

Democracy Studies:
Where To From Here?

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Abstract: This review and assessment of the field of democracy studies is organized around three distinct agendas defined in terms of the concepts of democratic transition, democratic stability, and democratic quality. In each case, the definition and justification of the subject matter, the main scholarly works on the subject, and the research findings, are outlined. In addition, the challenges faced by this literature are discussed. This line of analysis is pursued especially in the context of the well established agendas on democratic transition and democratic stability, and focuses on three areas: the conceptualization and measurement of the dependent variables, the integration of causal theories, and the assessment of causal theories. This article offers a balanced assessment, identifying strengths and weaknesses of the literature on democracy. The spirit of this review, however, is decidedly constructive, seeking to provide a map of the most fruitful avenues for future research.

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Scholarly interest in the wave of democratization that began in southern Europe in 1974 led to a truly mind boggling amount of empirical research. These studies conceptualized democracy as a national political regime and focused on democracy as the outcome or dependent variable. Beyond this common overarching interest, however, different researchers have emphasized a broad range of aspects of the politics of democratizing countries, drawn upon various theoretical traditions, and used a diverse set of methods. As the literature has grown and evolved, thus, the need for an assessment and synthesis of this literature has become more imperative. Indeed, as with any research program, such periodic assessments and syntheses play a critical role, helping both to ascertain whether any significant cumulation of knowledge has been attained and to identify the challenges which remain to be tackled and the lines of research that are most likely to be productive.

This paper seeks to respond to this need, offering a comprehensive evaluation of the body of literature on democracy that has been produced over the past twenty years.¹ To organize the discussion, I distinguish among three agendas, which are identified by three concepts that define their primary explanatory concern: democratic transition, democratic stability, and democratic quality. Focusing on these three distinct agendas, in each case I first discuss how the subject matter has been delimited and justified, the main research that has been produced and the findings this research has generated. Overall, this assessment shows that this literature has made some important achievements, focusing scholarly attention on sharply defined yet normatively relevant research questions, offering examples of solid research, and producing valuable findings.

¹As stated, at the broadest level, this literature can be considered a body of work in that it conceptualizes democracy as a national political regime and a dependent variable. Thus, this paper does not discuss the extensive literature in comparative politics and international relations that focuses on democracy as an independent variable. Neither does this paper address the growing literature on notions of citizenship that reach beyond and beneath the national state.

Moving beyond these positive features and accomplishments, this assessment also addresses the key challenges faced by this literature and identifies tasks that need to be addressed in three areas: the conceptualization and measurement of the dependent variables, the integration of causal theories and the assessment of causal theories. Specifically, the following suggestions are offered. Concerning the dependent variables, the importance of disaggregating the outcome of interest and using more nuanced measures is stressed. Concerning causal theorizing, I argue that the standard approach to theorizing has led to a somewhat unwieldy proliferation of explanatory factors and thus emphasize the need for greater parsimony. Finally, concerning causal assessment, the need for greater dialogue between quantitative and qualitative researchers, and the challenges that must be tackled to make this dialogue possible, are discussed. At the same time, I argue that until a multi-method approach can be adequately pursued, a multi-track approach is called for.

The challenges facing scholars currently active in the research program on democracy studies are considerable. The emphasis this paper places on these challenges, however, is not meant to suggest that this research program faces some insuperable hurdles. Rather, the point of this discussion is to use this assessment of the current state of the literature as a way to identify the most productive avenues for future research. Indeed, my assessment is positive with regard to the achievements already made in the field of democracy studies and also optimistic concerning the likely payoffs of future efforts to advance this research program.

1. Democratic Transitions

1.a. The Subject Matter: Delimitation and Justification

Research on democratic transitions is part of the broader field of democratic theory that gains its distinctiveness from a sharply defined focus on elections or, more specifically, on the critical step in the history of democracy when a country passes a threshold marked by the introduction of competitive elections with mass suffrage for the main political offices in the land. Indeed, the status of democratic transitions as a distinctive field of research is given by an undeniably Schumpeterian approach to democracy, which

emphasizes the procedures that regulate the access to power (Mazucca 2000a).² This delimitation of the subject matter did little to spur interest at the time university-based research was expanding dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s. Not only did the realities of world politics appear to devalue this line of research. In addition, the Schumpeterian conception of democracy was widely out of favor. Even though some landmark studies on democratic transitions were published as early as 1960 (Lipset 1960, Rustow 1970), interest in democratic transitions took a back seat to other, more pressing and/or more valued concerns.

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

First, the real world significance of democratic transitions is undeniable and has affected the lives of people all over the globe since approximately 1870, a rough landmark for the beginning of mass democracy (Finer 1997: 30). It developed relatively early in a number of English speaking countries: Great Britain, the United States of America, New Zealand, and Australia. For Western Europe as a whole, however, it remained a key issue on the political agenda from the late 19th century through the end of World War II. And for yet an even larger number of countries, it was a dominant issue in the last quarter of the 20th

²This proposed definition of democracy is not meant to resolve the question of how democracy should be conceptualized, but merely to suggest that it consists of multiple dimensions, a factor that is important to the discussion offered below. Nonetheless, as O'Donnell (2001) argues, it bears stressing that Schumpeterian definitions of democracy are not necessarily minimalist or strictly procedural, in that they tend to invoke, usually implicitly, a range of civil liberties that are needed for elections to be free, fair, and competitive.

century, as a wave of democratization started in southern Europe in 1974, and subsequently swept through Latin America, East and South East Asia, the communist-dominated countries that were part of the Soviet bloc during the Cold War, and parts of Africa.

Its continued significance, moreover, should not be underestimated. To be sure, inasmuch as a democratic threshold is passed, the challenge of a democratic transition fades into the past and other issues, of critical importance, begin to dominate the agenda. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that the problem of democratic transitions will cease to be of importance to the lives of tens of millions and even billions of people. On the one hand, the challenge of a democratic transition remains one of vital importance to a large number of countries. Depending upon the precise way in which the crossing of the threshold between authoritarianism and democracy is measured, in the year 2000 a full 40 to 60 percent of the countries in the world, including cases as significant as China and practically entire regions such as the Middle East, have never achieved democracy.³ On the other hand, not only do countries that have already passed the democratic threshold always face the possibility of a democratic breakdown. More ominously, even in the middle of the democratic wave of the last quarter of the 20th century, numerous countries experienced breakdowns. And there is evidence that indicates that in many cases newly minted democracies are unlikely to endure as the 21st century unfolds (Diamond 1999: Chs. 2 and 7). In sum, a concern with democratic transition has had and is likely to continue to have strong normative relevance.

This delimitation of a field of research focused on democratic transitions is also justified on analytic grounds. The conceptualization of democratic transitions in terms of a threshold marked by the introduction of competitive elections with mass suffrage for the main political offices excludes a large number of issues that are a concern of democratic theory. For example, it is set off from such fundamental issues as the variable ways in which public policy is formulated and implemented in democratic countries; the extent to which the rule of law is respected; and the increasingly important concern about the extension of democratic rule, traditionally a principle applied to the nation-state, to a range of other units, both of different territorial

³Huntington (1991: 26), Diamond (1999: 25-28), Dahl (1989: 234-41, 1999: 921-23).

scope and with different functional aims. What may appear like an unwarranted narrowing of concerns, however, is analytically justifiable.

The decision to focus on democratic transitions is driven by two key insights. First, it is based on the understanding that the introduction of competitive elections is an event that is fundamental enough to alter a country's political dynamics and that calls, therefore, for its own explanation.⁴ Second, this decision is justified on the ground that a transition to democracy is a process that is distinct enough, compared to the other concerns raised in democratic theory, to suggest that it is caused by factors that probably do not affect other aspects of democracy and most fruitfully theorizing on its own terms (Rustow 1970, see also Mazzuca 2000a). A focus on democratic transitions, thus, does not deny that countries vary along other dimensions or that these other dimensions may be as important as those highlighted by a Schumpeterian approach. Indeed, as current scholarship shows, a range of issues not encompassed by Schumpeterian definitions of democracy are likely to have great relevance in countries where democracy is firmly established (O'Donnell 1999: Part IV). Therefore, the delimitation of democratic transitions as a distinct area for scholarship is not based on a judgement about the importance of a Schumpeterian approach compared to any other approach but is rather a conceptual decision, which helps to distinguish dimensions of concern within democratic theory that most likely vary independently from each other. That is, the point is not to argue that one or another issue is more important but to provide a basis for an analytic approach by breaking down democratic theory into a series of distinct and hence more manageable explanatory challenges.

1.b. Research and Findings

The sharp delimitation of the subject matter of democratic transitions and hence the formulation of a fairly clear question—why have some countries had democratic transitions while others have not?—had an important benefit. Indeed, by providing researchers with a pointed and widely shared agenda, it allowed for the rapid generation of an impressive basis of knowledge through a succession of studies that eventually

⁴On the critical impact of elections on the dynamics of politics, see O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: Ch. 6) and Shain and Linz (1995a: 76-78).

came to encompass most cases of democratic transition in world history. Following in the wake of a key study of transitions in southern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s and early 1980s (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986), major cross-regional analyses were conducted comparing Latin America to East and South East Asia (Haggard and Kaufman 1995), and southern Europe and Latin America to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Linz and Stepan 1996). Excellent region-based studies were produced, focusing on Africa (Bratton and van de Walle 1997), Eastern Europe (von Beyme 1996, Offe 1997, Bunce 1999), as well as the three major regions of the developing world (Diamond, Linz, Lipset 1989a, 1989b, 1989c).⁵ In addition, impressive efforts were made to put the transitions of the last quarter of the 20th century in historical perspective through cross-regional analyses of Europe and Latin America ranging across the 19th and 20th centuries (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992, Collier 1999). Finally, a number of sophisticated statistical studies contributed to the debate.⁶

⁵See also the broad ranging work by Huntington (1991).

⁶See, among others, Gasiorowski (1995), Przeworski and Limongi (1997), Coppedge (1997), and Brinks and Coppedge (1999).

Figure 1. Democracy Studies. An Overview

Agenda	Democratic Transition	Democratic Stability	Democratic Quality
Research Question	Why have some countries had democratic transitions while others have not?	Why have some democracies been more stable than others?	Why have some countries developed patrimonial states and others bureaucratic states?
Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Level of economic development is not a good predictor -There are multiple paths to democracy, which are influenced by the type of prior, non-democratic regime -The prospects of democracy are enhanced when supporters and opponents of authoritarianism are economically interdependent and reduced when the opposition is led by a nationalist movement -State decay or collapse reduces the prospects of democratization -Labor repressive agriculture reduces the prospects of democratization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Democratic stability and democratic transitions have some different causes -Level of economic development has strong predictive power -The effect of plural societies is negative -There are multiple equilibria that can sustain democracy: in equal countries, a class compromise underpins the stability of democracy; in unequal countries, democratic stability rests upon the protection of elite interests -In unequal countries, the weakness and self-restraint of labor and the left, direct and indirect effects of repression, have a positive effect -Neoliberalism has a positive effect in unequal countries, reducing elite fear of democracy -The old regime, mode of transition, sequence of economic and political reforms, economic performance, strength of civil society and parties, presidential vs parliamentary institutions, are not good predictors * 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Democratic quality has different causes compared to democratic transitions and democratic stability -State formation driven by war and fiscal pressure has a positive effect on the bureaucratization of the state -Bureaucratic states are more likely when state formation proceeds before democratization
Challenges:			
1. Dependent Variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Disaggregate the concept of democracy and stability -Develop more nuanced measures of democracy and stability 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Refine key concept and develop adequate measures
2. Explanatory Variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Integrate causal theories 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Generate causal theories
3. Causal Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop a multi-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods -Continue multi-track approach: build large N data sets on processual variables, use historically-oriented quantitative methods; conduct small N research on focused questions 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Initiate testing with qualitative methods -Collect data
* These findings are based on a narrow operationalization of democratic stability in terms of duration.			

The richness of this literature is undeniable. Indeed, it offers a wealth of ideas on the causes of transitions, a great amount of nuanced data on very complex processes, and some very fruitful comparative analyses that have generated a number of important and surprising findings (see Figure 1). This literature has demonstrated that, contrary to the longstanding conventional view, level of economic development is not a good predictor of democratic transitions (Przeworski and Limongi 1997, Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi 2000: Ch. 2).⁷ It has also shown, again contrary to what was posited by modernization theory, that democratic transitions do not occur through a single process but rather through multiple paths defined by factors such as the power and strategies of elites and masses, and the top down or bottom up impetus for political reform (Stepan 1986, Collier 1999).

The codification of these distinct paths of democratic transition has led to other important findings. First, it has allowed analysts to establish that the path toward democracy a country follows is strongly

⁷There remains some confusion, however, regarding the basic thesis of modernization theory, as formulated by Lipset (1959, 1960). Lipset (1959: 75) stated his basic explanatory thesis as follows: “The more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.” However, in many parts of the text of his 1959 article and in the basic cross-tabulation he used to test his argument, there is considerable slippage. Thus, at some points, Lipset’s dependent variable appears to be the stability of regimes that are already democratic, which is consistent with the summary statement he gives of his thesis. But, at other points, his dependent variable appears to be something quite different: the origins of democratic regimes. Though Lipset’s tendency to conflate two distinct issues—the origin and the stability of democracies—was noticed early on (Jackman 1975: 99, 67), this important conceptual flaw continues to haunt the current literature. Thus, while Przeworski and Limongi (1997) make a strong case that level of economic modernization has no explanatory power when it comes to the question of the origins of democracy as opposed to democratic stability, many authors continue to argue that level of modernization can explain the origins of democracy and some even cite Przeworski and Limongi’s study to support their claim.

influenced by its type of prior, non-democratic regime,⁸ and that the very likelihood of a transition to democracy is affected by the type of actors that oppose authoritarian rule. In this regard, because pacts may be a necessary condition for a successful transition to democracy in the context of certain types of regime, the prospects of democracy are enhanced when opposition demands are amenable to negotiated resolution, as is more likely the case when the supporters and opponents of authoritarianism are economically interdependent, that is, class actors, than when opposition to authoritarianism is led by a nationalist movement (Arfi 1998, Roeder 1999, Wood 2000).⁹

Relatedly, research has shown that issues of regime change, such as democratic transitions, are closely linked with those of the state, conceived in Weberian terms. In this regard, a key finding is the principle “no state, no democracy,”¹⁰ that is, that processes of regime change that lead to state decay or state collapse reduce the prospects of democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996: 17-19). In contrast, though much research has been conducted with the goal of ascertaining whether the bourgeoisie (Moore 1966), the middle class (Lipset 1960) or labor (Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens 1992) is the prime agent of democratization, and whether the landed elites are an inherently undemocratic force (Moore 1966), this literature is mostly inconclusive with regard to the social origins of democracy. Indeed, probably the only strong finding that emerges is that landed elites that depend on labor-repressive practices have a negative effect on the installation of a democratic regime (Mahoney 2000: 6-13, see also Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2000: 18-22).

1.c. The Dependent Variable: The Challenge of Conceptualization and Measurement

⁸Linz and Stepan (1996), Bratton and van de Walle (1997: 9-14), Munck (1998: 17-22, Ch. 7), Leff (1999). See also Snyder and Mahoney (1999).

⁹Because the effect of nationalism is mediated, and can be ameliorated, by elites choices (Przeworski 1995: Ch. 1; Linz and Stepan 1996: Ch. 2), this relationship is not necessarily deterministic.

¹⁰I am indebted to Richard Snyder for suggesting this phrase.

The considerable accomplishments of this body of literature notwithstanding, the agenda of research on democratic transitions faces some considerable challenges. Though it has focused, as indicated, on a sharply defined subject matter, the way in which the outcome of interest has been conceptualized and measured is open to improvement. In this regard, a first challenge concerns the dependent variable of this research.

The problem is rooted in part in the use of an event, the holding of competitive elections that lead to the installation of authorities with democratic legitimacy, as an indicator which justifies changing the way an entire country is scored from negative to positive on the outcome of interest: democratic transition. To be sure, this way of coding cases, which draws on the notion of a “founding election” (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 61), has some validity when applied to transitions in the post-1974 period. The reason is that a common elite strategy in the late-19th and early 20th centuries—the gradual extension of voting rights, first to propertied males, then to all males, and subsequently to women—was probably not viable and thus not used in late-20th century transitions. To a certain extent, thus, it is appropriate to view recent democratic transitions as unfolding in a non-incremental fashion and along the various dimensions of democracy all at once.

But, even so, the limitations of this approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy are significant. For example, though some researchers essentially use this approach to code Chile as a democracy from 1990 onward (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi 2000: 64), it is obvious that even though Chile became fully democratic along some dimensions of democracy, it did not do so along others. Specifically, the fact that a sizable portion of the Senate was not popularly elected meant that it suffers from an important democratic deficit concerning the range of offices filled through elections. Moreover, as this example illustrates, the use of a dichotomous measure does little to capture the incremental nature of Chile’s democratic transition and hence the distinctive nature of Chile’s politics in the 1990s: the incomplete nature of its transition to democracy.

Some efforts have been made to avoid some of these problems. Thus, some quantitative scholars have sought to construct large-N data sets on democracy that explicitly code cases along various dimensions

and that consider options beyond simple dichotomies. But even this literature suffers from significant problems. Most importantly, though these measures of democracy score countries on multiple dimensions, they have usually been aggregated to one single score per country, and thus obfuscate the way in which countries might make progress along the various dimensions of democracy at different points in time and at a different pace. In addition, though these measures have not relied on dichotomies as a default position, a wise decision, they are frequently based on fairly arbitrary choices about the appropriate measurement level.

Concerning the dependent variable, thus, scholars should focus on the following challenges. First, efforts to conceptualize democracy should explicitly acknowledge the multidimensional nature of the concept of democracy. Second, scholars need to make greater efforts to construct measures of democracy that explicitly code cases along the various dimensions of democracy while giving due attention to the problem of justifying the choice of level of measurement. This is not an easy issue and much rides on it. Indeed, until this challenge is adequately met it will be hard to reconcile, in a systematic manner, the critical insight that democratization is first a matter a change *of* regime, that is, from an authoritarian to a democratic regime, and only subsequently a matter of change *within* a regime type, which alters the extent to which cases that are already considered democratic vary in their degree of democraticness.

1.d. The Explanatory Variables: The Challenge of Theoretical Integration

A second challenge concerns the need for greater integration of causal theories. The evolution of the literature on democratic transitions has been characterized by the frequent introduction of new causal factors considered critical to an explanation of why democratic transitions occur. These new explanatory variables sometimes reflect the experience of new cases of transition to democracy, which have brought to light factors that had not seemed important in the cases until then considered. In other instances, the focus on new variables has been driven more by an effort to rescue insights from older bodies of literature. Over time, then, the number of explanatory variables has multiplied, pointing to an important trade-off in this literature between theoretical fertility and orderly theory building.

As challenging as the task of theoretical organization and integration is likely to be, it is facilitated somewhat because theoretical debates have evolved around a number of central axes. One main axis contrasts short-term factors and the choices made by actors (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Przeworski 1991) to medium-term factors, such as the characteristics of the old regime (Linz and Stepan 1996, Chehabi and Linz 1998), and long-term, more structural factors, such as the mode of production or the model of development (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992). Another axis of debate contrasts elite-centered explanations (Dogan and Higley 1998) to mass-centered explanations, which focus either on class actors (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992, Collier 1999, Bellin 2000, Wood 2000), social movements (Foweraker 1995: Ch. 5, Tarrow 1995), or ethnic groups (Offe 1997: Ch. 4). Yet another axis contrasts political to economic determinants of transitions (Haggard and Kaufman 1995, Przeworski and Limongi 1997). And one more critical axis of debate opposes domestic factors to international factors (Whitehead 1996b, Drake 1998, Brinks and Coppedge 1999, Kopstein and Reilly 2000), an axis along which one might also locate explanations centered on stateness and nationality issues that might be labeled as "intermestic" (Linz and Stepan 1996). This way of organizing the literature has merit and helps to introduce some order into the debate. Moreover, it is noteworthy that, as the literature on democratic transitions grew and introduced new explanatory variables, scholars sought to impose some organization on theorizing either by pulling together the range of explanatory variables (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1995) or by attempting to synthesize a range of these explanatory factors (Mahoney and Snyder 1999, see also Kitschelt 1995: 452-55). However, the challenge of integrating and synthesizing the diverse set of explanatory factors proposed in this literature and the generation of a more parsimonious theory still remains to be adequately tackled.

In this regard, the potential gains associated with efforts to build rational choice-theoretic and game-theoretic models of democratic transitions should be noted. This literature is distinctive in that it employs a common theory, which facilitates theoretical cumulation. Moreover, inasmuch as it employs a formal methodology, it also brings to bear the power of deductive logic, which has the advantage of demonstrating what implications follow from a given set of assumptions. These advantages notwithstanding, it is worth highlighting that, to a large extent, the rational choice literature on democratic transitions has reproduced the

problems of the broader literature. On the one hand, much as with any approach to theory generation, game-theoretic models are driven by insights about specific cases or regions. As a result of this inductive aspect of the modeling process, game-theoretic models propose explanatory factors that diverge widely in terms of their empirical scope. On the other hand, these explanatory variables themselves vary considerably. Thus, some rational choice theorists seek to explain democratic transitions with tipping models, which focus on proximate factors and draw attention to the contingent nature of processes of democratic transition, specifically by highlighting the critical role of triggers or tippers, typically students, intellectuals or dissidents, and cognitive aspects, such as belief cascades (Kuran 1995). Others offer models that emphasize the explanatory role of the prior, non-democratic regime, seeking to show how actors within certain institutional settings engage in patterned forms of action (Geddes 1999). And yet others develop what might be labeled political economic models, which focus on the long-term and see action as driven by the interests of actors, which are either conceived in class terms or more broadly as elites and masses (Acemoglu and Robinson forth., Boix 2000). In sum, rational choice theories of democratic transitions diverge in terms of their empirical scope and explanatory variables, which suggests that the search for principles that would provide a basis for theoretical integration and synthesis remains a critical task.

Thus, another, for the most part unrecognized approach to the task of theoretical integration deserves emphasis. Efforts to define and measure the dependent variable more carefully, as discussed in the previous section, directly affect the validity of data. But they also offer a basis for breaking down the big question at the heart of research on democratic transitions into smaller, more analytically tractable tasks and thus have an important theoretical payoff. On the one hand, the disaggregation of the broad problem of democratic transition into its constituent parts and the use of measures which distinguish a variety of meaningful thresholds is likely to assist the search for explanations by helping analysts distinguish and avoid the conflation of aspects of democracy that are likely to be driven by different processes. For example, because there are good reasons to believe that the extension of the right to suffrage to men is driven by a different process than the extension to the right to vote to women, the disaggregation of the dependent variable in such a way as to explicitly capture this distinction is likely to help analysts uncover stronger

associations. On the other hand, such an approach may help to show how arguments that are presented as competing may actually be complementary. Indeed, once a disaggregated approach to democracy is employed, there would be little reason to consider the theses advanced in Barrington Moore's (1966) and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens and John Stephens' (1992) works as rival explanations. Rather, in that democracy is defined by Moore (1966: 414) in terms of the dimension of contestation, and by Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992: 303-04) in terms of participation, it seems clear how their theories might be considered as partial contributions to a general theory of democratic transitions. In short, it is important to recognize how analysts might be able to gradually integrate their research findings and place them in the context of a general framework by engaging in a dialogue between dependent and independent variables and explicitly seeking to fine-tune the concepts that anchor the analysis of the outcome of interest and potential explanatory factors.

1.e. Causal Assessment: The Challenge of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Research

A third challenge concerns causal assessment and touches upon the as yet barely addressed problem of how to combine qualitative and quantitative forms of research. Research on democratic transitions has been pioneered by researchers who have given primacy to small-N and medium-N comparisons. The reason for this strategy is obvious, in that the comparison of a small number of cases has been particularly well suited to the crafting of fertile concepts and has also provided a sufficient basis for introducing new ideas into the debate and for doing so rapidly. Moreover, the use of qualitative forms of analysis has had the added benefit of being useful for the task of causal assessment, in particular because its intensive nature and its emphasis on process tracing makes it suited to assess theories that highlight the role of actors, that are dynamic, and that posit complex interactions among causal factors.

This strategy, however, has also had its problems. Qualitative researchers are limited in their ability to test the generalizability of their theories and to offer precise estimates of causal effect that take into consideration a variety of sources of bias. Moreover, they have not always been as systematic as they could be. For example, though this literature has generated a great amount of nuanced data, researchers have not always gathered data on all the explanatory variables for all the cases they analyze nor always coded cases explicitly according to a set of clear criteria. Finally, small-N researchers have not given enough attention to issues of research design and rarely conducted strong tests of their theories. As a consequence, the ability of researchers to test their theories and draw strong conclusions has been somewhat constrained.

Though the weaknesses of qualitative research on democratic transitions are not all inherent to this method and thus much progress can be made by improving qualitative research, they certainly point to the need to combine qualitative and quantitative forms of analysis. But, unfortunately, the combination of these two types of research is far from easy. Indeed, though quantitative research on the question of democratic transitions has been produced, the links between qualitative and quantitative research on democracy has been very weak. First, the measures of democracy used by quantitative scholars tend to differ significantly from those used by qualitative scholars. What these scholars think of as a democratic transition, thus, may be quite different things. Second, the causal theories quantitative scholars actually test are many times

caricatures of the theories discussed in the qualitative literature. In this regard, existing statistical tests have been very limited. Practically without exception, they have focused on a narrow range of independent variables, related to economic and institutional aspects, ignoring a variety of theories cast in terms of the role of actors and choices. Moreover, tests have tended to use additive models and for the most part also linear models that severely misrepresent the causal argument generated and tested by qualitative researchers. Finally, large-N data sets have typically consisted of one observation per case per year, thus restricting their sensitivity to issues of time and process, which rarely obeys the cycle of calendar years. Indeed, it is important to recognize that there is a very steep trade-off in the level of nuance of data and the explanatory arguments tested as one moves from the literature based on intensive but relatively narrow comparisons of a small set of cases to the statistical literature based on a large number of cases.¹¹

The difficulties of using a genuine multi-method approach which combined qualitative and quantitative methods suggests that future research should probably be based on a continuation of the multi-track approach used so far. In this regard, the qualitative track is likely to yield significant dividends by extending the intensive analysis of a small to medium number of cases to some relatively unexplored questions. Some significant works offer a historical perspective on the democratic transitions that have been at the heart of the debate, those occurring in the last quarter of the 20th century (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992, Collier 1999). But much remains to be learned by cross-time comparisons and a re-analysis, in light of new theories, of the older cases of transitions discussed by Moore (1966), Reinhard Bendix (1978), Michael Mann (1987, 1993), and Charles Tilly (1998, 2000). In addition, qualitative research can make contributions by broadening the variation on the dependent variable it seeks to explain. The existing literature has tended to focus on positive cases, and introduced variation longitudinally, by

¹¹Indeed, from this perspective, the most fruitful comparative studies, in that they use hard-to-collect data to test complex and dynamic theories, while retaining a broad enough basis to make claims about generalizability, have focused on a medium number of cases, that is, roughly eight to twenty cases (see, for e.g., Huntington 1991, Haggard and Kaufman 1995, Linz and Stepan 1996, Collier 1999).

studying the process whereby countries that were authoritarian become democratic, and through the concept of modes of transition (Mainwaring 1992: 317-26). Beyond this, some insightful work has been done comparing cases of transitions that led to democracy but also to other outcomes.¹² But, overall, little attention has been given to explain failed transitions, that is, cases where transitions from authoritarian regimes lead to new authoritarian regimes, and to compare these negative cases to the more frequently studied positive cases. Indeed, an important question that remains to be fully answered is: why did many countries that saw the collapse of authoritarian regimes during the last quarter of the twentieth century have transitions that did not lead to democracy? Especially inasmuch as this research is explicitly connected to the existing literature and both draws upon its strengths and hones in on its lingering problems, the continued use of qualitative methods focused on these and other questions is likely to be highly rewarding.

The quantitative research track, in turn, is likely to contribute to the debate inasmuch as it addresses two tasks. One is the collection of data. In this regard, not only should data collection focus on factors other than the standard economic and institutional ones which are the staple of statistical analyses. In addition, data collection should be guided by the need for data that more closely reflect the unfolding of events than the standard practice of gathering one observation per case per year. Indeed, the full benefits of statistical tools are unlikely to be felt in the debate on democratic transitions until data sets are generated with information on the kind of actors involved in the process of democratic transitions, the choices these actors make, the sequence of events whereby democratic transitions unfold, and the thick institutional setting in which actors operate. A second task is the use of the increasingly sophisticated, more historically-oriented quantitative methods that provide a better fit with the actual causal theories in the literature. These are formidable tasks but ones with important payoffs and thus well worth pursuing. It is this sort of research that will finally bring the strengths of distinct research strategies to bear on the same research question, rather than remain as two somewhat disconnected approaches that never quite talk to each other. Indeed, the pursuit of a multi-track approach, if properly implemented, could offer an important stepping stone and

¹²Collier and Collier (1991), Yashar (1997), Snyder (1998), Mahoney (2001).

gradually give way to a truly multi-method approach which would show how qualitative and quantitative methods can be used in a complementary fashion.

2. Beyond Democratic Transitions: Democratic Stability and Democratic Quality

2.a. The Subject Matter: Delimitation and Justification

Research on politics after democratic transitions have been completed is harder to assess than research on democratic transitions for the simple reason that there is a lack of consensus concerning the subject matter and, moreover, because some ways of defining the subject matter do not offer a clearly delimited focus for research. Overall, the agenda put forth by what might be labeled regime analysts does share certain common elements. Thus, it can be contrasted as a whole to the voluminous research on narrower, institutional issues, that are standard in the study of advanced democracies and that have increasingly become a concern of students of new democracies. Institutional issues are of obvious relevance to fundamental questions in regime analysis. This much is evident, for example, from the debate over the relative impact of consociational versus majoritarian arrangements, and presidentialism versus parliamentarism, on the durability of democracies. But institutionalists more frequently take the democratic nature of the regime for granted, while regime analysts are explicitly concerned with the ongoing salience of the democracy question. This commonality notwithstanding, regime analysts have conceptualized post-transitional politics in such diverse ways that the organization of the field of research around clearly defined questions has been hampered.

The core of the problem is as follows. Initially, one concept—the concept of democratic consolidation—was widely used as a way to identify the subject matter of interest. This concept was quite useful, in that it provided an overarching frame for theorizing.¹³ However, over time this concept was used in such different ways as to end up creating some severe confusion. Indeed, the literature on democratic consolidation started to be dominated by exchanges in which one author would assert that some case was a

¹³See the insightful discussions about the uses of the concept of democratic consolidation in Schmitter (1995a), Schedler (1998a, 1998b), Merkel (1998), and Hartlyn (1999).

consolidated democracy and another author would argue the opposite, when the only real difference was that these authors had different conceptions, whether explicit or implicit, of what democratic consolidation meant.¹⁴ Then, to add to the confusion, these different conceptions would be used in assessments of causal theories, so that arguments for the importance of different causal factors were made which hinged in large part on the different way in which cases were coded on the dependent variable.

Responding to this need for conceptual clarity, various suggestions have been made. Some scholars argue that the confusion surrounding the concept is an inevitable result of the evolution of a popular concept. Their response has emphasized the need for greater conceptual order, and to this end have carried out conceptual analyses that shed light on the structure of the concept and its various uses (Collier and Levitsky 1997, Schedler 1998a, 1998b). Others take a more radical approach, arguing that the problems with the concept of democratic consolidation are so deep that its usefulness has been exhausted. Rather than clarify and thus rescue the concept, they suggest researchers would be better served by simply jettisoning the term (O'Donnell 1996). These suggestions are actually not incompatible. Thus, as a way to introduce conceptual order in this debate I suggest that a distinction needs to be made between what might be labeled thin and thick concepts of democratic consolidation, and also that, for sake of clarity, it is probably useful to drop the cumbersome reference to different versions of the concept of democratic consolidation and to focus the discussion on two concepts, those of democratic stability and democratic quality. These concepts, to be sure, must be defined with precision. But the broad point that needs to be recognized is that two very distinct major agendas on post-transitional politics have taken shape and that, as a first cut, they can be distinguished in terms of these two concepts.

¹⁴One critical source of confusion has been the tendency of scholars to fail to distinguish clearly between issues about the democratic nature of the rules of the game, which belong in the debate about democratic transitions, and the extent to which rules of the game, no matter what they are, are accepted by actors, the core concern about research on stability.

Research on *democratic stability* represents the most direct continuation of research on democratic transitions and is concerned, quite simply, with the sustainability and durability of the democracies, defined in Schumpeterian terms, which result from successful democratic transitions. The relevance of this clear and delimited subject matter is hard to dispute. Very few countries have followed the path of Great Britain, which moved toward democracy without ever suffering any reversal of its democratic gains. Thus, the potential breakdown of democracy has been an important concern of theorists of democracy. In the context of Western Europe, the history of France offers dramatic evidence of the potential for democratic reversals. In turn, the interwar period showed how the breakdown of democracy could become a widespread phenomena and gave us the paradigmatic case of breakdown: Weimar Germany. And the collapse of democracy in Greece in 1967 showed that even post-World War II Europe was not immune to the forces that could lead to an authoritarian backlash.

Beyond Western Europe, the history of post-World War II Latin America is punctuated by frequent democratic breakdowns, including the dramatic replacement of democracies by harsh authoritarian regimes in the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, the African continent witnessed the breakdowns of numerous democracies in the early post-colonial period and the history of important cases such as Nigeria is essentially one of the oscillation between democracy and authoritarianism. Even in Asia, where India provides a notable exception,¹⁵ cases like Pakistan are a reminder of the lack of guarantees that the establishment of democracy does not always lead to democratic stability. Finally, even the most recent wave of democratization did not end the continued relevance of concerns about democratic stability. The closing and bombing of the Russian parliament in 1993 and the serious doubts about whether elections were going to be held in Russia in 1996 helped drive this point home. The 2000 elections in Kyrgyzstan showed that sustaining democracy outside the fairly successful postcommunist cases of central Europe was a difficult affair. Even more unambiguously, democratic breakdowns in a range of cases in Latin America (Haiti 1991, Peru 1992, Ecuador 2000), Africa

¹⁵But even this exception is somewhat tainted by the restrictions placed on Indian democracy during the 1975-77 years.

(Nigeria 1983, Sudan 1989, Niger 1996, Sierra Leone 1997, Ivory Coast 1999) and Asia (Thailand 1991, Pakistan 1999) raised concerns about the potential of significant democratic losses (Diamond 1999: Chs. 2 and 7, 2000).

The relevance of research on democratic stability notwithstanding, as the perception that numerous countries that had democratized in the 1970s and 1980s appeared to face no immediate threat of breakdown took hold, scholars of democracy increasingly turned their attention to another issue. The driving force behind this new line of thought was, at its core, the following. As more and more countries which had democratized after 1974 remained democratic, some analysts proposed theories of convergence and the end of history that suggested that major political differences were bound to diminish. These theories relied on the fact that, with the global wave of democratization, some of the very notable political differences that set countries apart in the 1960s and 1970s had disappeared and that, with the end of the Cold War, ideological rivals to the composite option provided by democratic capitalism had all but disappeared. That is, these theories were not without foundation. But to many analysts of global politics, the statement that politics had converged around one single model just did not seem to ring true.

The point these analysts sought to make is not that elections in the new democracies are somehow less significant than in older, classic democracies. Indeed, though restrictions on the free and fair nature of elections evident in many countries serve as a reminder of basic differences in the democraticness of countries (Elklit 1994, 1999), there is little doubt that competitive and fair elections leading to alternation in power has become a fairly ubiquitous event (O'Donnell 1996). More importantly, the issue is not that elections are only a sided-show and that electoral politics is a mere procedural appearance that hides the real nature of politics. Rather, as numerous scholars stressed, the view that the turn to democracy has eliminated all major differences is problematic because even those countries which have unquestionably democratic elections and, moreover, which have been able to sustain these practices, differ, sometimes quite dramatically, with regard to critical elements not strictly related to the electoral process yet which seem proper to link to a concern with democracy: from the rule of law to a range of other issues such as the clientelism and corruption. These differences suggest that even stable democracies might differ in ways that

are fairly fundamental, that the analysis of post-transitional politics would remain incomplete if limited to democratic stability, and that a different line of thinking needs to be opened. Thus, scholars started to define a new agenda that has been identified with the admittedly fuzzy concept of *democratic quality*.¹⁶ As I discuss below, the fuzziness of this concept is a major problem and a critical challenge is the need to define and delimit the subject matter of research on democratic quality. Before turning to this issue, however, this paper addresses the more established research program on democratic stability.

2.b. Democratic Stability: Research and Findings

The delimitation of the subject matter of democratic stability and hence the identification of a clear question—why have some democracies been more stable than others?—has facilitated the rapid development of this research agenda. Research on democratic stability has relied on different methodologies. As in the case of research on democratic transitions, qualitative researchers have made significant contributions. These include some important regional studies, on Latin America (Karl 1990, Mainwaring, O'Donnell and Valenzuela 1992), Southern Europe (Gunther, Diamandouros and Puhle 1995, Morlino 1997), Eastern Europe (Elster, Offe, and Preuss 1998, Tismaneanu 1999, Janos 2000), and Africa (Joseph 1997, 1998, Wiseman 1999). Noteworthy works also offer cross-regional analyses, comparing southern Europe and Latin America (Higley and Gunther 1992), Latin America to East and South East Asia (Haggard and Kaufman 1995: Part III), southern Europe and Eastern Europe (Maravall 1997), and southern Europe and Latin America to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Linz and Stepan 1996).¹⁷ Moreover, thinking about democratic stability has been influenced by statistical studies to a greater extent than research on democratic transitions.¹⁸

¹⁶Przeworski (1995: 64), Linz and Stepan (1996: 137-38, 200), Linz (1997: 406, 417-23), Diamond (1999: 28, 132), Huber and Stephens (1999: 774).

¹⁷See also the broad ranging studies by Przeworski (1995) and Diamond (1999).

¹⁸See, especially, Remmer (1990, 1991, 1996), Diamond (1992), Hadenius (1994), Przeworski and Limongi (1997), Power and Gasiorowski (1997), Gasiorowski and Power (1998), and Mainwaring (2000).

This research on democratic stability has led to some surprising and some less surprising findings. First, a range of factors that were considered as potential determinants of the durability of democracy have been shown to not have much explanatory power.¹⁹ This applies to various propositions about the impact of: the old regime and the modality of transition to democracy,²⁰ the sequencing of economic and political reforms (Haggard and Kaufman 1992, Przeworski 1991: 180-87), economic performance and crises (Przeworski 1991: 32, 188), the strength of civil society and political parties (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992: 6, 49-50, 156, Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 1-2, 21-28), and the presidential or parliamentary form of democracy (Linz 1994).²¹ Indeed, a key finding is that countries that became democratic since 1974 display a tremendous amount of variation with regard to these explanatory factors yet

¹⁹See Remmer (1990, 1991, 1995: 117, 1996), Schmitter (1995b), Przeworski (1995: 45-46, 48, 53, 62), Haggard and Kaufman (1995: 327), and Hartlyn (1998).

²⁰Karl (1990), Karl and Schmitter (1991), Valenzuela (1992: 73-78), Linz and Stepan (1996: Ch. 4), Munck and Leff (1997).

²¹Concerning Linz's (1994) hypotheses that parliamentary democracies are more stable than presidential democracies some tests indicate strong support for the argument that parliamentary forms of government better promote democratic stability (Linz and Valenzuela 1994a, 1994b, Stepan and Skach 1993, Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi 1996), but others purport to show equally strong support for the argument that presidential forms of government also promote democratic stability (Shugart and Carey 1992, Mainwaring 1993, Mainwaring and Shugart 1997a, 1997b, Power and Gasiorowski 1997). As various authors have stated, a more plausible hypotheses would have to focus on variations within the broad choice between parliamentary and presidential forms of government, as well as consider the link between the power of presidents and the other institutional features such as the fragmentation of the party system and party discipline (Shugart and Carey 1992, Mainwaring 1993, Mainwaring and Shugart 1997a, 1997b). It is unclear, however, whether such a hypotheses would refer to the likelihood of the survival of democracy as opposed to the variable workings of stable democracies.

have had a fairly common outcome: a durable democracy. Moreover, even departures from this trend toward democratic stability do not appear to be strongly correlated to these factors.

A big caveat is in order here, however. The lack of explanatory power of these variables hinges on the operationalization of stability in terms of a narrow indicator—durability—which, as I discuss below, may not be very appropriate. Thus, it may be too hasty to reject some important lines of research on the basis of this negative finding. To give but an example, the modality of transition to democracy has had an impact on the path to democratic stability followed by countries (Higley and Gunther 1992, Dogan and Higley 1998). Hence, rather than reject the importance of this explanatory variable, it is equally plausible to suggest that some important findings might be uncovered if further research were aimed at linking thinking about modes of transition to the related scholarship on the sequencing of liberalism and democratization. Moreover, as some scholars have suggested, many of these factors may well have explanatory power with regard to the question of the quality of democracy. Thus, inasmuch as these factors are shown to have an impact on politics, it may be prudent to avoid the premature rejection of these explanatory variables and to give further thought to the manner in which these variables might affect the stability of democracy or whether they might play a role, rather, in explaining a different dependent variable.

Second, this research has also produced some positive findings about the conditions leading to democratic stability. To a considerable extent, evidence confirms Dankwart Rustow's (1970) broad proposition that the causes of the origins of democracy are likely to be different from those that account for the stability of democracy (see also O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 65-66). Most notably, this proposition is supported by another finding, which validates an old hypothesis (Lipset 1959, 1960): that level of economic development, which does not explain democratic transitions, is nonetheless an important determinant of the stability of democracy.²² But Rustow's proposition should not be pushed too far. Indeed, another old hypothesis that has received empirical support concerns the argument that democratic stability is less likely

²²Przeworski and Limongi (1997), Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi (2000: Ch. 2), Diamond (1992), Geddes (1999), Mainwaring (2000).

in plural societies or multinational states,²³ even if, as Arend Lijphart (1977, 1984) stresses, this negative factor is mediated and potentially ameliorated by elite choices and power sharing arrangements (see also Dahl 1989: 254-60, Linz 1997: 411-14). Thus, what might be labeled as the national question seems to affect, in broadly the same manner, the prospects of democratic transition and democratic stability.

Another critical finding is that, much as there are multiple paths to democracy, so too are there multiple equilibria that can sustain democracy, a basic thesis that is best established in research on the orientation of class actors in more equal and less equal countries. In more equal countries, as research on post-World War II Western Europe shows, a class compromise underpins the stability of democracy (Przeworski 1985, Boix 2000). In this scenario, democratic stability was premised on a political exchange, whereby the moderation of the demands of labor and the left—a key goal of elites—is exchanged for redistributive policies—a core demand of mass actors. Both elites and masses, thus, have an incentive to accept democracy. In less equal countries, in contrast, a class compromise does not represent an equilibrium. As evidence from Latin America during the 1950s-70s shows, the redistributive consequences of democracy threatened elite interests and thus weakened the commitment of elites to democracy (O'Donnell 1973, 1999: Ch. 1). Indeed, democratic stability in less equal countries rests on an entirely different basis: the breaking, rather than the establishment, of any link between democracy and redistribution.

The stability of the democracies that emerged in less equal countries in the post-1974 period can thus be related to two sets of factors. First, the potential destabilization of democracy due to the polarization of politics has been reduced due to the weakening of popular sector actors and labor as a result of recent experiences with authoritarian rule (Drake 1996, Munck 1998: Ch. 7) and the conscious lowering of expectations and self-restraint, especially among the left, that is a result of a learning process begun in the context of repressive, authoritarian regimes (Drake 1998, McCoy 1999, Mainwaring 2000). More broadly, democratic stability is also the result of the widespread adoption of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and

²³Dahl (1971: 108-11), Powell (1982: 40-53), Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1995: 42-43).

1990s. Put in different words, because democracy in these countries is currently not associated with redistribution, business elites, whom previously felt threatened by democracy and frequently sought to undermine democracy, have come to accept democracy (Payne and Bartell 1995, Huber and Stephens 1999: 775-80). In short, a key implication of research on the class question is that the stability of democracy can be attained in different ways and not all stable democracies are alike, varying considerably in terms of what they represent to the masses of citizen.²⁴

2.c. Democratic Stability: Challenges

The accomplishments of this literature notwithstanding, scholars of democratic stability face a series of challenges that are quite similar to those discussed in the context of research on democratic transitions. One challenge concerns the manner in which democratic stability, the dependent variable in this research, is conceptualized and measured. Overall, the outcome of interest has been conceptualized in a manner that avoids the problem of the literature of the 1960s, when scholars tended to conflate the issues of democratic transition and stability (Jackman 1975: 99, 67). But some problems remain.

First, much as with research on democratic transitions, this research has operated with an aggregate concept of democracy, which leads analysts to assign one single score per country. Thus, this literature downplays any sense in which different aspects of democracy may initially take shape at different points in time and subsequently break down also at different points in time. The problems associated with this practice are considerable. For example, Przeworski and his collaborators suggest that El Salvador became a

²⁴To this list, one might add some fairly pointed findings concerning the positive impact played by supportive international environment through a mixture of influences (Drake 1998, Green 1999a, 1999b, Mainwaring 2000). However, this literature is far from parsimonious and highlights a range of disparate factors, such as the genuine support for democracy by important powers and regional organizations such as the EU and the OAS (Whitehead 1996a), the less sincere demand by the international community that at least certain democratic appearances are maintained (Joseph 1998), and the lack of internationally influential ideological alternatives to democracy (Linz 1997: 404-05).

democracy in 1984 and that Brazil did so in 1979, so that presumably their stability as democracies is measured from that point on (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi 2000: 63-64). But, though El Salvador had elections in 1984, a basic feature of democracy—the right of all major political forces to contest elections—was not effectively guaranteed. Likewise, though Brazilians had the right to vote in elections, that were fairly competitive, for Congress by 1979, Congress was not fully and freely elected until 1986 and Brazilians did not have direct elections for President until 1989. Hence, the use of aggregate data obscures the way in which democracy might be installed (and also dismantled) bit by bit, leading to questionable scoring decisions.

A second problem concerns the choice of level of measurement used in research on democratic stability. Scholars have debated how durable a democracy has to be for it to be classified as stable and considered various options. Thus, some have proposed that democracies should be categorized as stable if they last 12 years (Power and Gasiorowski 1997: 133-35) and others have suggested that a more appropriate cutoff point is 25 years (Lijphart 1984, Mainwaring 1993). As useful as these efforts at measurement have been, they are open to questioning. Most directly, it is confusing why scholars have sought to establish a cutoff point to turn democratic stability into a dichotomous variable when the durability of democracy seems to lend itself to a continuous measure. More broadly, it is also worth noting that these options concerning how to measure democratic stability, all drawn from the quantitative literature, employ a very thin measure—a count of years. Such an approach has the advantage of offering a fairly uncomplicated way of operationalizing the dependent variable. But another fruitful avenue for further research might focus on the suitability of thicker measures of democratic stability.

Indeed, a serious question about this literature is whether democratic stability is adequately measured in terms of the durability of democracy, that is, whether current measures of democratic stability tap into the core concern in inquiries about stability: whether the rules of the game are accepted by actors and hence constitute an equilibrium. This is a critical issue. After all, inasmuch as new and more valid measures of democratic stability are constructed, analysts might be forced to revise certain findings, especially those concerning explanatory variables that are rejected on the basis of current measures of

democratic stability in terms of durability. Thus, the importance of further efforts at conceptualizing and measuring democratic stability should not be underestimated.²⁵

A second critical challenge that must be faced by scholars of democratic stability concerns the pressing need for integration of causal theories. Some scholars have proposed causal factors that are structural in nature and focus primarily on economic aspects (Lipset 1959, 1960, O'Donnell 1973, Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Others have emphasized the explanatory significance of a range of institutional arrangements (Shugart and Carey 1992). And yet others advance theories that stress the importance of choice (Linz 1978) and strategic issues (Przeworski 1991: Ch. 1, O'Donnell 1992). As scholars have argued, each of these types of factors seems to have some explanatory power; hence a theory that ignores any of these types of factors would be incomplete. The problem, however, is that with a few exceptions (Lijphart 1977, Collier and Collier 1991), this literature has treated these variables in isolation even though processes affecting the stability of democracy unfold simultaneously at the various levels of analysis tapped by these variables. Thus, further progress on research on democratic stability is likely to hinge in large part upon efforts to articulate the connection between different types of explanatory factors and the generation of a more parsimonious and powerful theory that integrates the long list of explanatory factors highlighted by existing causal theory.²⁶

²⁵Appropriate measures of democratic stability would have to distinguish between two different issues: the extent to which a set of rules is accepted by actors and the success of actors that do not accept these rules in replacing the status quo rules by another set of rules. This is something not done very well by existing measures of democratic stability, which thus obscure the manner in which democracies that endure can still vary considerably in terms of the extent to which actors accept democratic procedures. For a useful discussion of thick measures of democratic stability, see Schedler (2001).

²⁶For an important attempt to address this need, see Mahoney and Snyder (1999). Concerning the contribution of the game-theoretic literature to the task of integration and synthesis, a noteworthy effort is offered by Weingast (1997), who rightly frames the issue as a problem of credible commitment. As with the

A third challenge faced by scholars of democratic stability concerns causal assessment. Statistical analysis has been more common in the study of democratic stability than democratic transition. Thus, the need to find ways to connect literatures using different methods is a prime concern. As with the literature on democratic transition, however, future research on democratic stability would still benefit from a multi-track approach. In this regard, important payoffs for qualitative researchers are likely to be derived from efforts to extend their comparative analyses beyond the current successes and failures to secure stable democracies. This might include comparisons with older positive experiences and especially the successful post World War II record of Western Europe (Przeworski 1985, Maier 1987: Ch. 4). Moreover, it might address older cases of democratic breakdown, either by revisiting the well researched cases of interwar Europe,²⁷ and Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s,²⁸ or analyzing the important episodes of the failure to establish stable democracies in Africa and Asia in the early post-colonial period.²⁹

The tasks faced by researchers who use statistical methods are pretty much the same as those they face in the context of the study of democratic transition. First, as emphasized above, quantitative tests have

game-theoretic literature on democratic transitions, however, the limits of this effort should be noted. Essentially, Weingast's (1997) model stresses how democratic stability may be threatened by those who are in power, but he fails to acknowledge that this is not the only way in which democracies are destabilized and that, in addition to threats to democracy from within the regime, democracy can also be threatened either from above or from below. A big question that remains, thus, is how Weingast's model would be combined with other models, which grasp these other options, to form a truly general theory of democratic stability.

²⁷Linz and Stepan (1978), Kurth (1979), Zimmermann (1987, 1998), Zimmermann and Saalfeld (1988), Luebbert (1991), Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992: Ch. 4), Linz (1992), Berg-Schlosser and De Meur (1994), Ertman (1998), Berg-Schlosser and Mitchell (2000).

²⁸O'Donnell (1973), Linz and Stepan (1978), Collier (1979), Collier and Collier (1991), Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992: Ch. 5).

²⁹Collier (1982), Young (1988).

tended to use deceptively simple measures of democratic stability. Second, quantitative research on democratic stability has only assessed a limited number of independent variables. Virtually all studies concerned with democratic stability still consider the favorite factor of modernization theorists: level of socio-economic modernization. To this factor, others have been added. These include other facets of economic and social life, such as economic performance (Gasiorowski 1995, Gasiorowski and Power 1998) or inequality (Midlarsky 1997); political culture (Inglehart 1997); the international environment (Mainwaring 2000); and, in what is probably the most significant departure, institutions.³⁰ This is, in short, a much more sophisticated body of literature compared to the research produced in the 1960s.

However, statistical research on democratic stability has remained focused on easily measurable variables and tended to ignore the role of actors and choices stressed by process-oriented theorists. Some notable but not very successful attempts aside (Berg-Schlosser and De Meur 1994: 270-74), most researchers have proceeded as though it were unfeasible to collect data on process-oriented factors (Gasiorowski and Power 1998: 742, 745). Indeed, even one of the strongest proponents of a process-oriented approach totally ignores these factors in his attempt to test theories of democratic stability quantitatively (Przeworski 1991, Przeworski and Limongi 1997). As a result, this research continues to be biased toward structural factors, as was the case with the earlier modernization literature, and is unable to address the actor-centered theories that have been increasingly appreciated and theorized by qualitative researchers. Thus, the need to collect data that would allow for an assessment of the range of explanatory factors in the broader literature is an important task for quantitative scholars. Indeed, inasmuch as this task is addressed, and more historically oriented quantitative methods are used, the possibility of a fruitful dialogue among quantitative and qualitative researchers about the causes of democratic stability will be significantly increased.

2.d. Democratic Quality: Agenda Definition and Other Challenges

³⁰Stepan and Skach (1993), Mainwaring (1993), Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi (1996), Mainwaring and Shugart (1997), Power and Gasiorowski (1997).

Moving beyond the agenda of research on democratic stability, scholars interested in the politics of countries in the wake of their transitions to democracy have increasingly become concerned about issues that extend beyond those discussed in the literature on democratic stability. This new research agenda, which has been taking shape under the label of democratic quality, is at an early stage in its development compared to the well established agendas of democratic transition and democratic stability. Thus, it is not surprising that probably the most pressing challenge faced by scholars of democratic quality is the delimitation and justification of the subject matter. This step in the research process is critical, in that the initial definition of the agenda provides an anchor for subsequent research. Moreover, it is also an extremely demanding challenge, in that it requires a pioneering effort of moving into uncharted territory, convincing other scholars that there is something new and important that deserves to be studied, and offering a map others might use to navigate this new terrain. As I seek to show, however, some significant efforts to respond to this challenge have already been made.

The most insightful effort to define this new agenda is found in O'Donnell's ongoing attempt, launched with a number of publications in the early 1990s, to rethink democratic theory in light of the experiences of new democracies outside the rich industrialized West. O'Donnell points out that even though more and more countries have become democracies and that these democracies have endured, many of the new democracies differ from the classic cases of democracy in important ways. Most significantly, the new democracies have not enshrined the rule of law and failed to eradicate clientelistic and other particularistic practices. Beyond these key differences, O'Donnell (1994, 1996) has discussed a variety of other practices in his effort to define the concepts of "delegative democracy" and "informally institutionalized polyarchy" he has proposed to characterize the politics of new democracies. Thus, the potential for confusion should be acknowledged. However, as Sebastián Mazzuca (2000a) stresses, the core insight in O'Donnell's work can be elegantly reformulated. Indeed, as Mazzuca suggests in his effort to reconstruct O'Donnell's concepts, the key point that should be derived from O'Donnell's work is that he identifies a syndrome of factors that point to a normatively important dimension along which countries vary considerably and that is not captured by the Schumpeterian conception of democracy. In Mazzuca's (2000a) terms, while the Schumpeterian

conception of democracy that has anchored the agendas of research on democratic transition and democratic stability is focused on issues pertaining to the “access to power,” the issues O’Donnell identifies and which form the core concerns of a new agenda relate to the “exercise of power.”

Some terminological issues related to the definition of this new agenda remain to be clarified and resolved. Thus, while O’Donnell (2001) sees the new dimension of interest as related to the democratic state as opposed to the democratic political regime, Mazzuca (2000a) suggests that this new agenda might best be delinked altogether from the concept of democracy. Indeed, he argues the options of democracy and authoritarianism pertain to issues of access to power, which he sees as the core of the regime question, while the new agenda is best thought of in terms of a bureaucracy-patrimonialism axis, defined in Weberian terms, which is at the heart of the state question. In this sense, Mazzuca sees the new agenda of research as introducing such a significant break with previous strands of research that it takes us beyond the core concerns of democratic theory that have served as a constant point of reference for debates about democratic transitions and stability.

Consensus on these terminological issues is desirable, in that it will allow for a clearer debate. Nonetheless, the key point of the contributions of O’Donnell and Mazzuca is as follows. They agree that the new dimension they are both concerned with pertains to procedures regulating national institutions and, more precisely, procedures that are best considered in relation to the concept of the state than that of political regime. This conceptualization thus distinguishes this agenda from various other proposals to push the boundaries of research beyond a Schumpeterian understanding of democracy either in the sense of deepening the concept of democracy, so as to make it applicable to subnational territorial units and non-governmental functional spheres; broadening democracy, so as to extend it beyond the nation state; or altering the Schumpeterian conception of democracy even more radically by considering democracy in substantive as opposed to procedural terms. In sum, these agenda setting efforts have produced clear concepts that identify and delimit a new subject matter which until recently has only been referred to by the fuzzy concept of democratic quality.

The delimitation of the subject matter and hence the identification of a clear research question—why have some countries developed patrimonial states and others bureaucratic states?—has gradually opened the way for empirical research. This line of research is only beginning and thus there is nothing like the body of research that already exists on democratic transitions and democratic stability. However, some suggestive efforts at causal theorizing and some significant evidence are already available.

An important causal theory is owed to the European literature on state formation. Though many issues in this literature remain unresolved, a well-established point of agreement across the main schools of thought is that many European states responded to the fiscal pressures created by wars by eliminating patrimonial powers.³¹ The pattern set by these European states, however, has not been replicated elsewhere.³² Indeed, as Mazzuca (2000b) shows in his analysis of South America, state formation in this region was not driven, as in Europe, by war and fiscal pressures. Rather, a different mechanism can be seen at work, in that the goal of the elites that oversaw the formation of the state was integration into the world economy as opposed to military expansion, and the primary source of fiscal resources used to create state structures was customs duties and foreign loans as opposed to domestic taxation. In Latin America, then, the formation of the state proceeded through a series of pacts between state forming and local elites, which reinforced rather than weakened the power of the latter. In short, these divergent processes explain why European states are bureaucratic in character and Latin American states are patrimonial, and support a finding that processes of state formation driven by war and fiscal pressures have constituted the most consistently traveled path to a bureaucratic state.

³¹Finer (1975), Tilly (1990), Downing (1992), Mann (1993). As Mazzuca (2000c) shows, an important disagreement in the European literature concerns the longer-term causes of the bureaucratization of the state. In this regard, Anderson's (1974) argument that the origins of war are to be found in the crisis of feudalism is not shared by other authors. This disagreement, however, takes as its point of departure a shared view of the causal importance of wars and fiscal pressures.

³²Moreover, noteworthy exceptions within Europe itself include Spain, Italy, Poland and Hungary.

This analysis raises the question about the prospects that countries in Latin America may, belatedly, undergo a political transformation that would turn its patrimonial states into bureaucratic states. However, as Mazzuca (2000a) argues, this is probably unlikely. Indeed, in an interesting twist on Rustow's (1970) argument that the conditions of democratic transition may be different from those of democratic stability, he suggests that the actors that affect the process of democratization of the regime are different from those that shape the process of state formation and, moreover, that the actors that have been mobilized in the process of democratization not only have no incentive to push for the bureaucratization of the state but may actually have an incentive to resist such a change. That is, because democratization in Latin America got underway in the context of a patrimonial state as opposed to a bureaucratic state, as in Europe, the likelihood of bureaucratization of the state in Latin American may be diminished. In other words, sequence appears to constitute a significant factor.

This research program, to be sure, is in its infancy and the findings of this research might best be treated as tentative. Moreover, the challenges that must be faced are considerable. Further causal theorizing is calling for. Better measures and more data are needed (Linz 1997: 417-18). And small-N and medium-N studies, which have the advantage of offering prompt tests of causal theories and which can help guide causal theorizing in productive directions, is another top priority. Nonetheless, this is certainly an exciting new agenda of research that is bound to push theorizing well beyond the traditional concerns of scholars working on democracy and establish fruitful links with a mainly European focused literature on state formation.

3. Conclusion

The literature this paper has discussed is valuable in a number of regards. First, it has addressed normatively pressing problems in an analytically tractable manner. The importance of the clear identification and delimitation of a subject matter is rarely considered as a step in the research process. Yet, as shown, it plays a key role in research, both in terms of establishing the normative relevance of the research agenda and of providing the first organizing principle of a research program. In this regard, it bears pointing out that in

the field of democracy studies this critical task of agenda setting involves a distinctly conceptual mode of analysis which opens up and organizes broad lines of research that can only be judged by their eventual fruitfulness. Once an agenda has been set, a range of other considerations enter into the picture. These other challenges are important and have been stressed throughout this paper. Indeed, one of the main concerns of this paper has been to argue that, even through democracy studies has led to the cumulation of significant findings, future progress in research hinges upon the ability of analysts to face up to three important challenges, which are closely interrelated and jointly affect the prospects of cumulative knowledge creation.

One challenge is the need to better conceptualize and measure the dependent variables. In this regard, this paper has emphasized the need for a more disaggregated conception of dependent variables and greater awareness concerning the choice of measurement level. In addition to increasing the validity of measures, these concerns are also likely to help define narrower and potentially more fruitful targets for causal theorizing. Indeed, as stressed in this paper, there are good indications that the different outcomes discussed in the literature on democracy have different causes and therefore that it would be fruitful to focus theorizing on more disaggregated outcomes. A second challenge is the need for greater integration of causal theories. The reason for this exhortation is that students of democracy, in their effort to avoid the dangers of exceedingly abstract theorizing and the pitfall of “premature parsimony” (O’Donnell 2001), have created a different problem: the multiplication of independent variables. As a result, theorizing has become cumbersome and somewhat disorganized, and tended to drift toward the theoretically unsatisfying perspective that outcomes are necessarily overdetermined.

The search for greater parsimony and hence the generation of more powerful theory is among the hardest in the social sciences and one that is probably not amenable to simple solutions or shortcuts. Indeed, we currently lack any well-established procedures for integrating causal theories. However, two important clues can be offered. First, there are good reasons to begin efforts at theorizing by focusing explicitly on the outcomes of interest and identifying generative mechanisms by working backwards. Indeed, it is crucial to realize that the identification of explanatory variables is not only a distinct task, compared to efforts to estimate causal effect, but also a logically prior one. Second, it is also crucial to note that even if causal

theorizing is molded to a greater degree by deductive thinking, causal theory about substantive issues necessarily involves a combination of inductive and deductive modes of thinking. Thus, any effort to produce greater theoretical integration will also have to consider the manner in which causal theorizing involves a diverse set of factors that are cast, moreover, at different levels of generality. The problem of integration, hence, can be seen as hinging upon the orderly disaggregation of the dependent variable into component parts that bear an explicit theoretical relationship to each other, and that are clearly linked to distinct generative mechanisms. In this sense, then, it is crucial to realize how the first two challenges, of conceptualization and measurement of the dependent variable and theoretical integration, are actually best seen as involving an iterative process of refinement.

Turning to the third challenge, concerning causal assessment, the ideal to be pursued in this field of studies, as in any other, should be a multi-method approach which considers the trade-offs associated with small-N and large-N methods (Coppedge 1999) and taps into the respective strengths of small-N methods—the generation of nuanced data, the sensitivity to the unfolding of processes over time, the focus on causal mechanisms—and large-N methods—the emphasis on systematic cross-case comparison, the concern with generalizability, the formulation of precise estimates of causal effect and statistical significance. There are good reasons, however, why such a multi-method approach is hard to use in practice. On the one hand, thus, this paper has stressed the need for large-N data sets on key, processual variables and the use of more historically-oriented quantitative methods. On the other hand, this paper has argued for the continuation of the multi-track approach used so far until small-N and large-N can be adequately combined and offered some suggestions especially concerning the small-N research projects that are most likely to yield important benefits.

In sum, the field of democracy has both made significant strides and still faces important challenges. In this sense it constitutes an exciting research agenda. It has opened up and continues to open up new substantive agendas. As the overall summary in Figure 1 shows, it has also generated some important findings. Moreover, the issues it is concerned with puts this field of study in dialogue with some of the main debates about theory and methods in comparative politics and, more broadly, in the social sciences. In this

sense students of democracy have focused consistently on the core theoretical issues of modern politics: the conflict over how the access to the power of the state is regulated and how the power of the state is exercised. In turn, in terms of methodological questions, the study of democracy has been a site of important methodological innovations and a substantive field where a range of methodological challenges have come into sharp focus. For these reasons, democracy studies should rightfully be seen as a vibrant and important research program.

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