats, autocratic equilibria—in which leaders and support coalitions combine to neutralize opponents—can be very hard to shake once locked into place. To sufficiently erode autocratic power, the status quo must first be *disrupted* through major violent events and crises. Especially when this includes leader turnover, the resulting instability yields

highly insecure leaders, supporters uncertain about regime survival, and newly emboldened opponents. In fact, most democratic transitions since 1800 featured an irregular executive turnover in the five years prior to democratization, compared with less than one in four other autocracies.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, peaceful mass challenges (such as protests and strikes) by themselves tend not to seriously weaken regimes nor pose a mortal threat to strong ones. A cohesive autocratic government with military loyalty and a determination to retain power is extremely difficult to defeat from below (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 21; Goodwin 2001; Bellin 2004). However, *after* autocratic regimes are disrupted, they become much more vulnerable to mass opposition, similar to the pattern for social revolution (Skocpol 1979; Goodwin 2001).

The second component in the “little to lose” calculation is autocratic leaders’ expectations about their power in democracy. This is mainly driven by the likelihood of winning elections, with secondary factors including other governing positions (such as cabinet offices and regional control) and reserves of institutional power (such as control of the military). Dictators, ruling parties, and regime allies frequently prosper within democracy, yet the connection from this phenomenon to democratization is woefully understudied (Slater and Wong 2013; Albertus and Menaldo 2018; Miller 2021). Perhaps surprisingly, the final autocratic decision maker in accepting democracy subsequently won the executive or legislature after 48% of all transitions, mainly through a continuing ruling party.<sup>3</sup> When a party accedes to democratization, it has more than a three-fourths chance of winning democratic power. Thus, autocrats with strong electoral parties should be much more willing to tolerate a democratic outcome.

In sum, autocrats are most likely to democratize when they face little loss of power from democracy, especially when combined with pro-democratic pressure. In turn, this is most likely to be satisfied either after a violent rupture or when ruling party leaders believe they can prosper in democracy. What must be emphasized is that these violent events and ruling parties are almost never *intended* to lead to democracy. Rather, they’re initially elite projects to grab or maintain autocratic power. In the aftermath, autocratic leaders (many of whom take power through the ruptures) face unanticipated consequences that contribute to democratization. We can thus summarize the central thesis as follows: Democratization typically results when an elite struggle for power unintentionally produces a political context in which regime leaders do not sacrifice significant power by accepting democratization.

2. Unless noted otherwise, all descriptive statistics use data described in the appendix.

3. After 65% of transitions, *some* ruler from the autocratic period gained democratic power.

Path	Starting condition	Key motive for democracy	Popular opposition	Examples
Shock	Recent violent shock (coup, civil war, assassination, foreign war defeat, hegemon withdrawal)	Leader insecurity in autocracy	Protests Violent threats	Italy 1946 Portugal 1976 Argentina 1983 Thailand 2011
Electoral continuity	Established electoral ruling party	Positive electoral prospects in democracy	Protests Electoral mobilization	UK 1885 Taiwan 1996 Mexico 2000

FIGURE 1.1. Summary of the two paths to democratization.

### THE PATHS AND PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION

Having laid out this general logic, what does the process of democratization look like? What are the observable sequences of events that show this theory in action? It's most illuminating to think in terms of two *paths*, concretely defined patterns of democratization that illustrate the logic of minimal power loss.

In the first and more common path, democratization follows one or more violent *shocks* that disrupt the autocratic equilibrium. In most cases, this shock causes turnover to a new autocrat, while in others the autocrat survives but is often so insecure that democracy becomes a salvation rather than a sacrifice. I limit shocks to five of the most significant violent events, divided into domestic elite conflicts (coups, civil wars, and assassinations) and foreign shocks (defeat in war and withdrawal of an autocratic hegemon). Relying on a specific list allows for a more concrete categorization than trying to subjectively judge disruption and weakness. It also draws attention to unique elements of the political environments following events like coups and civil wars (see chapters 3 and 4). I typically require democratization to occur within five years and in 88% of cases it's within three years. A total of 100 of 139 transitions since 1800 follow the shock path, including the most recent transitions in Portugal, Greece, Argentina, and Thailand.

In the second path, which I call *electoral continuity*, an established ruling party (in power for at least four years) democratizes through elections because party leaders expect to remain competitive within democracy. To proxy for these expectations, I conservatively include only those parties that regained executive or legislature power within the ensuing democracy.<sup>4</sup> As a result, leaders would need to have severely underestimated their chances to fail the confidence requirement. Chapter 5 overviews extensive supporting evidence that party

4. For quantitative testing predicting democratization, I instead use a simpler measure of whether a sufficiently durable electoral ruling party exists.



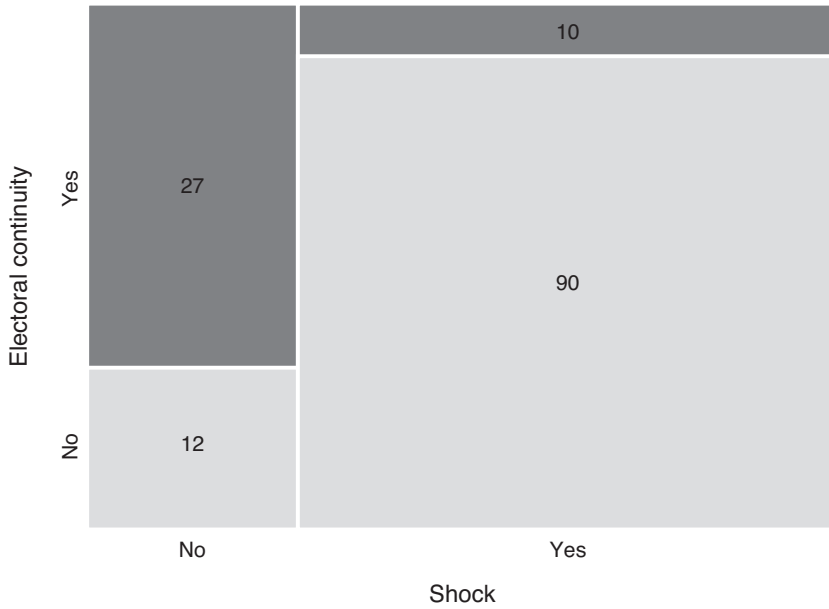


FIGURE 1.2. Two paths to democratization. Frequencies of all 139 democratic transitions since 1800 by the path taken. Over 90% of transitions fit either the shock or electoral continuity path.

leaders in these cases democratized with high confidence. To reduce subjectivity, however, my coding of electoral continuity relies solely on the concrete observables of party existence and later electoral success. In total, 37 of 139 transitions fit this path, encompassing older transitions in the UK and Sweden and more recent transitions in Taiwan, Mexico, Ghana, and South Korea. However, 10 of these also follow a shock that's considered more causally significant.

Of 139 democratic transitions since 1800, more than 9 in 10 fit one of these two paths. Thus, they combine to make up a *virtually necessary* condition for democratization. Figure 1.1 summarizes the key features of each path, namely the starting conditions, the central motives for leaders to democratize, and the most common sources of popular pressure. Figure 1.2 displays the number of democratic transitions that fit each path. Only 12 transitions fit neither, although several of these still satisfy the underlying logic well (see chapter 6).

Although clearly distinct paths, they share some important characteristics. For both paths, democratic transitions can be understood as involving two steps. First, an event dislodges the autocratic equilibrium and launches a *disruption period*. For the first path, these are of course the shocks. Many cases involve a series of shocks, but it's usually possible to identify an initial shock that sets off this instability. For electoral continuity, nearly all cases similarly involve a *trigger* that ushers in a more competitive electoral period. These

are a mix of disruptions internal to electoral politics (e.g., party splits) and external (e.g., the Soviet Union's collapse) and are rarely as violent or destabilizing as the shocks. Nearly all of these disruptions flow from elite struggles for power in which the main actors see democracy as at most a possible, but unintended, outcome.

The second step is democratization from the disruption period. In some cases, this occurs rapidly: about a third of shock cases democratize within a year of the initial shock. Others take several years and follow chaotic cycles of multiple autocratic regimes, each exploiting their predecessor's weakness to win power. These periods provide critical openings for pro-democratic actors, allowing democracy to become an explicit goal that opposition and regime actors bargain over.

However, instability also increases the potential for other radical changes, including social revolution, new forms of autocracy, and state collapse (Skocpol 1979; Goodwin 2001; DeFronzo 2011). Democratic actors must win out against these alternatives, as well as the current regime's consolidation of power. Unfortunately, in most cases they fail. Although shocks and ruling parties combine to form a virtually necessary condition for democratization, they are not a *sufficient* one. Success still depends on autocrats deciding they have little to lose and actors maintaining sufficient pro-democratic pressure, with the latter strongly dependent on socioeconomic conditions.

Finally, I qualitatively coded how the final decision to democratize was made in each transition, tracking the specific actors and motives behind this choice. In brief, the decisions overwhelmingly fit into three patterns, corresponding to the mechanisms of high insecurity within autocracy, high expected power in democracy, and an elite-reformer pattern tied to regime weakness and pro-democratic sentiment. See Claim 5 below.

Figure 1.3 presents a visualization of the theory. In the shock path, a violent disruption weakens regimes through effects on leaders, supporters, and the opposition. In the electoral continuity path, a ruling party believes it has strong prospects within democracy. In either context, autocrats believe they have little to lose from democracy. When also facing pro-democratic pressure, they become likely to accept democratization. Additional arrows could be added from opposition openings and ruling parties to pro-democratic pressure, as both provide greater room for democratic actors to organize.

## MAIN THEORETICAL CLAIMS

It's worth taking a breath here and summarizing six key theoretical claims. Each is expanded upon in the following chapter, but this provides a succinct overview and initial exploration of the implications. In chapters 7–9, I develop more specific empirical hypotheses for quantitative testing.

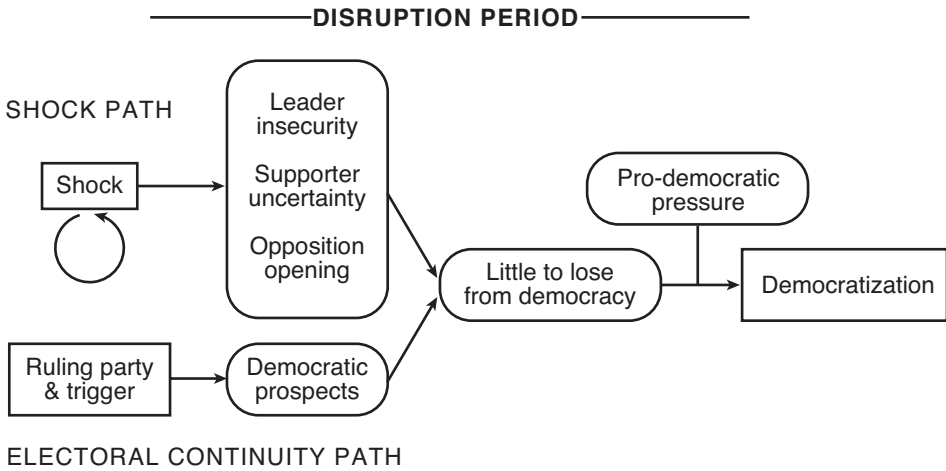


FIGURE 1.3. Summary of the book's theoretical argument, with the key mechanisms in rounded boxes. In the shock path, a violent disruption contributes to regime weakness through leader insecurity, uncertain allies, and openings for mass opposition. In the electoral continuity path, a ruling party believes it has strong prospects for winning democratic power. In either context, autocrats have little to lose by democratizing. When combined with strong pro-democratic pressure, autocrats are highly likely to accede to democratization.

I also indicate how each claim is empirically supported. Across the book, I employ three main types of evidence: case studies (chapters 3–6), cross-country quantitative testing (chapters 7–9), and qualitative measures. The latter—covering elements like the paths, motives for shocks, and the final decisions to democratize—function as “causal process observations,” qualitative codings that provide evidence of causal mechanisms at work and help to discount alternative theories (Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2004).

**Claim 1:** Democratization is most likely when autocratic leaders perceive they have little to lose from democracy in power and personal security, because of either existing weakness within autocracy or high expectations of power within democracy.

There are two main components to this claim: the locus of decision making and the motives for accepting democracy. First, we can source democratization to a decision made by a single autocrat or small set of regime leaders. This is a more innocuous statement than it may appear at first. Although coercive regime changes are common in autocracy, in and of themselves they can only begin a new (perhaps fleeting) non-democratic period. Ultimately, democracy requires an authority in autocracy to accept its installation. This decision may be highly reluctant and influenced by violent threats and protests. We may

judge that the leaders were so vulnerable they had no “real” choice. However, it’s still vital to recognize that a choice is made, rather than viewing democratization as somehow willed into being by societal preferences.

Second, leaders balance the expected benefits from struggling to retain autocracy versus acceding to democracy, with the implications for power and personal security paramount. Facing elite challenges, many autocrats determine that democracy is a tolerable outcome compared to risking violent overthrow. Alternatively, leaders may calculate that they will prosper within democracy.

The case studies and coding of decisions to democratize provide critical qualitative evidence for this claim. In addition, I directly test the mechanisms by showing that an autocrat’s risk of coercive ouster and a ruling party’s likelihood of regaining power in democracy both predict democratization (chapter 7).

**Claim 2:** Democratization almost always occurs from specific political contexts defined by the aftermath of violent shocks or the presence of a confident electoral ruling party.

This claim posits that the conditions in Claim 1 will rarely be satisfied outside of two political contexts. Reaching sufficient weakness in autocracy requires disruption to the autocratic equilibrium in the form of violent instability. Alternatively, for regime leaders to have high confidence in their democratic chances, they typically need an existing ruling party. As a result, more than 9 in 10 democratic transitions closely follow one of five violent shocks or occur with an established ruling party that regains power in democracy.

The rarity of democratization outside these two paths reflects the solidity of autocracy without violent disruption or electoral change. Even challenges like protest movements, economic crises, and internal regime divides (that don’t result in coups) are usually insufficient to dislodge these regimes. Thus, democratization is almost never driven by popular pressure from below or strategic choices to democratize independent of these political contexts.

The paths coding provides the clearest evidence for this claim. The case studies, which are organized around the individual shocks and electoral continuity, focus on how they contribute to regime weakness, electoral confidence, and ultimately democratization. Finally, empirical tests in chapter 7 show that shocks and durable ruling parties strongly predict democratization, whereas the likelihood outside these contexts is extremely low (around 1 success every 200 years).

**Claim 3:** The initial shocks and events that disrupt stable autocracies are almost never intended to lead to democratization.

The events that produce the distinctive contexts leading to democratization are almost exclusively about elite contestation for power. In only six transitions (four coups and two foreign wars) did elites carry out an initial shock with the intention of causing democratization. In all other cases, autocrats

or foreign powers hoped to establish a new autocratic regime or opposed the regime for other political reasons. In some, elite reformers took power intending to democratize, but within *existing* disruption periods. Similarly, in the electoral continuity cases, none of the ruling parties were founded with the goal of democratizing and nearly all of the events that triggered heightened competition were outside of any actor's control (e.g., economic crisis, Soviet collapse). Thus, democracy is usually an entirely unintended outcome of elite rivalries and autocratic failures. As evidence for this, I track the actors and motives behind the initial disruptive events and confirm that virtually none were motivated by democratization.

Claim 4: Shocks and confident ruling parties create openings for pro-democratic activity and make this activity more effective at achieving democratization.

A consequence of autocratic disruption and weakness is greater opportunities for pro-democratic actors, including popular protest and international pressure. The same applies to competitive electoral regimes following disruption. In addition, these contexts add leverage to pro-democratic pressure since regimes are more vulnerable. Thus, pro-democratic activity takes on a pivotal importance in a way it usually doesn't in stable autocratic periods.

This has several implications. First, pro-democratic activity should be more common following shocks and with durable ruling parties. Second, democratization should be more likely in these contexts when combined with strong pro-democratic pressure. This helps to explain variation in democratic success from these contexts, as democracy always competes against autocratic reconsolidation and other forms of radical change. Third, country characteristics that predict pro-democratic sentiment should have a heightened importance following shocks and with durable parties. Chief among these are regional democracy and modernization variables like economic development and literacy.

A range of evidence supports this claim. I coded for the presence of significant pro-democratic protest, international pressure, and elite reformers—89% of transitions on the paths include at least one. The case studies bring close attention to how shocks and competitive elections increase openings for pro-democratic opposition. Lastly, empirical tests in chapter 8 confirm that protests and other pro-democratic activities are more common following shocks or with ruling parties and are more democratizing in combination with them. The same applies to structural factors like regional democracy and economic development, which have their strongest effects following shocks. In turn, this suggests a new framework for testing how structural factors flow through preceding events to predict democratization.

Claim 5: Nearly all final decisions to democratize are made by either autocrats facing severe elite threats, reformers who grab power within

existing disruption periods, or rulers/parties that regain power in democracy.

Many democratization theories leave it unclear how the final decision to democratize is made. To validate the mechanisms, I qualitatively coded the specific actors and motives behind this decision.<sup>5</sup> These decisions overwhelmingly fall into three patterns. First, in the *Salvation* pattern, a leader accedes to democratization due to high insecurity stemming from elite challengers. This is a direct observation of the leader insecurity mechanism and is most common after domestic shocks. Second, in the *Reformer* pattern, a reform-minded elite takes power *within* a preexisting disruption period (i.e., not through an initial shock) and quickly and deliberately pushes the country to democracy. This is mutually exclusive from the Salvation pattern and is closely connected to regime weakness and pro-democratic sentiment. Third, in the *Regained Power* pattern, the final autocratic decision maker (either a leader or party) gains power in the ensuing democracy. This can overlap with the other two and is satisfied by all electoral continuity cases. Again, this identifies the autocrats who believed they could compete in democracy.

Seven in eight transitions overall and 94% of those on the paths fit one of these patterns. In contrast, it is rare to find decisions to democratize driven purely by protest threats, elite-driven strategies without a strong ruling party or insecure leaders, or pro-democratic actors who carry out the initial shock and then democratize.

Claim 6: Despite some shared logical features, the two paths significantly differ on the circumstances of democratization and the chances of democratic success.

The existence of an overarching logic to democratization should not obscure the pronounced variation in how transitions play out. The shock and electoral continuity paths differ on the average level of disorder and violence, the opposition's mode of participation, the typical motives of the final autocrat, the displacement of autocratic elites, and their control of the transition. In turn, chapter 9 shows that electoral continuity leads to stabler and higher-quality democracies, although with larger roles for autocratic elites and greater institutional continuity.

### *Contributions to Literature and Implications*

How does this book relate to previous work on democratization? No attempt is made to comprehensively cover this literature, which might fill ten similarly sized books. Rather, I tackle three more modest aims. First, I explain how this

5. For more detail, see the next chapter and the appendix.

book's theory complements existing perspectives on democratization. Second, I discuss perspectives that my theory does challenge. Third, I explain how I advance related strands of the literature on regime power, critical events, and expectations about democracy. In addition, I overview some of the practical implications of the theory.

### INTEGRATION OF PAST WORK

At its core, this book concerns how the near-term political context shapes democratization. Because this is a relatively underexamined area, the framework is compatible with many existing theories and can help to integrate and contextualize them, such as by explaining under what conditions causal factors are most powerful. In particular, the political context provides a bridge between the structural- and actor-based approaches to democratization that have dominated past work.

The oldest segment of the literature, known as the *structural school*, focuses on country characteristics and broad socioeconomic forces like economic development, culture, and education (Lipset 1959, 1960; Moore 1966; Dahl 1971; Przeworski et al. 2000; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Long-term, impersonal elements like average income are said to provide preconditions for democratization (Lipset 1959; de Schweinitz 1964; Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Barro 1999; Boix and Stokes 2003). Despite presenting clear predictions, this work often struggles to identify chains of causation that translate into actors' choices on regime change. As Huntington (1991: 107) reminds us, "A democratic regime is installed not by trends but by people."

This theoretical fuzziness produced a turn in the literature, often termed the *actor-based school*, that shifted attention to individuals, strategic choices, and sequences of events (Rustow 1970; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Di Palma 1990; Colomer 1991, 2000; Przeworski 1991). This perspective sees democratization as possible almost anywhere if actors make the correct choices. Yet because transitions are buffeted by "unexpected events (*fortuna*), insufficient information, [and] hurried and audacious choices" (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 4), luck and contingency also loom large. Critics contend that this approach problematically minimizes societal actors and the political context (Haggard and Kaufman 1995; R. Collier 1999; Carothers 1999; Way 2008, 2015). As Remmer (1991) argues, a focus on luck and individual initiative is effectively a retreat from generalizable theory. Causal claims, if any, tend to be specific to the actor and country, rendering democratization inexplicable and unpredictable prior to the moment of transition (Mahoney and Snyder 1999).

Instead of a long-term structural view or an exclusive focus on the moment of transition, this book's theory lies squarely in the middle and links the two approaches. As shown in chapter 8, structural characteristics strongly predict

shocks and ruling parties and take on greater importance in their aftermath. This provides critical connecting tissue from structure to the arena in which democratization decisions are made. Further, the theory complements the actor-based approach by incorporating individual strategic choices but improves generalizability by allowing the political context to influence these decisions.<sup>6</sup>

The same integrative logic applies to other causal factors for democratization. Instead of challenging their causal impact, this book's framework indicates *when* these factors are most likely to matter. For instance, the theory certainly does not imply that popular protest is ineffectual. Rather, results show it is *most* effective following violent shocks and against electoral ruling parties. The mediation model introduced in chapter 8 provides researchers a method of testing variables that reveals not just whether they predict democratization but *why*.

A useful analogy is that the theory works like a lens, through which causal factors pass to produce a final image. A lens can refract, dim, or color the incoming light, but the image is a product of both working together. When the light changes, so does the image. Similarly, various causal factors—from protest to economic development—can influence democratization through regime power, shocks, and parties, often with intricate patterns explicable by the theory.

### CHALLENGES TO PAST WORK

Although consistent with some theories, this book challenges many others, especially regarding the process and fundamental logic of democratization. Most obviously, it disputes a commonly held idea that violent events like coups and civil wars are detrimental to reaching democracy. As a theory about minimizing shifts in power, it challenges images of democratization as wholesale defeats for unified autocrats at the hands of the masses. It also clarifies the importance of tracking individual leaders and regimes to understand authoritarian outcomes.

Yet the most significant challenge is to the neglect of *context* in theories of democratization. I argue that political context, especially how regime power is transformed by major ruptures like coups and wars, is a necessary element for understanding democratic transitions. Omitting it from theories has led to a proliferation of puzzles, misunderstood cases, and weak predictions. For instance, it has contributed to a presumption that protest-led democratization is always possible, so that if it fails the reason must lie within the protest

6. This follows past attempts to integrate structure and agency by allowing structure to influence actors' preferences, choice sets, and resources (Karl 1990; Mahoney and Snyder 1999).



movement. To the contrary, political structure strongly predicts when protests succeed or fail (Schock 2005; Way 2008, 2015). This neglect of context extends to how scholars explain both the causes and process of democratization.

A widespread assumption is that democratization can be understood as a direct function of societal actors' preferences. In other words, democracy emerges if it has sufficient support in mass culture (Dahl 1971; Lipset 1994; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Woodberry 2012) or among class representatives (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992), especially economic elites (Llavador and Oxoby 2005; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Ansell and Samuels 2014; Albertus and Gay 2017). Yet this view neglects the intervening role of regime power, as sufficiently strong regimes can nullify even the most widespread democratic sentiment. Instead, we should expect mass preferences to matter after the regime has been disrupted through shocks and crises. Overlooking such cataclysmic events is like trying to understand losses at sea by focusing on the sailors' desires to return home and ignoring the storms.

An instructive parallel is the modern literature on social revolutions. Skocpol (1979) criticized earlier work for seeing revolutions as products of popular dissatisfaction and the purposive organization of revolutionary movements. Although these elements are not irrelevant, revolutions depend first on the state facing a crisis that leaves it vulnerable. Revolutions require "politico-military crises of state and class domination" (Skocpol 1979: 17) that "both weaken[s] the state and embolden[s] the opposition" (Foran 2005: 22). Skocpol focused on international crises surrounding war, while more recent work encompasses various domestic and economic crises (Goodwin 2001; Foran 2005; DeFronzo 2011). Thus, the state must be front and center, with its leaders not reducible to dominant classes (Skocpol 1979: 29). I place a similar emphasis on regime vulnerability and crisis in reaching a different popular outcome. However, this outcome is usually reached more consensually, including through an electoral continuity path that has no parallel for revolutions.

The most common framework for describing the democratization process divides by the actors responsible for pushing along the transition (Karl 1990; Huntington 1991; Przeworski 1991; Haggard and Kaufman 2016). Huntington (1991), for instance, contrasts transitions directed *from below* by opposition movements, *from above* by regime insiders, and *from joint action*. Although a useful descriptive tool, reducing most transitions to a single protagonist overlooks strategic interaction and the political context. For instance, popular protest is most effective only *after* elites have electorally liberalized or weakened the regime through violent conflict. Indeed, nearly all transitions combine actions from above and below, with different actors taking the initiative at different times (Casper and Taylor 1996; Wood 2000). South Africa's democratization, for instance, was prefaced by years of protest and mass violence, then reform by ruling party elites, and finally extended bargaining (Jung and Shapiro 1995; Sparks 1996; Wood 2000).

Identifying *who* is driving democratization is ultimately a way of redefining the outcome to be explained. If from below, we need to identify what allowed popular actors to reach a dominant position and why regime leaders relented. If from above, we need to explain what motivated elites' choices. A gradually liberalizing ruling party and a coup leader retreating due to elite threats are both transitions from above, but radically dissimilar processes. Therefore, recognizing the constellations of power that shape transitions is indispensable to *how* and *why* they succeed.

Falling squarely on the “from above” side, O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986) influential theory argues that democratic openings stem from splits between regime *soft-liners* and *hard-liners*, who are defined by their support for or opposition to liberalization. In fact, they claim that *all* transitions are “the consequence—direct or indirect—of important divisions within the authoritarian regime” (19). Successful transitions then require soft-liners to become dominant and ally with opposition moderates, often through an explicit pact (Colomer 1991; Przeworski 1991). This book agrees on several points, such as the centrality of the state, the rarity of transitions driven solely from below, and the common occurrence of openings prior to democratization. However, the shock path is otherwise only superficially similar. Although shocks often involve elite splits, these are violent ruptures that weaken or overthrow autocracies, not ideological divides within continuing regimes. In other cases, especially electoral continuity, the democratizing regime need not be internally divided, nor is there necessarily an accord with opposition actors. Thus, I don't find the O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) pattern to fit many cases, although it does match some of the outliers.

#### OTHER RELATED WORK

This book's theory intersects with several existing strands of literature. For starters, autocratic elections and the five shocks have each been linked to democratization, although in varying depth and without anyone integrating these events into a general theory. Further, the work on elections has emphasized their danger for autocrats, whereas I stress their contribution to long-term *security*. This research is discussed in chapters 3–5. Here, I address more general theoretical areas, specifically how regime power, violent events, and expectations about democracy have been treated in past work.

The democratization literature has only recently given close attention to the critical role of autocratic regime strength, including coercive capacity (Bellin 2004; Levitsky and Way 2010; Albertus and Menaldo 2012; Andersen et al. 2014; Way 2015) and institutional organization (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Slater 2006, 2010; Levitsky and Way 2010; Svobik 2012). For instance, Way (2015) argues that rising political competition in post-Soviet countries often results from state weakness rather than pro-democratic

sentiment or opposition strength. Given the importance of regime incapacity, many scholars recognize that democratization can be disordered and violent (Moore 1966; Wood 2000; Berman 2007; Klopp and Zuern 2007; Cervellati, Fortunato, and Sunde 2014; Varol 2017), “a story of narrow squeaks and unexpected twists” (Mazower 1998: xii) and “notoriously a chaotic affair” (Marks 1992: 397). Although O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 66) compare transitions to a “multilayered chess game,” they also note that chaos coexists with strategy: behavior is “tumultuous and impulsive . . . with people challenging the rules on every move, pushing and shoving to get to the board, shouting out advice and threats from the sidelines, trying to cheat wherever they can.”

This focus on autocratic weakness and disorder has brought attention to how disruptive events can provide democratic openings (Marks 1992; Casper and Taylor 1996; Colomer 2000; Higley and Burton 2006; Miller 2012). These can take the form of geopolitical shifts like the Soviet Union’s collapse (Huntington 1991; Gunitsky 2017), economic crises (Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Aidt and Leon 2016; Houle, Kayser, and Xiang 2016), or scattered events like war and leader deaths (Marks 1992; Linz and Stepan 1996: 57–60; Boix 2003: 28–29; Treisman 2015). These events can form “critical junctures” that set regimes on divergent and often unanticipated trajectories (Paige 1997; Mahoney 2001; Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010).

For the most part, however, disruptive events in this literature are treated in passing as exogenous sources of regime crises that don’t connect to a deeper theory of democratization.<sup>7</sup> Exceptions, like the work on coups and civil wars, are limited to specific events and struggle to account for how they translate to democratization, often mistaking the events as intentionally pro-democratic (see chapter 3). This book fills a need for a more expansive theory that encompasses a full range of shocks and explains the resulting process of regime change. Further, it draws attention to the interactive role of pro-democratic pressure following disruption.

A substantial literature touches on how elite expectations about democracy influence their resistance to democratization. This work has especially focused on fears of policy radicalism within democracy, including high levels of redistribution (Przeworski 1991; Wood 2000; Boix 2003; Lizzeri and Persico 2004; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Dunning 2008; McKoy and Miller 2012). Logically, leaders will also fiercely oppose democratization if it threatens them with prosecution (Huntington 1991; Krcmaric 2018) or economic ruin (Baturu 2017; Albertus 2019). As Przeworski (2015: 102) quotes a Polish communist reformer, “What matters is not *whether* we would win or lose but *what* we would lose.” Despite leaving a bad taste in the mouth, amnesty and

7. For instance, O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986) note that elite splits can follow from protest or autocratic failure but treat this as external to their theory (R. Collier 1999: 5) and don’t connect the idea to specific events (except for a fleeting mention of defeat in war).

other guarantees are therefore often necessary to reassure outgoing autocrats (Dahl 1971; Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Albertus and Menaldo 2018). The emphasis in this book is instead how expectations about political *power* influence autocratic decision makers, especially ruling parties. This expands on a growing body of work on the subject (e.g., R. Collier 1999; Slater and Wong 2013; Riedl 2014; Ziblatt 2017), which I argue in chapter 5 has been limited in scope and disconnected from wider patterns of democratization.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

What are the theory's practical implications for promoting democracy? Although I provide greater detail in the book's conclusion, it's worth highlighting a few points here. To head off one common concern, the book does *not* suggest sponsoring coups, civil wars, or assassinations to trigger regime change, nor does it characterize them as desirable. These are bloody and destructive events that contribute to democracy precisely because of how destabilizing they are. The resulting cost in lives and long-term political disorder outweighs any temporary boost to democratization.

Instead, the book points to a superior route to democracy: electoral continuity. This is a smoother, often nonviolent path that produces more durable and higher-quality democracies, albeit at the cost of greater institutional persistence (see chapter 9). Although shocks are responsible for far more transitions, the recent trend has moved sharply toward electoral continuity. In turn, this attests to the value of supporting competitive elections and guided liberalization.

Another crucial implication is the importance of context in how protest and foreign pressure influence democratization. These actions are generally ineffectual without shocks or durable ruling parties, implying that much of democracy promotion is misdirected (or mistimed) effort. This helps to explain why so many large-scale protests fail, from the 1848 revolutions to Tiananmen Square to the Arab Spring. Simultaneously, it suggests that while violent events like coups and wars should not be encouraged, they should still be recognized as *opportunities* for democrats to strike.

## *Methodology and Inference*

In this section, I discuss the sample of democratic transitions, the general methodological approach focusing on the paths, threats to causal inference, and alternative explanations.

## THE SAMPLE

This book examines all 139 democratic transitions from 1800 to 2014, focusing on how shocks and ruling parties explain and predict democratization. I start with a case-based qualitative analysis of successful transitions, briefly discuss

how the paths illuminate stable autocracies, and then move to quantitative testing predicting democratization in a full sample of autocracies. The next chapter describes how democracy is defined, as well as the consistency of findings using other democracy measures.

As a starting point for the qualitative analysis, I developed a detailed case history for each transition, covering the key actors and events leading up through democratization. These histories collectively draw on thousands of sources, including past case studies, news accounts, primary documents, and election results. Synopses of these histories are in the appendix.

Using these histories and event data, I qualitatively coded several features of each case. Most importantly, I determined which cases fit the two paths. Again, the shock path requires democratization to follow any of five violent events (coups, civil wars, assassinations, defeat in foreign war, and hegemonic withdrawal), generally within five years or less. The electoral continuity path requires a ruling party to democratize through elections and regain power in democracy. In total, 127 cases satisfy one of these strict criteria, leaving 12 outliers. In addition, I coded the final decision to democratize, the presence of pro-democratic protest and international pressure, and the motives for shocks. Further detail is in chapter 2 and the appendix.

By covering all cases since 1800 (including microstates), this is to my knowledge the most comprehensive qualitative analysis of democratization to date. This sacrifices depth on individual cases but greatly improves generalizability. A continual problem with the democratization literature is that theories are often built on a small number of cases in specific periods or regions (Remmer 1991; Bunce 2000, 2003; Munck 2001; Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010; Haggard and Kaufman 2016). For instance, O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986) theory fit a pattern common in Latin America in the 1970s–1980s but less so elsewhere (McFaul 2002), whereas post–Cold War transitions shifted attention to mass protest (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Bunce 2003). The literature has also focused on a few prominent cases like Brazil, Mexico, Poland, and South Africa. Significantly, several of this book's outliers have disproportionately influenced past theory, including the pacted transitions of Uruguay and Brazil and cases like South Africa with unusually large shifts in power. In this book, all cases are given equal weight in theory generation and descriptive statistics. As a result, wholly ignored, undertheorized, or “anomalous” cases like San Marino, Suriname, Cape Verde, and Portugal are given their proper due as equally informative examples of how and why democratization happens.

## GENERAL METHODOLOGY

Having already summarized the book's main theoretical claims and how they are tested, I focus here on my general methodological approach, particularly how the two paths structure the book's organization and empirics. According

to the theory, a “little to lose” dynamic drives autocrats’ choices to democratize, especially when combined with pro-democratic pressure. The paths describe *how* this is satisfied in successful transitions.

Following the general theory in the next chapter, I organize the case analysis in chapters 3–5 around the six path conditions (five shocks plus electoral continuity). For each, I develop specific theory on how they contribute to democratization. This is followed by case analysis, with two main purposes. First, I describe subpatterns within each category. For instance, I differentiate civil war cases by the war’s outcome. This adds further explanatory power and depth to the patterns of democratization. Second, the cases lend support for the theory’s key mechanisms. For shocks, these include leader insecurity, regime weakness, and openings for pro-democratic actors. For electoral continuity, I focus on leaders’ confidence in their parties’ democratic prospects. Where possible, I incorporate judgments in the secondary literature regarding motives and chains of causation. The most in-depth case studies cover Portugal, Bolivia, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Spain, Japan, Poland, the UK, Brazil, and Madagascar, providing global and temporal breadth.

To avoid focusing solely on successes, a common limitation of democratization studies, I next examine non-democratizing cases in chapter 6 and then a full sample of autocracies. In chapters 7–9, I quantitatively test the direct effects of shocks and ruling parties on democratization, their interactive effects with protest and economic structure, and the paths’ effects on democratic survival. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, I developed an extensive global data set covering 1800–2014. For all variables, I carefully extended and merged existing data sources. For shocks and ruling parties, as well as other important political variables, I tried to ensure full global and temporal coverage by filling in the remaining country-years using historical sources. (See the appendix for further detail.) All data mentioned but not cited in the text are covered there.

Chapter 7 shows that shocks and ruling parties sharply raise the likelihood of democratization. The annual chance is magnified by 5 times with a shock in the previous five years and by 3.5 times with a durable ruling party (compared to neither). Yet despite their predictive power, most shocks and ruling parties fail to produce democratization. Coups, for instance, precede about half of all transitions, but 7 in 8 coups are not followed by democratization within five years, reflecting the rarity and difficulty of transition. Rather than being sufficient for democratization, the paths are facilitating conditions that require further elements to succeed.

Chapter 8 confirms that shocks and ruling parties more strongly predict democratization when combined with pro-democratic activity and structural elements that spread pro-democratic preferences. Similarly, pro-democratic activity is highly predictive in these contexts but has a virtually zero effect outside of them. Further, the interactive effect is so strong that with positive

structural conditions, autocracies are much more likely than not to democratize within five years given shocks or ruling parties.

Organizing the book around the paths has several benefits. Distinguishing among the shocks and electoral continuity embraces distinct routes to democracy rather than a homogeneous, monocausal story. Using objective criteria, including a specific list of shocks, captures the mechanisms in a transparent and concrete manner. In addition, the paths bring attention to the specific political contexts in which democratization happens. No country's politics immediately following a coup or defeat in war can be understood without grappling with this context. Indeed, each type of shock contributes distinct features to the political environment that tie into democratization, such as sharply divided militaries following coups and coercive weakness during civil wars. A complete theory of democratization needs to recognize these features, while also binding the events into a unifying logic.

#### CAUSAL INFERENCE AND ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Nearly all democratic transitions occur through the paths, and empirical testing confirms that shocks and ruling parties strongly predict democratization. Before concluding that this confirms the main theory, to what degree can we infer that these are *causal* effects? Further, could alternative mechanisms explain the link?

This book presents abundant evidence for the causal effects of shocks and confident ruling parties. Causation here simply means that these conditions raise the ensuing likelihood of democratization compared to their absence.<sup>8</sup> For the shocks, causation played out in different ways, sometimes setting off a rapid chain of events with democracy as the final domino and other times selecting for insecure leaders who fumbled around for a bit before democratizing. Note that the shocks are intentionally limited to events with significant political effects. Plainly, experiencing a president's coercive ouster or defeat in war matters to a country's politics. Thus, it's highly plausible these events could affect democratization.

Yet shocks and ruling parties could still be endogenous to factors that also predict democracy. Leaning against this threat is that most major predictors of democratization are unlikely to also predict violent instability or the development of durable electoral ruling parties.<sup>9</sup> Chapter 8 provides strong support

8. In a handful of cases, a shock ends a prior democracy and the country redemocratizes soon after (e.g., Thailand 2011). Since I am predicting *democratization*, these are in fact exemplary cases of causation as the shock contributes to both the autocratic starting point and the democratic outcome.

9. For instance, Miller (2020b) finds that autocratic election adoption and democratization are predicted by entirely different factors.

for this, finding that most structural factors significantly predict shocks and democratization in *opposite* directions. Thus, it's at least as likely that omitted factors lead to an underestimate for shocks. Further, both shocks and ruling party creations are external to the democratization process since they are not a formal part of transitions and rarely result from actors intentionally aiming for democratization.

Regime weakness represents the most plausible confounder for shocks and democratization. I argue shocks produce weak regimes as a central theoretical mechanism, but what if shocks are symptoms as much as causes? Indeed, regime weakness can contribute to shocks by encouraging challenges and making regimes easier to overthrow. Despite this potential mutual causation, there are several reasons why this does not undermine the causal link from shocks to democratization. First, if regime weakness routinely caused democratization independently from shocks, then we should observe many transitions from weak regimes but prior to any shocks. In fact, this should be about as common as the shocks occurring first. Yet democratization absent a shock is very rare (excepting the stronger electoral continuity cases). Second, the causal effects of shocks, including through mechanisms outside of regime weakness, are strongly supported by case analysis in chapters 3 and 4.

Third, many of the shock cases were in fact highly durable prior to the initial shocks, including the regimes preceding democratization in Portugal 1976, Spain 1977, Nicaragua 1984, and the post-communist cases. In the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo held power for 31 years prior to his assassination, which unleashed an extraordinarily unstable period. On average, before the initial shocks, autocratic regimes had continuously held power for 18.7 years and the countries had been autocratic for 53.0 years. Both figures are marginally *higher* than the average for all autocracies. Thus, these were not chronically unstable regimes. Rather, the shocks caused them to destabilize, setting them on the road to democratization.

Nevertheless, I employ several empirical techniques designed to address endogeneity threats, including a *difference-in-differences* model (that controls for country and year) and *placebo tests* (see chapter 7). I emphasize the findings' robustness to potential confounders, using a technique called *extreme bounds analysis* that explores several thousand control combinations. In particular, shocks' effects on democratization show little to no change when controlling for markers of regime weakness. I also contrast shocks with events predicted by similar factors (such as failed coups and revolutions) and find no effects on democratization.

Although there is strong evidence for causation, skeptical readers who doubt this should still find the analysis illuminating. Instead of seeing the shocks as independent causes, one could view them as *proxies* for regime weakness, with the implications for leader insecurity and democratization still following. Even if one thinks the shocks are masks for more fundamental



causes—like regime strength, economic structure, or recalcitrant militaries—the fact remains that democratization proceeds in the unique contexts that follow these shocks.<sup>10</sup> The same applies to electoral continuity, where the electoral confidence logic holds even if the presence of ruling parties is endogenous to other factors.

Finally, suppose we believe in the causal effects. What are the most plausible *alternative explanations* for why the path conditions predict democratization and how do I counter them? For shocks, the simplest alternative (and a presumption of some scholars) is that the shocks are carried out by pro-democratic actors. Thus, democratization results from a deliberate plan and not weakness or unintended consequences. In response, I show that the initial shocks that disrupt autocracies are almost never pro-democratic.<sup>11</sup> For electoral continuity, an alternative is that ruling parties are forced to liberalize, with their expectations about democracy playing no role. After this, some parties later gain power by happenstance, accounting for the pattern. To counter this, chapter 5 furnishes extensive evidence of party agency and the causal importance of electoral confidence.

### *Plan of the Book*

This book presents a revisionist theory that counterintuitively claims that violent ruptures and continuations of autocratic party dominance are integral to democratization. When autocratic leaders face pro-democratic pressure and believe they have little to lose from democracy, because of either existing weakness in autocracy or prospective strength in democracy, they are likely to accept democratization. This corresponds to two main paths to democracy, which account for more than 9 in 10 transitions since 1800. Among many implications, the theory clarifies the interactive roles of elites and masses, showing that popular movements need to grasp opportunities unintentionally pried open by elite conflict. As the theory is based around concrete events, it improves predictions of democratization, while suggesting a new framework for testing structural factors.

Chapter 2 covers key definitions and the theory. It begins by defining the set of 139 democratic transitions and the six conditions (five shocks plus electoral continuity) that delineate the two paths. To open the theory section, I explain why the primary motives for democratization are lacking absent shocks or confident ruling parties, making transition very rare. I then elaborate on the two-step theory of the democratization process. First, a shock or trigger disrupts the autocratic regime, shifting to a period of leader insecurity,

10. After all, masks matter—they block sight, frighten children, heighten drama.

11. Even including later shocks (following existing disruption), fewer than one-sixth of shock cases include a pro-democratic shock.

supporter uncertainty, and openings for opposition actors. Second, facing this challenging environment, dictators abandon repression and accede to democratization.

Chapter 3 begins the qualitative analysis with the democratic transitions following three types of domestic shocks: coups, civil wars, and assassinations. For each, I review the related literature and develop specific theory connecting the events to the mechanisms, especially leader insecurity. For the coup cases, the largest category, I show that democratization centers around military factionalism, failed autocratic projects, and chaotic cycles of violence, rather than pro-democratic coup plots. I contrast cases with single versus multiple coups, as well as by the initial motives of the single coups. Bolivia 1979–82 and Portugal 1976 are the most detailed cases. For civil wars, I argue that ongoing wars (e.g., the Philippines 1986) and stalemates (e.g., Mozambique 1994) should predict democratization more than rebel or government victories, unless the winners are unusually divided or weak. Lastly, I show that assassinations can predict democratization either by creating power vacuums (e.g., Pakistan 1988) or by shifting power to reformist leaders (e.g., Spain 1977).

Chapter 4 examines two international shocks: defeat in international war and withdrawal of an autocratic hegemon. I argue that *defeat* in war has a special relationship to democratization, matching an earlier pattern for liberalization in medieval Europe. I divide the cases by whether the victor intentionally democratized the country or not. The former include the defeated Axis powers after World War II. More surprisingly, democratization can also result if the victor is indifferent or even hostile to democracy (e.g., Prussia for France 1870). For hegemonic withdrawal, I focus on nine cases of post-communist transition after the Soviet collapse, particularly Poland 1989. I also briefly discuss Nazi Germany's withdrawal in several transitions that are primarily attributed to war.

Chapter 5 covers the electoral continuity cases. I elaborate on the triggers that initially shift ruling parties to heightened competition, as well as the sources of pro-democratic pressure. The chapter's second half presents case evidence that party elites democratized because of positive electoral expectations. I divide between older cases like UK 1885 (involving suffrage extension) and newer cases like Taiwan 1996 (involving increased competition), as well as between parties that kept power through democratization versus winning power later. I also discuss near-misses for the electoral continuity path (e.g., Brazil 1985) and autocrats that *resisted* democratization because they were not confident (e.g., Central African Republic 1993).

Chapter 6 overviews all other autocracies. I first discuss the twelve outliers outside the two paths, arguing that several fit the logic (if not the letter) of specific path conditions and noting some commonalities, such as the roles of protest and autocratic elections. I then examine how the paths framework can help explain autocratic *stability*. In fact, a majority of non-democratizing

autocracies are well explained by the theory as they neither follow shocks nor have a sufficiently durable ruling party.

Chapter 7 begins the quantitative analysis, focusing on direct effects of the shocks and durable ruling parties. Using a range of controls and empirical techniques, I show that these path conditions strongly predict democratization, whereas events like revolutions, coup attempts, and victories in war do not. I also compare subtypes within the shocks (such as civil war outcomes) that test expectations drawn from the case studies. Lastly, I use country- and party-level characteristics to estimate propensities for irregular turnover and party victories in democracy, proxying for leader insecurity and party confidence. Both estimated propensities are shown to predict democratization.

Chapter 8 shows that pro-democratic activity and structural characteristics like economic development have stronger democratizing effects in combination with shocks and durable ruling parties. In fact, given positive structural conditions in either context, it is much more likely than not that countries democratize within five years. I then develop a novel mediation framework for testing how structural variables predict democratization. Country-level factors can predict shocks or ruling parties, as well as interact with them in predicting democratization. This illuminates *why* certain characteristics predict democratization and allows for other nuanced predictions like the type of democratization. I first apply this mediation framework to economic development, then summarize the patterns for a range of other variables, only a hint of the potential applications.

Chapter 9 relates the paths to ensuing democratic performance. I argue that electoral continuity should produce more durable and higher-quality democracies compared to post-shock cases. Empirical analysis confirms that countries that democratize with durable ruling parties produce healthier democracies, especially compared to transitions following domestic shocks.

Chapter 10 summarizes the findings and draws out further implications, such as what the findings recommend for international democracy promotion and opposition strategy. I also offer ideas for work building on this book and explore what the theory suggests for the future of global democracy.

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