# Democratization

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# Theories of Democratization

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## Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the factors that have been proposed as determinants when, where, and why democratization happens. Several of these factors are synthesized into a broader framework that describes human empowerment as an evolutionary force channelling the intentions and strategies of actors towards democratic outcomes.

## Introduction

The question: which political **regime** prevails in which society, and why, has been at the heart of political science since Aristotle's first treatment of the problem. And so is the question as to when and why societies democratize.

Democratization can be understood in three different ways. For one, it is the introduction of democracy in a non-democratic regime. Next, democratization can be understood as the deepening of the democratic qualities of given democracies. Finally, democratization involves the question of the survival of democracy. Technically speaking, the emergence, the deepening, and the survival of democracy are strictly distinct aspects of democratization. But they merge in the question of *sustainable democratization*, that is, the emergence of democracies that develop and endure. Democratization is sustainable to the extent to which it advances in response to pressures from within a society.

There are many different explanations of democratization processes. Provided a grain of truth is in most of these explanations, researchers have too often tried to take sides, favouring one particular factor over all others. But the real challenge is to theorize about how different factors *interplay* in the making of democracy. This is what this chapter aims to achieve.

## The Nature and Origin of Democracy

Before one can think about the causes of democratization one has to have an understanding of what democracy means—for one needs to have an idea of the nature of the phenomenon one wants to explain.

In its literal meaning, 'government by the people', democracy is about the institutionalization of people power. Democrat*ization* is the process by which this happens. People power is institutionalized through *civic freedoms* that entitle people to govern their lives, allowing them to follow their personal preferences in governing their *private* lives and to make their political preferences count in governing *public* life.

In the history of **states**, the institutionalization of people power has been an unlikely achievement. As power maximizing actors, power elites have a natural tendency to give as little power away as possible. There is a natural resistance among elites to grant civic freedoms to the wider public because such freedoms limit elite power (Vanhanen 2003). To acquire civic freedoms, ordinary people had usually to overcome elite resistance and to struggle for their cause (Foweraker and Landman 1997). This is no easy achievement. It requires wider parts of the public to be both *capable* and *willing* to mount pressures on power elites.

Quite logically then, the conditions under which democracy becomes likely must somehow affect the power balance between elites and masses, placing control over resources of power in the hands of the people. Only when some control over resources of power is distributed over wider parts of the public, are ordinary people capable to coordinate their actions and to join forces into **social movements** that are capable to mount pressure on elites (Tarrow 1998). Under these conditions, bargaining power is vested in wider parts of the public as elites cannot access people's resources without consent. And if elites try to extract resources from people, they have to make concessions in the form of civic freedoms. Such was the case when the principle of 'no taxation without representation' was established during pre-industrial capitalism in North America and Western Europe (Downing 1992).

To be sure, no democracy in pre-industrial history would qualify as a democracy under today's standards because one defining element of *mature* democracies, universal suffrage, was unknown. All pre-industrial democracies were *nascent* democracies that restricted entitlements to the propertied classes. But nascent democracy was necessary to create mature democracy, encouraging yet disempowered groups to also push for civic freedoms, until universal suffrage created mature democracies early in the twentieth century in parts of the Western world (Markoff 1996). Since then people's struggles for empowerment have continued and expanded. Within established democracies, civil rights and equal opportunity movements did and do fight to deepen democracy's empowering qualities. Beyond established democracies, people power movements did and do pressure to replace authoritarian rule with democracy.

It is impossible to understand the driving forces of democratization without understanding why and where democracy first emerged. So we must have a closer look at the origin of nascent democracy in pre-industrial times and the factors giving rise to it. Without exception, all nascent democracies are found in agrarian economies of the freeholder type. Most

freeholder societies organized defence in the form of a militia, the citizen-army (Finer 1999). In a freeholder-militia system, all men owning a slot of land provide military service and, in return, are entitled with civic freedoms. In pre-industrial times, a citizen army could only be sustained in a freeholder system. Only the yeoman who could sustain a family on his own could afford the armoury necessary for military service. In a freeholder-militia system citizens had bargaining power against central authorities—for citizens could boycott taxes and military service. Without a standing army at their exclusive disposal, rulers lacked the means to end such boycotts, disabling them to deny or abrogate civic freedoms (McNeill 1968).

Nascent democracy limited **participation** to the propertied classes. Still, compared to other pre-industrial regimes, nascent democracy is characterized by relatively inclusive civic freedoms. This constellation reflects relatively widespread access to basic resources, such as water, land, and armoury, and lack of central control over these resources. These conditions vest action capacities and bargaining power into the wider society and limit the state's repressive potential. The absence versus presence of democracy is about the absence versus presence of centralized control over resources of power (Dahl 1971).

## Democracy and resource distribution

Freeholder systems not only gave rise to nascent democracy but also to pre-industrial capitalism. The combination of freeholdership, pre-industrial capitalism, and nascent democracy is hardly the result of an ingenious act of social engineering, such that some wise men decided at one point in history to create freeholdership, capitalism, and democracy. Instead, this constellation evolved in a cumulative process that was favoured by certain natural endowments. Freeholder systems only emerged where there was lack of centralized control over the resource that makes land valuable: water (Jones 1985). This was the case only where continuous rainfall over the seasons made water so generally available that a centrally coordinated irrigation system was unnecessary (Midlarsky 1997). Continuous rainfall over the seasons is only found in certain climatic zones, especially in North-West Europe, North America, and parts of Australia/New Zealand (Midlarsky 1997). These are the areas where we find the threefold constellation of freeholdership, pre-industrial capitalism, and nascent democracy.

Besides the continuity of rainfall, another natural endowment was conducive to nascent democracy. This condition, too, favours democracy by limiting centralized control over resources—in this case not over water but armoury. When a territory is, by means of its topography, shielded from the continuous threat of land war, there is no necessity to sustain a standing army at the exclusive disposal of a monarch (Downing 1992). With no standing army at hand, a ruler's control over coercion is limited. Hence, the proportion of sea borders (an island position in the optimal case) has been found to be positively related with the occurrence of nascent democracy (Midlarsky 1997). Iceland, the UK, and Scandinavia are examples. A functional equivalent of the shielding effect of sea borders are mountains. Shielded by the Alps from war with neighbours, Switzerland never needed a standing army. It sustained a freeholder-militia system, and is hence among the prime examples of nascent democracy.

Since democracy is about people power, it originates in conditions that place resources of power in the hands of wider parts of the populace, such that authorities cannot access these resources without making concessions to their beholders. But when rulers gain access to a source of revenue they can bring under their control without anyone's consent, they have the means to finance tools of coercion. This is the basis of absolutism, despotism, and autocracy—the opposite of democracy. The sixteenth-century Spanish monarchy turned more absolute after the crown gained control over the silver mines in South America. From then on, the Spanish Habsburgs did not have to ask for consent in the *cortes* to finance military operations (Landes 1998). This is a pre-modern example of what is today known as the 'resource curse'. It is a curse for democracy when a country is endowed with immobile natural resources that are easily brought under central control, giving rulers a source of revenue that requires no one's consent (Boix 2003). These revenues allow rulers to invest into the infrastructure of their power. Thus, 'oil hinders democracy' as Michael Ross (2001) put it.

So, we find both prosperity and democracy to be associated with climate. The more temperate the climate of a country, the more likely it is both to be rich and democratic (Landes 1998). According to Acemoglu and Robinson (2006), the geographic pattern of both prosperity and democracy simply reflects that white Europeans embarked early on a path of both capitalist and democratic development. They brought with them the institutions of capitalism and democracy wherever they could settle in larger numbers, that is, wherever they found a European-like climate. And when they settled in hotter climates, such as the Southern states of the USA or Brazil, they brought slavery and other exploitative institutions with them and resisted democracy. In this view, the global geographic distribution of capitalism and democracy simply reflects where climate 'required' European settlers to introduce slavery and exploitative plantation economies.

But why did Europeans embark on a path of capitalist-democratic development? Simply viewing this as a smart historic choice of Europeans is unsatisfactory. Following Jared Diamond (1997), the more likely reason why Europeans embarked on a course of capitalist-democratic development is that some unique natural endowments made this a more likely 'choice' in Europe than elsewhere.

## Capitalism, industrialization, and democracy

One of the reasons why the duo of pre-industrial capitalism and nascent democracy emerged in Europe, is that, among the major pre-industrial civilizations, Europe was the only one that sustained rainfed freeholder societies on a larger scale (Jones 1985). But within Europe, this feature varies on a geographical gradient, becoming ever more pronounced as one moves north-westward, culminating in the Netherlands and England.

As one approaches Europe's north-west, the continuity of rainfall increases as a result of the influence of the Gulf Stream. In late medieval times, this led to an increasing agrarian surplus towards the north-west (Jones 1985). From this followed an entire chain of consequences, as shown in Figure 6.1: a larger urban population, a denser network of cities, a more commercialized economy, more advanced capitalism, and bigger and economically more powerful middle classes. Capitalism vested bargaining power in the wider society. In the liberal revolutions and the liberation wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the middle classes used this bargaining power against monarchs to establish the principle 'no taxation without representation' (Tilly 1997). This is the birth of nascent democracy, and capitalism preceded it.

However, two qualifications of the claim that capitalism led to democracy are due (see also Ch. 9). First, capitalism led to democracy only where propertied groups, such as rural freeman and urban merchants, represented broad middle classes—not tiny minorities (Moore 1966). This condition was limited to the hubs of the pre-industrial capitalist world economy, centring on North-West Europe and its overseas colonial offshoots in North America (Wallerstein 1974). Colonies that were unsuited for large-scale European settlement were kept under an exploitative regime. Democracy was not imported by Europeans where the colonial interest was focused on extraction rather than settlement (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). Second, pre-industrial capitalism only established nascent democracy, limiting civic freedoms to the propertied classes. The establishment of mature democracy with universal (male) suffrage was a product of industrialization and the working class's struggle for political inclusion (Huber, Stephens, and Rueschemeyer 1992). Yet, industrialization did not always lead to mature democracy, at least not to *enduring* mature democracy. Mature democracy in a stable form followed industrialization only where royal absolutism was prevented or abandoned and where nascent democracy was established already in pre-industrial times (Huntington 1968).

There is no uniform connection between industrialization and democracy. In fact, the fierce class struggles connected with the rising industrial working class often operated against democracy. Of course, industrialization almost always led to the symbolic integration of the working class by granting universal suffrage. But universal suffrage was as often organized in authoritarian ways as in democratic ones. Communist, fascist, and other forms of dictatorship all adopted universal suffrage in the industrial age. And while the working class almost always fought for universal suffrage, it often sided with populist, fascist, and communist parties that aborted the civic freedoms that define democracy (Lipset 1960).

Achieving mature democracy in a stable form at an early stage was neither the achievement of the middle

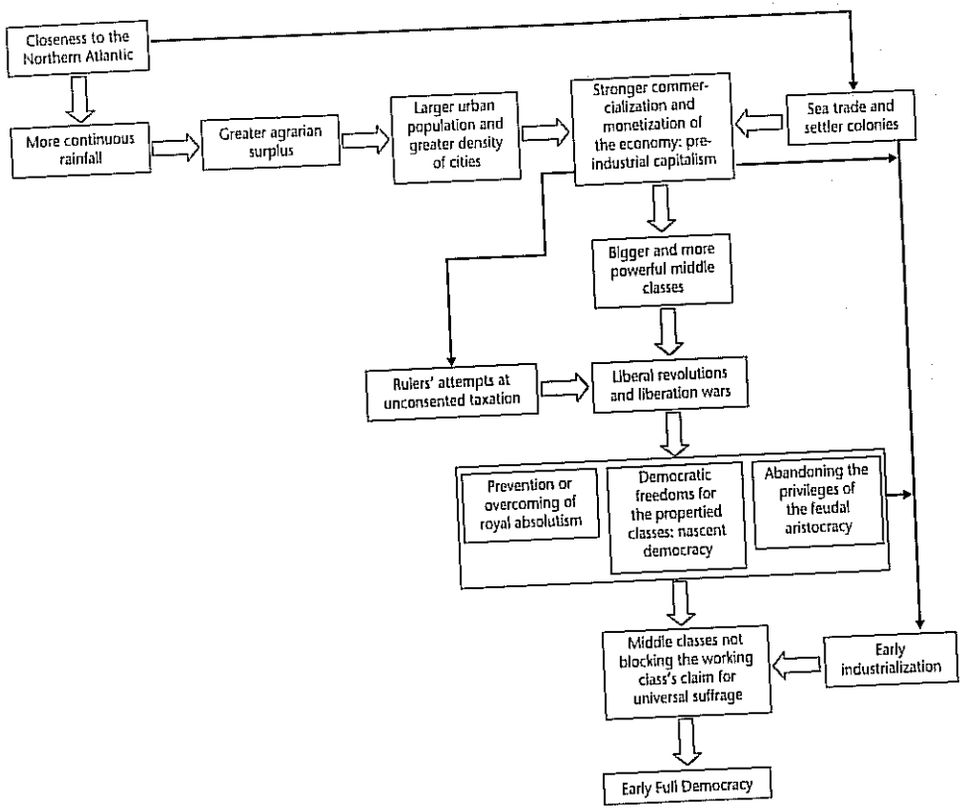



Fig 6.1 Factors explaining the northern Atlantic origins of capitalism and democracy

classes nor the working class alone. It appeared when the middle classes did not take sides against the working class (Collier 1999). This in turn only happened when the middle classes' victory over the aristocracy and royal absolutism was so decisive that neither an alliance with the aristocracy, nor reliance on state repression was an option in dealing with the working class. Partly for reasons originating in natural endowments, these conditions were historically unique to North-West Europe and its overseas offshoots (Moore 1966).

## Social Divisions, Distributional Equality, and Democratization

Except under conditions found in North-West Europe and its overseas offshoots, the social class struggles associated with industrialization did not generally work in favour of democracy. This can be turned into a more general point. When class cleavages and group distinctions turn into enmity, political camps fight for the monopolization of state power in order to become capable of repressing the claims of rival groups. This pattern works against democracy (Dahl 1971).



Class cleavages turn easily into enmities when classes are segregated into separated milieus, when political parties are single-class parties, and when the distribution of economic resources between classes is extremely unequal. Under such circumstances, class coalitions and compromises are unlikely. Rivalry and enmity between groups will prevail (Lipset 1960). In European countries with a tradition of royal absolutism and continued privileges of the aristocracy, industrialization regularly produced such class divisions, polarizing an impoverished rural and urban working class against a privileged class of land owners, industrialists, bankers and office holders in the state apparatus and the army (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Outside Europe, industrialization had the same effect in areas the Europeans colonized out of 'extractive interests' rather than for reasons of settlement (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006).

Wherever industrialization produced class polarization of this kind, the privileged classes would fear working class parties to be voted into office. Once in office, these parties might use their power to enforce land reforms and other redistributive measures that deprive the privileged classes of their privileges. Thus, the privileged classes would rely on state repression to prevent working class parties from gaining power. Confronted with state repression, working class activists would, in turn, radicalize and embrace revolutionary goals, aimed at a total reversion of the existing social order (Collier 1999). This is pretty much the pattern that explains Latin America's long lasting capture between right-wing military regimes and leftist guerrilla warfare (see Ch. 19).

Democratic countries in the 'centre' of world capitalism would often support the repression of working class interests in the 'periphery' in order to be able to outsource labour into cheap-wage regions and in order to prevent communism from taking over countries in the capitalist periphery. During the Cold War, and before the **Washington consensus**, the capitalist world system favoured democracy in the centres of capitalism, but authoritarian rule in its periphery (Wallerstein 1974). In any case, it can be said that extreme social polarization is detrimental to democracy because group polarization turns easily into violent fights for the monopolization of the state (Dahl 1971). Peaceful power transfers from one group to another, as democracy foresees them, are not accepted under these conditions. Instead, military coups and civil wars that end up in the dictatorship of one group over others are the regular result of polarized societal cleavage structures (Huntington 1968).

The logic of group enmity does not only apply to social class. Societies can also be segregated into hostile groups on the basis of religion, language, and ethnicity, and the chances for this to happen increase with a country's religious, linguistic, and ethnic fractionalization, especially when fractionalization goes together with spatial group segregation (Rokkan 1983). Spatial segregation facilitates the stabilization of group identities, and this is an important precondition for the development of group hostilities. Sub-Saharan Africa, as the region with the highest ethnic fractionalization, exemplifies the latter type of group enmity and its negative effect on the chances of democracy to flourish (see Ch. 22). These insights can be turned into positive conditions for the emergence and survival of democracy. The presence of a large middle class, in whom economic differences do not go beyond a certain range, is a condition that eases group enmity, which in turn increases the acceptance of democratic power transfers between groups. Seen in this light, the transition of industrial to post-industrial societies is a positive development because it overcomes the sharp division between the working class and the privileged classes that characterized the industrial age (Bell 1973).

When resources are more equally distributed across socioeconomic, religious, ethnic, and other groups, this can diminish existential hostilities, making groups more inclined to accept each other as legitimate contenders for political power. If there is less at stake in the power game, all groups can be more relaxed about others winning the game for just one electoral round. Relative equality in the distribution of resources has thus a diminishing effect on hostilities for all sorts of groupings, be they class-related or ethnicity-related. In models explaining democratization, measures of income distribution are often used and have many times been found to significantly increase the chances of democracy to emerge and survive (Muller 1995; Vanhanen 2003).

# Colonial Legacies, Religious Traditions, and Democracy

In its northern Atlantic origins, democracy is intimately connected to two traditions: Protestant religion and British descent (Lipset 1959). But this does not mean that Protestantism and British descent per se favoured democracy. They did so insofar as they were situated in the northern Atlantic centre of pre-industrial capitalism (Bollen and Jackman 1985). Neither Protestantism nor Britishness created pre-industrial capitalism. Countries such as the Netherlands, Iceland, and Denmark, were located at the northern Atlantic and so they embraced pre-industrial capitalism and nascent democracy, despite the fact that they were not British. Vice versa, Protestant Prussia was far off the northern Atlantic, so it neither embraced pre-industrial capitalism nor nascent democracy (Tilly 1997). Belgium, by contrast, was mainly Catholic but it is located at the northern Atlantic, so it adopted pre-industrial capitalism and nascent democracy. Contrary to Max Weber (1958 [1904]), who claimed that Protestantism created capitalism, it is just as plausible to argue that societies that were already capitalist adopted Protestantism as the religion granting the most **legitimacy** to the capitalist system (Landes 1998).

The relationship between Protestantism and capitalist democracy is as easily misunderstood as the fact that many of the early democracies are still monarchies today (e.g. UK, The Netherlands, Scandinavian countries). Monarchies survived until today in some of the oldest democracies because these monarchies did not insist on royal absolutism. Instead, they negotiated **social contracts** by which civic freedoms have been granted, creating constitutional monarchies that are anchored in society rather than being absolute from it (Lipset 1960).

Similarly misunderstood is the relationship between Islam and democracy. It has often been said that Islamic traditions are unfavourable to democratization (Huntington 1996). And indeed, the belt of Islamic countries from North-West Africa to South-East Asia is still the least democratized region in the world. However, this might not reflect a negative influence of Islam per se. Instead, for reasons of natural endowments, an unusual proportion of Islamic societies have based their economies on the export of oil. This places revenues in the hands of rulers without requiring anyone's consent, which is what explains the absence of democracy. As Michael Ross (2001; 2008) argues, Islam has little negative effect of its own on democracy, once one controls for oil exports. The same logic that explains why the capitalist development of Protestant societies favoured democracy explains why oil exports in the Islamic societies hinders democracy. Capitalist development tends to spread control over resources of power among wider parts of the society. Oil exports, by contrast, tend to concentrate control over resources of power in the hands of dynasties (see also Chs 8 and 21). On a more general note, explaining certain countries' affinity or aversion to democracy by criteria that simply group them into 'cultural zones,' 'civilizations', or 'families of nation' is inherently unsatisfactory as long as one cannot specify what exactly it is about these grouping criteria that creates these affinities and aversions.

# Modernization and Democratization

Because of democracy's obvious link to capitalist development, 'modernization' has been most often championed as the decisive driver of democratization (Lerner 1958; Lipset 1959; Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994). The thesis that modernization favours democratization has been repeatedly challenged, but time and again it has been re-established against these challenges. Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi (1997), for instance, thought to demonstrate that modernization only helps existing democracies to survive but does not help democracy to emerge. However, Carles Boix and Susan Stokes (2003) used the same data to show that modernization operates in favour of both the emergence and the survival of democracy. As of today, the fact that modernization operates in favour of democracy is beyond serious doubts.

The reasons as to exactly what it is about modernization that operates in favour of democracy are less clear. Modernization constitutes a whole bundle of intertwined processes, including productivity growth, urbanization, occupational specialization, social diversification, rising levels of income and prosperity, rising literacy rates and levels of education, more widely accessible information, more intellectually demanding professions, technological advancement in people's equipment and available infrastructure, including means of communication and transportation, and so on. Which of these processes does exactly what to increase the chances of a country to become and remain democratic is an unresolved problem, and most likely these effects are not isolable. Perhaps, it is precisely the fact that they are so closely intertwined that makes them so powerful.

One thing, however, seems clear that all these processes do together. They enhance the resources available to ordinary people, and this increases the masses' capabilities to launch and sustain collective actions for common demands, mounting effective pressures on state authorities to respond. Given that state authorities, by the nature of their positional interest, aim to preserve as much autonomy from mass pressures as possible, democratization is an unlikely result, unless the masses become capable to overcome the authorities' resistance to empower them (Vanhanen 2003). The major effect of modernization, then, is that it shifts the power balance between elites and the masses to the mass side. Democracy certifies this process institutionally.



### Box 6.1 Key points

- Social divisions that foster group enmities hinder peaceful power transfers that are necessary for democracy to function.
- Democracy is anchored in social conditions in which resources of power are widely distributed among the population so that central authority cannot access these resources without their beholder's consent.
- Certain natural conditions have been favourable to a more widespread control over resources but modernization can happen everywhere and it is important because it tends to distribute the control over resources in the ways that favour democracy.

# International Conflicts, Regime Alliances, and Democratization

The fact that scores of countries have democratized in distinctive international waves suggests that processes of democratization cannot be considered as isolated domestic events (see Chs. 4 and 7). They are influenced by international factors, especially the outcome of confrontations between opposing regime alliances. Therborn (1977) noticed that countries democratize as much as a consequence of wars as of modernization.

Whether, and when, countries democratize has often been decided by the outcome of international confrontations between the enduring alliance of Western democracies and shifting counter-alliances of antidemocratic empires. Thus, regime changes towards and away from democracy are not only a matter of power struggles between pro-democratic and antidemocratic forces *within* countries. Instead, power struggles between opposing regime forces take also place on the international stage, in confrontations between democratic and antidemocratic regime alliances. Indeed, three waves of democratization followed precisely such confrontations. Western

democracies defeated the alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire in World War I; this led to a (later reversed) wave of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe. Western democracies again, together with the Soviet Union, defeated the fascist axis powers in World War II and this led to another wave of democratization, including, for the first time, countries outside the West, such as India and Japan. Finally, Western democracies triumphed over communism in the Cold War, leading to the most recent and massive wave of democratization throughout Eastern Europe and parts of Africa and Asia (Huntington 1991, McFaul 2002).

Part of the explanation as to why democracy has been spreading is the technological and military superiority of democracies, and their tendency to join forces against antidemocratic empires. Together, these two factors have enabled democracies to free societies from the tyranny of antidemocratic empires—when necessary, Western democracies have used their power to install democracy by military intervention, as in Grenada or Iraq. Since the 1980s, they have also used their economic power to press countries depending on Western credits to adopt electoral democracy.

This was a dramatic paradigm shift. During the Cold War, the capitalist world system was favourable to democracy in the centres of capitalism and to authoritarian rule at its periphery. But since the Washington consensus, Western countries promoted electoral democracy throughout the globe. Installing a system of electoral **accountability** seemed to be a better safeguard of investment security than the arbitrary rule of eccentric dictators, especially after communism and socialism lost their appeal. In addition, rich Western democracies dominate the global entertainment industry and images of the living conditions in Western countries spread around the planet. Consequently, people associate everywhere democracy with the freedom and prosperity of the West. And insofar as people find freedom and prosperity attractive, democracy has become the preferred type of regime in most populations of the world (Fukuyama 1990; Klingemann 1999; Inglehart 2003).

The economic, technological, and media dominance of Western democracies are important explanatory factors in the recent spread of democracy. Democratization is hence, to some extent, an externally triggered phenomenon. But whether externally triggered democratization leads to viable and effective democracy still depends on domestic conditions within a country. External influences can open important opportunities for democratic forces in countries where such forces exist. But external influences cannot create democratic forces where they do not exist. And without democratic forces growing strong inside a country, democracy will not be socially embedded. It remains a socially aloof, and hence, hollow phenomenon. Even if most people in a country associate positive things with the term democracy, this does not necessarily mean that people understand the freedoms that define democracy nor that they have the means and the will to struggle for these freedoms.

Externally triggered democratization has led to a spread of electoral democracy, but not necessarily effective democracy (Welzel and Inglehart 2008). Many new democracies have successfully installed competitive electoral regimes but their elites are corrupt and lack a commitment to the rule of law that is needed to enforce the civic freedoms that define democracy (O'Donnell 2004). These deficiencies render democracy ineffective. The installation of electoral democracy can be triggered by external forces and incentives. But whether electoral democracy becomes effective in respecting and protecting people's civic freedoms depends on domestic factors. Democracies have become effective only where the masses put the elites under pressure to respect their freedoms (Welzel 2007).

## Elite Pacts, Mass Mobilization, and Democratization

Besides mass-level factors, actor constellations at the elite level are widely considered decisive for democratization processes. Considering transitions from authoritarian rule to democracy, scholars distinguish two opposing sets of actors: the regime elite and the regime opposition. The regime elite is usually not a monolithic bloc but a coalition of forces that can split under certain circumstances into an orthodox status quo camp and a liberal reform camp. The regime opposition, too, is often divided into a moderate bargaining camp and a radical revolution camp (Casper and Taylor 1996).

The early transition literature argued that a regime opposition in an authoritarian system cannot achieve a transition to democracy unless a split in the regime elite occurs and a liberal reform camp becomes visible (O'Donnell *et al.* 1986; Higley and Burton 2006). Such a split is likely to occur after a major economic crisis, a lost war or other critical events that undermine the legitimacy of the regime. Such critical events lead to the formation of a liberal reform camp that aims to regain legitimacy by initiating a liberalization process. If in such a situation the regime opposition is dominated by a moderate camp whose proponents are willing to bargain with the reform camp in the regime elite, a negotiated transition to democracy becomes possible. This interpretation sees negotiated transitions via elite pacts as the ideal path to democracy. Mass anti-regime mobilization is not only unnecessary for democratic regime transitions from this point of view; it even endangers their success by prompting the regime elite to close its ranks and tempting it to issue repressive measures (Casper and Taylor 1996).

The recent democratization literature has altered these views rather decisively, emphasizing the positive role of non-violent mass opposition in knocking over authoritarian regimes and establishing democracy (Karatnycki and Ackerman 2005; Ulfelder 2005; Welzel 2007). These studies show that democracy is in most cases achieved when ordinary people struggle for it against reluctant elites. Democratization processes of recent decades have been most far-reaching and most successful where the masses were mobilized into democracy movements in such numbers and so ubiquitously that state authorities could not suppress them easily.

## State Repression and Democratizing Mass Pressures

Recent studies on the positive role of mass opposition have altered our view on the survival of authoritarian regimes. Usually it was held that authoritarian regimes can use repression to silence opposition and that this allows them to endure, even if the masses find their regime preferences 'falsified' (Kuran 1991). However, most authoritarian regimes did not survive because of their ability to repress mass opposition (Wintrobe 1998). In fact, most authoritarian regimes did not have to deal with widespread mass opposition most of the time (Francisco 2005). This might partly be so because a credible *threat* of repression alone can keep people from opposing a regime. Yet, for the credibility of repression to become the key factor in stabilizing authoritarian rule, there must be a widespread belief in the illegitimacy of authoritarian rule in the first place. And this does not always seem to be the case. In fact, as Samuel Huntington (1991: 143) notes, most of the authoritarian regimes that were swept away by mass opposition movements late in the twentieth century, were initially 'almost always popular and widely supported'. It is only when people come to find appeal in the freedoms that define democracy that they begin to consider dictatorial powers as illegitimate. Only then does the threat of repression become a relevant stabilization factor of authoritarian rule. And yet, there is ample evidence from the non-violent, pro-democratic mass upheavals of recent decades that when a population begins to long for freedoms, mass opposition does emerge—in spite of repressive threats (Karatnycki and Ackerman 2005; Schock 2005; Welzel 2007).

Once opposition becomes manifest, the success of attempts at repression does not only depend on the extent of coercion used; it depends as much on the size and scope of the mass opposition itself. Indeed, mass opposition can grow so wide that repression becomes too costly, overwhelming the power holders' repressive capacities. In such cases power holders are forced to open the way to a regime change. This happened quite often during the last three decades. Huge mass opposition swept away authoritarian regimes in scores of countries, including some strongly coercive regimes. The point here is that the desire for

democratic freedoms and the corresponding belief in the illegitimacy of dictatorial powers are variables, not constants. When these variables grow strong, they provide a powerful motivational force for the mobilization of mass opposition in authoritarian regimes as soon as opportunities occur (Oberschall 1996). And no regime has the power to foreclose the rise of opportunities. Repression cannot isolate authoritarian regimes from the destabilizing effect of eroding legitimacy and rising mass demands for democracy.

## Mass beliefs and democratization

Socioeconomic modernization and the emergence of mass democracy movements are not necessarily contradictory explanations of democratization. They are simply located at different stages in the causal sequence. By enhancing ordinary people's available resources, modernization increases collective action capacities on the part of the masses and thus makes mass democracy movements possible, be it to achieve democracy when it is denied, to defend it when it is challenged, or to advance it when it stagnates. But even if we link modernization with democracy movements, there is still something missing. As social movement research has shown, powerful mass movements do not simply emerge from growing resources among the population. Social movements must be *inspired* by a common cause that motivates their supporters to take costly and risky actions (McAdam 1986). This requires ideological 'frames' that create meaning and grant legitimacy to a common cause so that people follow it with inner conviction (Snow and Benford 1988). Successful frames are not arbitrary social constructions and not every frame is equally appealing in every population. Instead, frames must resonate with ordinary people's prevailing values to generate widespread and passionate support. This is why values are important. To advance democracy, people have not only to be capable to struggle for its advancement; they also have to be willing to do so. And for this to happen, they must value the freedoms that define democracy. This is not always a given, and is subject to changes in the process of value transformation.

Structural approaches implicitly assume that the masses do always anyways want democracy, so this is a stable and constant factor that does not vary across populations (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). But ample evidence from the major cross-national survey programmes shows that the extent to which ordinary people value democratic freedoms varies widely across populations (Dalton, Shin and Jou 2007; Shin and Tusalem 2007). Hence, to make plausible that modernization favours democracy, one has not only to show that it increases people's capability to struggle for democratic freedoms but also that it increases their willingness to do so.

This seems unlikely from the perspective of **institutional learning theory**. Dankwart Rustow's (1970) 'habituation model', for instance, maintains that people learn to appreciate democracy's freedoms only if they have gathered experience with the practice of these freedoms. This requires democratic institutions *to be in place* for democratic values to emerge. In this view, people's valuation of democratic freedoms is endogenous to the presence of democratic institutions and does not cause them. Since an intrinsic valuation of democratic freedoms among the populace can only occur under enduring democratic institutions, modernization cannot give rise to pro-democratic values, unless it advances under democratic institutions.

By contrast, Christian Welzel and Ronald Inglehart (2008) argue that people's valuation of democratic freedoms reflects how much utility they see in these freedoms. And perceived utility is not only depending on first-hand-experience with the practice of these freedoms. It depends primarily on the resources that people command, for the more resources people have, the more they need freedoms to make use of them (Rostow 1961). Hence, growing and spreading resources increase the utility of democratic freedoms in ways that are easily becoming obvious. Accordingly, Figure 9.3 in Chapter 9 demonstrates that, under mutual controls, the endurance of democracy has no effect on people's valuation of democratic freedoms while modernization has. Emphasis on democratic freedoms is more driven by the utility of these freedoms than by the experience of them. This makes it possible that an intrinsic desire for democracy emerges in authoritarian regimes and that pro-democracy activists can create civic rights frames that resonate with people's emerging valuation of freedoms.

People's valuation of democratic freedoms becomes manifest in emancipative beliefs that emphasize the power, freedom, agency, equality and trustworthiness of ordinary people (Welzel and Inglehart 2008). As these values emerge, they motivate elite-challenging collective actions (Welzel 2007). In fact, emancipative beliefs motivate elite-challenging collective actions on every level of democracy (or lack thereof). And on all levels of democracy, emancipative mass actions operate in favour of democracy, helping to achieve democracy when it was absent and to sustain it when it is present.

Counter-intuitively, at first glance, the type of mass beliefs tapping public support for democracy in a most direct way is irrelevant to democracy, both to its survival and its emergence (Inglehart 2003). The percentage of people in a country who say they support democracy strongly and reject authoritarian alternatives to democracy strictly, has no effect whatsoever on subsequent measures of democracy, once one controls for the dependence of these attitudes on prior democracy (Welzel 2007). What matters is not whether people support democracy but *for what reasons* they do so (Schedler and Sarsfield 2006). Only when people support democracy for the freedoms that define it, are they ready to mount pressures on elites to introduce these freedoms when they are denied, to defend them when they are challenged, or to advance them when they stagnate. Thus, people's explicit support for democracy advances democracy if—and only if—this support is motivated by emancipative values. Devoid of these values, support for democracy has no effect.

## Elite-conceded versus mass-pressured democratization

Two recent approaches link modernization to actor constellations and by doing so claim to have found the reason why modernization favours democratization. The two approaches are in direct contradiction to each other.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) interpret democracy as the result of a struggle over economic redistribution between propertied elites and impoverished masses. In this view, democracy is a struggle for universal suffrage in which both sides are motivated by conflicting interests in economic redistribution. The masses want democracy because universal suffrage would enable them to redistribute income from the elites, and the elites oppose it for precisely the same reason. Consequently, the elites will only concede universal suffrage if they have reason to believe it will not lead to extensive redistribution—otherwise, they will suppress mass demands for suffrage. The reason why modernization is important in this model is that it is assumed to close the income gap between the elites and the masses, tampering the masses' interest in extensive redistribution and the elites' fear of it. Suppressing the masses' demands for democracy becomes then more costly than conceding democracy and so the elites concede democracy. An additional reason why elites have less to fear from conceding democracy is when their capital is so mobile that they can move it out of the reach of taxation into other countries (Boix 2003).

Several strong assumptions underlie this model (these assumptions are not always made explicit but without them the model would not work). First, variation in mass demands for democracy cannot account for the emergence and survival of democracy, since the model assumes that the masses are always in favour of democracy. Second, the decision to democratize is always fully in the hands of the elites; they decide whether to repress mass demands for democracy or whether to concede democracy. Third, modernization increases the chances to democratize by changes in income equality and capital mobility that make universal suffrage more acceptable to the elites.

The human empowerment approach of Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2005) favours the exact opposite assumptions. First, these authors find a great deal of variation in the degree to which given publics desire democratic freedoms. Second, the decision to expand democratic freedoms

**Box 6.2 Key point**

- The global diffusion of democracy resulted partly from the military defeat of anti-democratic empires by allied democratic powers.
- Mass-pressured democratization is the more frequent and more successful type of democratization as compared to merely elite-conceded democratization.

remains exclusively an elite choice only as long as ordinary people's action resources are meagre. But this is precisely what modernization changes. It greatly increases ordinary people's action resources, enabling them to mount more powerful collective actions, putting increasingly effective pressure on elites. Third, the survival of authoritarian regimes is not simply a question of whether elites choose to repress the masses—it reflects the balance of forces between elites and masses, which tends to shift to the mass side with ongoing modernization. The recent waves of democratization were, in large part, a story of effective mass mobilization, motivated by strong emancipative beliefs among people who had become increasingly skilled and ambitious at organizing social movements. In this view, the major effect of modernization is not that it makes democracy more acceptable to elites. It is that modernization increases ordinary people's capabilities and willingness to struggle for democratic freedoms.

## Institutional Configurations and Democracy

Beside socioeconomic modernization, social divisions, international regime alliances, elite constellations, social movements and mass beliefs, institutional factors have been claimed to influence democratization. Barbara Geddes (1999) argues that the type of authoritarian regime shapes the chances of democracy to emerge. She differentiates three types of authoritarian regimes: personalistic regimes, military regimes, and single-party regimes. By means of their institutional variation, these regimes are supposed to be vulnerable to different degrees to democratizing forces, as they offer different opportunities for regime opponents and command different resources to restrict their radius. Indeed, these three types of **authoritarianism** are vulnerable in different degrees to mass regime opposition (Ulfelder 2005). But the point is that all three of them are more likely to break down and to transit to democracy under the pressure of anti-regime mobilization.

The level at which regime type and other institutional variables operate is what is commonly called 'political opportunity structure' (Tarrow 1998). Any authoritarian regime, even the most powerful one, has some sort of a control deficit, depending on institutional structures. Depending on the nature and extent of these control deficits, authoritarian regimes offer democratic forces different opportunities to merge into a democratic mass movement. But one should not forget that opportunity structures do not by themselves create these mass movements and that no authoritarian regime has the power to foreclose opportunities forever. Once the resources and values that make people capable and willing to struggle for freedoms have emerged, people will find and create opportunities to join forces in mass democracy movements. Provided such movements grow strong enough, no authoritarian regime can resist them forever, regardless what institutional type of authoritarian regime it is.

Institutional variation plays also a role when it comes to existing democracy's malfunctions, which can be an important factor of their stability and survival. There is a large literature on the deficiencies of presidential democracies, as opposed to parliamentary democracies, and it is widely believed that presidential democracies are more vulnerable to antidemocratic challenges (Linz and Valenzuela 1994; Mainwaring and Shugart 1997; Lijphart 1999). Again, the argument is about opportunity structures. By means of their institutional structures, presidential democracies might offer antidemocratic challengers better opportunities to operate. But institutional opportunities do not create these challengers. Other, more deeply rooted societal factors are responsible for this.

## The Human Empowerment Path to Democracy

Synthesizing the above discussion, we can now identify a 'master sequence' towards sustainable democratization. Modernization enhances the action resources of ordinary people, making them more capable to struggle for democratic freedoms in launching popular movements that sustain elite-challenging activities.



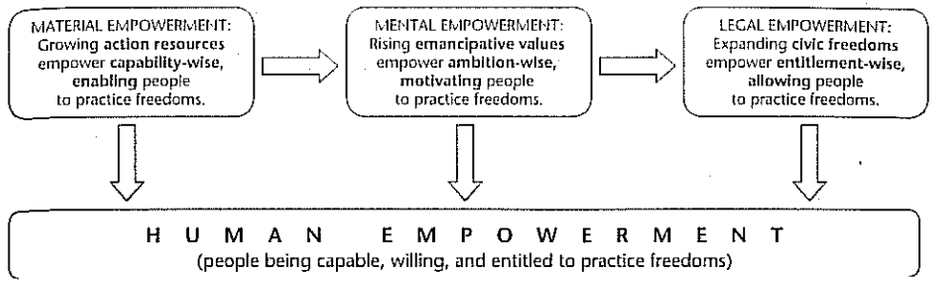



Fig 6.2 The human empowerment path towards democratization

By increasing people's action resources, modernization increases the utility of democratic freedoms and it does so in ways that are easily made perceptible through frames, so that people's valuation of these freedoms grows. This gives rise to emancipative values, making publics more willing to struggle for democratic freedoms.

Popular struggles for democracy become manifest in social movements whose activists frame democratic goals and mobilize the masses in support of these goals in campaigns that sustain elite-challenging actions (Foweraker and Landman 1997). If elites do not voluntarily give in, in anticipation of these mass pressures, these pressures can grow too strong to resist, forcing elites to give in, either by introducing democracy when they have denied it or by advancing it when they were to bloc its further advancement. This sequence is what Welzel and Inglehart (2008) call the 'human empowerment' path to democracy, as shown in Figure 6.2. It follows a sequence such that (1) growing action resources empower people *materially* by making them more capable to struggle for freedoms, (2) rising emancipative beliefs empower them *mentally* by making them more willing to struggle for freedoms, and (3) democracy empowers them *legally* by allowing people to practice freedoms.

The more human empowerment has advanced in its material and mental dimensions, making people capable and willing to practice democratic freedoms, the more sustainable the legal component of human empowerment—democracy—becomes. The human empowerment path to democracy is not the only path to democracy. But it is arguably the only path producing socially embedded and hence sustainable democracy.

Putnam's (1993) social capital theory of democracy represents a specific aspect of the general human empowerment framework (see also Ch. 11). As human empowerment advances in its material and mental dimensions, it makes people more capable and more willing to initiate and sustain collective action. In doing so, human empowerment creates social capital as a by-product.

## A Typology of Democratization Processes

The human empowerment path to democracy is responsive to mass pressures for democracy. This path constitutes *responsive democratization*. This has been the dominant type of democratization in the emergence of nascent democracies and in the global wave of democratization of recent times. But there are other types of democratization processes that do not respond to mass pressures. These types can be classified as *enlightened democratization*, *opportunistic democratization*, and *imposed democratization*. In each of these types, the power elites' vested interest in monopolizing power is overcome by reasons other than mass pressures. In each of these types this leads to socially detached rather than embedded democracy, the latter of which can only result from mass responsive democratization.

One of the reasons why power elites might overcome their natural resistance to democratize is

when negative historical experiences have discredited alternative forms of government. The adoption of democracy in post-World War II Germany, Italy, and Japan partly fall into this category. This type of *enlightened democratization* is the only type in which elites effectively respect democratic standards even in absence of mass pressures to do so. But this model is very rare in history as it is at odds with power elites' natural tendency to resist democratization.

Another reason why elites concede democracy even in the absence of mass pressures is when these elites depend on the will of external powers and when these powers are pushing for democracy. This case of *imposed democratization* is again typical of post-war democracies such as West Germany, Austria, Italy, and Japan after World War II. The US-led attempts to install democracy in post-war Afghanistan and Iraq fall into the same category of externally imposed democratization, though it is far from clear whether the latter cases will be successful.

Still another and increasingly widespread case in which elites concede democracy in the absence of mass pressures is when they believe they can easily corrupt democratic standards in practice and when the pretence of democracy is perceived as a useful means to open the doors to the international community, especially donor organizations. This case of *opportunistic democratization* has become more likely since the Washington consensus, as a result of which western credits have been tied to conditions of 'good **governance**.'

In the enlightened, imposed, and opportunistic types of democratization, elites concede democracy despite absent mass pressures to do so. Among these three types, elites respect democratic freedoms effectively only in the enlightened type but this type is rare. In the imposed and opportunistic types of democratization, elites do not effectively respect democratic freedoms. Responsive democratization is the only type of democratization in which democracy becomes socially embedded and hence socially sustainable.

# Conclusion

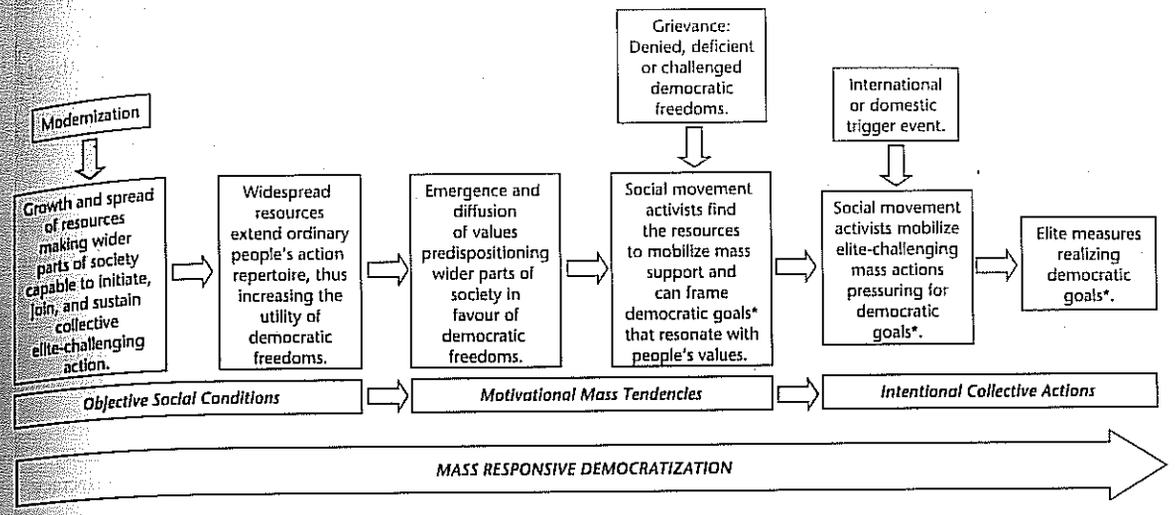
Some approaches to understand democratization focus on societal *conditions*, such as modernization or distributional equality. Other approaches emphasize the role of collective *actions*, including elite pacts or mass mobilization. Conditions and actions are often portrayed as contradictory explanations of democratization when in fact a full understanding of democratization needs to highlight the interplay between conditions and actions.

It is self-evident that democratization is not an automatism that guides itself without agents. Instead, it is the outcome of intentional collective actions, involving strategies of power elites, campaigns of social movement activists, and mass participation. Thus, any explanation of democratization intending to illuminate the role of social conditions must make plausible how these conditions shape actor constellations. On the other hand, it is just as self-evident that actions leading to democratic outcomes are the result of choices that are socially conditioned. Thus, it is the task of action-centred approaches to illuminate how concrete actions respond to social conditions.

Figure 6.3 suggests *motivational mass tendencies* as the intervening force that helps translate *objective social conditions* into *intentional collective actions*. Motivational tendencies are based on shared beliefs and values. They are shaped, on one hand, by social conditions because what people believe and value is not a context-free given but reflects objective circumstances. On the other hand, motivational tendencies direct intentions towards goals that inspire actions.

The path in Figure 6.3 focuses on mass responsive democratization because this is the socially most sustainable type of democratization process. For this type of democratization to become possible, people must have the resources that enable them to act jointly for democratic freedoms, and this is where social conditions become relevant. Socioeconomic modernization, for instance, places more resources into the hands of ordinary people, enhancing their capacity for collective action. But in order to take the risks and costs to act jointly for democratic freedoms, people must passionately believe in these freedoms. This is where emancipative values become important. Where these values develop, they provide a






*Goals aiming at the introduction, deepening or defence of democratic freedoms.

**Fig 6.3** Causal path toward mass-pressured democratization

motivational force that predispositions people in favour of democratic freedoms. If people have acquired both the capability and the willingness to join forces in struggling for democratic freedoms, and if there is reason for grievance because these freedoms are denied, deficient or challenged, at some point a critical event will prompt people to actually act together for these freedoms, be it to establish, to deepen or to defend them. Provided these actions grow strong enough, power elites will be forced to give in to their demands. When this happens we witness mass responsive democratization.

Mass responsive democratization is the joint result of objective social conditions, motivational mass tendencies, and intentional collective actions, triggered by critical events, in the context of enduring grievances. The role of objective social conditions in this causal interplay is that they determine a society's capabilities for collective action. The role of motivational mass tendencies is that they shape the intentions that inspire collective actions. The role of grievances is that they provide a reason to become active for the sake of given goals. The role of critical events is that they provide a trigger for collective actions. And the role of collective actions is that they constitute a challenge that, when becoming strong enough, leads to a political change.

Again, mass responsive democratization is not the only path to democracy. For democracy can be imposed by foreign powers or adopted by unilateral elite actions. But mass responsive democratization is the only path to democracy that creates socially embedded democracy. And only socially embedded democracy is sustainable democracy.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is nascent democracy?
2. Which structural factors favour democratization?
3. Which structural factors impede democratization?
4. Why did democracy and capitalism co-evolve in Western Europe and North America?
5. Why did industrialization not always favour democratization?
6. What is the role of mass motivational tendencies in democratization?

Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for additional questions to accompany each chapter, and a range of other resources: <www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/haerpfer/>.

## FURTHER READING

Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J. A. (2006), *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press). Encompassing account of the origins of democracy from a political economy perspective.

Casper, G. and Taylor, M. M. (1996), *Negotiating Democracy* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press). This book is the best on actor strategies, comparing failed and successful cases of democratization.

Dahl, R. A. (1971), *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press). This classic provides the theoretically most comprehensive account of democracy until today.

Foweraker, J. and Landman, T. (1997), *Citizenship Rights and Social Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). One of the best books on democratization from a social movement perspective.

Huntington, S. P. (1991), *The Third Wave* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press). The classic on waves of democratization and what causes them.

Inglehart, R. and Welzel, C. (2005), *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy* (Canbridge: Cambridge University Press). Perhaps the most comprehensive account of democratization in a political culture perspective.

## IMPORTANT WEBSITES

**<http://repositories.cdlib.org/csd>** This website links to downloadable publications of the Center for the Study of Democracy at UC Irvine.

**<http://democracy.stanford.edu>** This is the website of the Comparative Democratization project of Stanford University, directed by Larry Diamond.

**<www.journalofdemocracy.org>** This is the website of the Journal of Democracy. Some articles are free for download.

**<www.tandf.co.uk/Journals>** This is the website of the Taylor & Francis academic journal *Democratization*. Article abstracts can be read online.

# Part Two

# Causes and Dimensions of Democratization