

Why did democracy become consolidated only in the twentieth century

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Abstract. Democracy became the preferred and consolidated form of government only in the twentieth century. It is not sufficient to explain this change solely by reference to rational motives, nor by detecting processes and leadership. A historical approach is required. The new historical fact that led to the change of preference from aristocratic rule to democracy is the capitalist revolution, which changed the manner of appropriating the economic surplus from violence to the market. This is the first necessary condition for democracy. The disappearance of the fear of expropriation, the rise of middle classes and the pressures of the poor or of the workers are the second, third and fourth new historical facts that opened the way for the transition from the liberal to the liberal-democratic regime. After these four conditions were fulfilled, the elites ceased to fear that they would be expropriated if universal suffrage was granted. Eventually, after the transition, the democratic regime became the rational choice for all classes. The theory presented here does not predict transitions, since countries often turn democratic without fully realized historical conditions, but it predicts democratic consolidation, since no country that has completed its capitalist revolution falls back into authoritarianism.

Key words: democracy, economic development, capitalist revolution, democratic transition, democratic consolidation

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Democracy is today the prevailing and consolidated form of government in developed countries and tends to be so in the middle-income countries. Democracy has become such strong political value that nobody challenges it. Yet, this consensus is as recent as modern democracy is. Advanced countries and many middle-income countries became real democracies only in the twentieth century, when the poor and the women finally won the right to vote and to be elected.¹ Why did democracy become the dominant form of government so late historically? Why, since the Greeks, did philosophers prefer some form of monarchy or aristocracy to democracy? Why are democracies consolidated in

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some countries while not in others? Why are *coups d'Etats* so frequent in poor countries – countries that did not “complete” their capitalist revolutions?²

There are no simple answers to these questions, but I believe to have some consistent with political theory and with broad historical observation, as well as with the extensive empirical research undertaken by other political scientists on democracy and development. We know that economic development and democracy are linked. We also know that in the historical transition from traditional to modern societies, in the capitalist revolution taking place in each national state, a new and large bourgeoisie gradually assumed economic and political dominance and, eventually, came to support democracy after rejecting it for a long time in name of liberalism. Thus, the capitalist class was the first ruling class to accept democracy. In this paper, I try to understand the reason to that, discussing why the capitalist class removed successively its vetoes on democracy; and I hope to explain why democracy turned consolidate in rich countries and in an increasing number of middle-income countries, whereas it remained unstable in poor countries.

The method I use is historical; I am interested in generalizing from empirical experience rather than being normative, or depending on specific processes and leadership. I look for new historical events that changed the social reality. I also ask for the rational motives behind the consolidation of democracy, but they are not considered *a priori* as proposes rational choice, but *a posteriori* – just as an additional explanation to the change that the new historical facts originated and explain.

In this paper, I claim that the major new historical fact behind the rise of democracy was the “capitalist revolution” (the formation of the modern national-states and the industrial revolution) and the corresponding change of the form of appropriating the economic surplus from the control of the state to the market. After that, three subsequent historical facts (elites’ gradual loss of the fear of expropriation by a socialist working class winning elections, the pressure from the poor for more democratic participation, and the rise of middle classes) led economic elites to suspend their veto to democracy. We will see that these four historical facts explain why the bulk of democratic transitions and consolidations took place only in the twentieth century. Yet, in the case of democratic transitions, we have many exceptions to the model that I present in this paper, while, in the case of democratic consolidation, the occurrence of these facts are the necessary and sufficient condition.

I know that there is not an “operational” definition of capitalist revolution – it is difficult to say which country did complete its capitalist revolution and already counts with a large business class and working class and growing professional middle class, and in which country economic surplus is already appropriated mainly through the market on the form of profits. But I don’t believe that we should ask for that in papers considering *la longue durée*. This is primarily a theoretic not an empirical paper, but I also present here the empirical evidence for the capitalist revolution model explaining the relation between economic development and democratic transition and consolidation.

The philosophers’ view

In the ancient world, the normative view about the good political regime was clear: it should be monarchic or aristocratic, not democratic. The most that philosophers could accept was Aristotle’s “mixed regime”, in which some aspects of democracy were combined with authoritarian rule. Since the philosophers’ main political objective was social order or security, they were either outright authoritarian, like Plato, or moderate,

like Aristotle and Polybius, who were concerned to balance rich and poor for the sake of both stability and justice. Democracy alone was dangerous, subject to factions, instability and corruption. Today, we cannot view ancient Greek democracy as true democracy, given the exclusion of women and foreigners and the existence of slaves. Only many centuries later, with the great revolutions in France and in the United States, inspired by Greek democracy and especially Roman republicanism (Pocock 1975), democracy once again came into the minds of people as a possibility. Yet these were liberal rather than democratic revolutions: they gave priority to the protection of civil rights and the rule of law over the affirmation of political rights, particularly universal suffrage.

Politics – the art of governing through argument and compromise, and not only by the use of force – reappeared in the Italian merchant city-states with the republican humanists and their major representative, Machiavelli. After centuries, in a particular region of the world the times were suitable for doing and thinking politics. Yet, with the rise of the modern national-states in the form of absolute monarchies, such opportunities for politics and political thought seemed to fade. Not so. The Reformation changed Europe in political and cultural terms. And, given that the emerging nation-states were the outcome of a political alliance of the monarch with the emerging bourgeoisie, the members of this social class started to participate in the creation of new institutions. Eventually, with the American and the French revolutions, not only the fortune of markets but also the times of politics and of political thought achieved a new momentum.

With industrialization, the capitalist revolution in England was completed, and shortly thereafter in France and in the United States. The new market economy required a non-arbitrary political regime: a liberal state, respectful of property rights and contracts, in which the rule of law prevailed, but not necessarily a democratic one. Political philosophers were still far away from democracy; they lived in absolute monarchies, and, realistically, saw the liberal or constitutional state, not democracy, as the alternative form of political regime. The absolute monarchies, however, were already a manifestation of the capitalist revolution, and, with Thomas Hobbes and the social contract theory, the legitimacy of political power was transferred from tradition or from divine right to the people. After that, a new breed of enlightened or liberal political philosophers emerged. Liberalism is originally the ideology of the bourgeoisie, but it involved a larger range of interests. After Locke, the first great liberal philosopher, liberal thinkers were constitutional monarchists. Liberalism was not an alternative to monarchy, but a form of constitutionally limiting the powers of the monarch.

With the American and the French revolutions, liberal ideology turned dominant, but the word and the demand for “democracy”, long forgotten, returned to public debate. In the American Revolution, democracy was rejected, and, as John Dunn (2005: 72-73) remarks, only in retrospect, as America’s new constitution was put to work, and after Alexis de Tocqueville explained Americans to themselves, did the new nation view itself as a democracy. In the French Revolution, there was a radical democratic project, which proved self-defeating in the hands of the Jacobins. Jürgen Habermas (1988: 465), writing on the French Revolution and on the dialectic between liberalism and democracy, emphasizes that “democracy and human rights form the universalistic core of the constitutional state that emerged from the American and French Revolutions in different variants”. However, such a universalistic core would take a century to become reality. After the two revolutions, liberals often identified democracy with the worst excesses of the French Revolution, or as the dictatorship of the majority. In light of their historical experience, liberal political philosophers – such as Benjamin Constant – remained hostile to democracy, which would entail instability and disorder, thus demonstrating the inherent

incapacity of the people to govern. Even Rousseau, who is usually associated with democracy, was not really in favor of modern, i.e., representative, democracy. Being a citizen of the republican city-state of Geneva, he believed only in direct democracy. For large empires, or even in nation-states, he had the same view as Montesquieu: government was much more complex and difficult, and there was no alternative to a kind of despotism. Rousseau would not accept the basic criterion distinguishing liberal from liberal-democratic regimes: the inclusion of women and the poor as citizens.

The liberals, who had been the dominant political philosophers since the eighteenth century, favored democracy only in the twentieth century. Before that, they feared it: they were worried that the poor would expropriate the rich and cause disorder. They accepted the liberal politicians' policy of granting voting rights to the people, but gradually, slowly. One reason for this, according to Norberto Bobbio (1991: 26), was the classic conflict between reason and democracy.

In the great tradition of Western political thought, which began in Greece, the assessment of democracy, viewed as one of the three ideal forms of government, has been preponderantly negative: an assessment that is based on the assumption that democratic government, more than the others, is dominated by passions. As can be seen, exactly the opposite to reason.

In the second part of the nineteenth century, however, things began to change. For the market economy, a liberal political regime was not enough for protecting property rights and contracts. Democracy, which used to be a pejorative word, gradually underwent a transformation. In mid-nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill, following indications already existing in the work of Jeremy Bentham and of his own father, James Mill, was one of the first major philosophers to endorse democracy. Before that, we can also see a democratic tendency in Thomas Paine and in Tocqueville. According to C. B. Macpherson (1965: 1-2, 9) pressure from those who had no vote but were part of the market process became irresistible; on the other hand, writing in the mid-1960s, he noted that “democracy used to be a bad word... Then, within fifty years, democracy became a good thing. Its full acceptance into the ranks of respectability was apparent by the time of the First World War”.

Beginning in the more advanced nation-states at the end of the nineteenth century, universal suffrage was finally accorded in each country. Since the other requisite to democracy had been reasonably achieved by the liberal state, this was the historical new fact that completed the transition to democracy. As Pierre Rosanvallon (1992: 16) underlines in his history of the universal suffrage in France, “the universal suffrage is a kind of sacrament of the equality among men... it represents a fulfillment, the entry in a new age of the politic”.

Short review on democratic transitions

There is a long tradition of research and thought on democratic transitions and consolidations that begins with Seymour Lipset (1959) and Philip Cutright (1963), uses an historical approach following loosely either Weber (modernization theory) or Marx (structural theory). Lipset's classic paper on development and democracy shows that the more advanced an economy is, the more democratic it will tend to be. Lipset uses theories of modernization, and stresses the importance of education – which is indeed important, but not enough to explain why democracy became the preferred form of government only in the twentieth century. In fact, his seminal paper establishes a correlation, not a causal

connection. A series of other studies confirmed Lipset's original finding, but remained inconclusive in relation to the underlying cause.

In studying democratic transitions and consolidation, there are two alternative approaches to the historical one. The major study by O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986) on democratic transitions emphasized the particularities of each country in which the transition to, or the consolidation of, democracy took place, and attributed a major role to individuals and to the process through which authoritarian elites split between "soft liners" and "hardliners", a process that eventually led to the victory of the former. According to this approach, democracy is the result of changes in political institutions, processes, and leadership. The alternative is the rational choice approach, but, in so far as it is hypothetical-deductive and ignores history, it is by definition unable to explain historical facts. The former approach is too specific and involves a leadership aspect; the latter is too general; and both fail to consider the new historical facts and the structural and cultural conditions behind institutional change.

These two approaches derive from Dankwart Rustow's 1970 paper on transitions, which rejected the quite reasonable assumption that the causes of democratization are also the causes of consolidation. Rustow thereby created space for choice or agency; but this kind of approach either leads to abstract rational models like those used in neoclassical economics where choice becomes mere maximization, or ends up in case-by-case studies that lack predictive capacity. More recently, Charles Boix (2003), Boix and Stokes (2003) and Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2006) made contributions to the democratic transition issues that are related to the argument in this paper and made knowledge on the subject to advance, but they just show that democracy is less threatening to the rich when economic development takes place, while my argument is historical: is that the capitalist class is the first social class not to veto democracy and, second, that a consolidated democracy is only possible after the capitalist revolution takes place.³

This paper is part of the tradition of thought, the historical one that looks for new historical facts and for the structural, cultural and institutional determinants of social and political action. It is akin to approaches by Seymour Lipset (1959) and Barrington Moore (1966), Robert Dahl (1971), Samuel Huntington (1991), Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber and John Stephens (1992), who look for structural forces behind democratic transitions and consolidations.⁴ Yet Rueschemeyer, Huber and Stephens observed that "the causal forces that stand behind the relationship between development and democracy remain, in effect, in a black box" (1992: 29). In fact, capitalist development and democracy appear together but there is no clear explanation why. I hope to offer in this paper a contribution toward opening the black box and toward understanding democratic consolidation.

Two concepts: democracy and capitalist revolution

In late nineteenth or early twentieth century the more economically advanced countries adopted universal suffrage, and democracy became finally dominant. Table 1 presents the first countries to adopt universal suffrage up to the 1940s. The first was New Zealand, in 1893. The adoption of the universal right to vote does not mean that a country has completed its transition to democracy, but in most advanced countries this was the case. Such countries had constitutional or rule-of-law regimes. Freedom of thought and association and regular elections had also existed for some time. When the propertyless and women were finally entitled to vote, the minimum conditions for democracy materialized. As Wanderley G. Santos (1998) observes, the number of voters doubled, or

more than doubled, in most countries in the year that universal suffrage is adopted. The fact that democracy is a twentieth century phenomenon is quite clear from Table 1. The question is why only at that moment democracy became a viable form of government.

Table 1: The First Countries to Adopt Universal Suffrage (up to the 1940s)

Year	Country
1893	New Zealand
1902	Australia
1906	Finland
1913	Norway
1915	Denmark and Iceland
1918	Austria and Luxembourg
1919	Germany and the Netherlands
1920	United States
1921	Canada and Sweden
1923	Ireland and Uruguay
1928	United Kingdom
1929	Ecuador
1931	Sri Lanka
1932	Brazil
1934	Cuba
1937	Philippines
1942	Dominican Republic
1944	Jamaica
1945	Italy, Bulgaria, and Hungary
1946	France, Japan, Turkey, Poland, Albany, Romany, Panama, and Malta
1947	Argentina, Venezuela, and Pakistan,
1948	Belgium, Israel, South Korea, and Suriname
1949	Chile and Costa Rica

Sources: Santos (1998) and the Laboratory of Experimental Studies based on Nohlen (1993), Gorvin (1989), and Lane, McKay and Newton (1997).

It is time, now, to define two basic concepts that are in the core of this paper: the concept of democracy and of capitalist revolution. *Democracy* is the political regime in which all adult citizens vote (universal suffrage), elections are free and regular, and the constitution assures the rule of law involving principally freedom of association, of speech and of information, and protection of minority rights. In other words, I understand as democratic the political regime that satisfies Dahl’s criteria defining a polyarchy (1971; 1989: 233).⁵ This is a “minimal” concept of democracy, and corresponds to the first historical form of democracy – liberal democracy. As political development takes place, the quality of democracy is expected to improve, but we need a minimal concept of democracy to distinguish authoritarian from democratic rule and be able to discuss democratic transition and consolidation. In this paper, I do not discuss the quality of democracy.⁶ When we discuss democratic transition and consolidation, we should not expect of democracy more than a political regime is able to offer, nor fall back on the old distinction between formal and substantive democracy that served to justify authoritarian regimes.

We also need a short definition of capitalist revolution. The *capitalist revolution* represented a tectonic shift in the history of civilization. It began with the commercial revolution and the emergence of the bourgeoisie, advanced with the formation of the nation-states, and got “completed” in each country with the industrial revolution. It involved, at the economic level, the transition from the appropriation of economic surplus with the use of direct force by an oligarchy controlling the state to a mode of self-enrichment in a market-coordinated economy; it turned profit into the economic motive, and capital accumulation embodying technical progress into the means to that end. At the political level, it brought the transition from the absolute state to the liberal state – the one that assures the rule of law but is not democratic. At the administrative level, it implied the separation of the public from the private patrimony, or, in other words, the transition from the patrimonial state, where rent seeking was part of the game, to the modern bureaucratic state where rent-seeking turned a disease. With the capitalist revolution, the new nation-states were able to develop three basic institutions: the modern state apparatus, the legal-constitutional system, and the national market. At the cultural level, it involved the transition from tradition and revelation as sources of knowledge to reason and scientific research. The capitalist revolution begins with the emergence of a bourgeois middle class in Italian cities since the thirteenth century and “ends” with the formation of the nation-state and the industrial revolution in late eighteenth century in England. After that we can view the capitalist revolution as “completed” in each country where the appropriation of economic surplus ceased to take place principally through the control of the state to be achieved in the market, or, in Marx’s terms (1864: 1024-25), when “relative” surplus value (the one involving technological progress) turns the dominant form of surplus appropriation, there is “the real subsumption of labor under capital”, and that society arrives at “the specific mode of capitalist production”.⁷

Marx made the classical analysis of the capitalist revolution, but, since he was concerned with the transition to socialism, he was unable to derive from capitalism its two major political consequences: the formation of the nation-states,⁸ and the emergence of the democratic regimes. Barrington Moore (1996: 426) took a step ahead: he made the classical analysis of the bourgeois-democratic revolution – he showed “the English Civil War, the French Revolution and the American Civil War as the stages of *the* bourgeois-democratic revolution”. Writing one hundred years later, when democracy in England, France and United States was consolidate, but the experience of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes in other countries was still recent, he asked which had been the historical conditions in capitalist development that led to democracy. It was clear to him that the capitalist or bourgeois revolution was the central condition. Yet, since this fact was already well known when he wrote, his more specific question was which other conditions were required – conditions that were present principally in England, and also in France and United States, but not in Germany, Japan, Russia, China, or India. His innovative response as consequence of a major study for that was that, in the sixteen and the seventeenth centuries, the advance of commerce and the increased demand of absolutist rulers for cash led the English landed aristocracy to turn to a form of commercial farming and to a political alliance with the bourgeoisie. His illuminating theory relating liberalism and democracy to the emergence of the “gentry” – a numerous proprietary stratum below the aristocracy and above the rich peasants and the new bourgeoisie – is well known. But he underlines that, above the gentry, the overlords also got involved in commercial agriculture and in political coalition with the bourgeoisie. For him, to reduce the bourgeois-democratic revolution just to a conflict between these two classes won by the bourgeoisie is “a caricature” (p.428). While in a country like Germany, the aristocracy conserved throughout the nineteenth century a firm position against democracy, Moore underlines that the radical opposition to democracy was a

marginal current in the British aristocratic class. Yet, he underestimates the liberal resistance to democracy in Britain, or in the United States, or in France – a resistance that in name of the risk of the “dictatorship of the majority” delayed democracy for a century.

The basic argument

In the first democratic countries the transition to democracy was the outcome of *four historical events*, among which the capitalist revolution is the central one. Before capitalist revolution, the aristocratic elites exercised an absolute veto over democracy; after it, the new bourgeois elites, although not immediately adhering to democracy, ceased to veto it – and eventually turned interested in it. Barrington Moore had already remarked this fact. Discussing the political coalition of the English bourgeoisie with the landed aristocracy, Moore (p. 424) is clear that:

A vigorous and independent class of town dwellers has become an indispensable element in the growth of parliamentary democracy; no bourgeois, no democracy... the English bourgeoisie from the seventeenth through much of the nineteenth century had a maximum material interest in human freedom. (p. 418 and 424)

It is not my central concern in this paper to discuss the historical conditions that proved to be more favorable to liberalism and democracy in some countries than in others. Yet, it is central to my argument the claim that bourgeoisie is a class that, differently from the previous ruling classes or oligarchies, opposed democracy just for certain time and eventually accepted it. Before the capitalist revolution, production was organized at the family level, and economic surplus was appropriated through ownership of land and particularly by the use of political power to tax people, to reduce them to slavery or servitude. In order to be rich or to own land one was supposed to be politically powerful, to be part of the oligarchy controlling the state. The distribution of income was essentially a political question. Land property had also a political origin. Dominant groups appropriated economic surplus out of land rent and of war; they fought for booty, they enslaved the defeated, or imposed heavy taxes on the colonies, and they appropriated land. As society changed from tribal to more complex forms, like city-states and empires, taxation became increasingly important. The military aristocracy, with the support of a patrimonial bureaucracy and a religious hierarchy, appropriated the economic surplus from merchants, while landowners collected rents from peasants. Religious legitimacy was always an essential part of the process, but the very existence of empires and dominant oligarchies depended on their capacity to retain political power and to wage war. In the last form of pre-capitalist state organization, the patrimonial state, taxation was essential to finance a court aristocracy and a patrimonial bureaucracy. There was no separation between the public and the private patrimonies. The poor, identified since Aristotle as the sponsors of democracy, would often press for freedom, for some sort of democracy, but the dominant group resisted, resorting to all forms of violence to keep the state under their political control. Since markets had just a marginal existence, the only way to distribute wealth and income was through the control of the state. Occasionally the people or the merchants could gain some power and establish some form of republic, but the interests involved in political power would soon corrupt and wipe out the new regime.

After the industrial revolution signals the culmination of the capitalist revolution for each newborn national state, this situation changes dramatically. Now, constitutional and market systems coordinate society. Now profits and high salaries gain relevance in making people rich, while land rents and taxation lose it. The state continues to have a role in the

acquisition and distribution of income, but is no longer a condition for the existence of the economic elite. It is not easy to determine whether a country underwent its capitalist revolution, but besides the formation of the nation state and the industrial revolution, a good gauge is whether rent seeking or the patrimonial capture of the state still plays a major role in making people rich.

The capitalist revolution did not create democracy, but made it possible. The new capitalist class could now do what the previous dominant classes could not: it had the option of not vetoing democracy since the absolute control of the state was no longer a necessary condition of its wealth. From this moment on, the fight against authoritarian regimes gathered pace, the consensus against democracy disappeared. As John Dunn (1979: 8) observes, the “dismissal of the viability of democracy was a fair summary of an European intellectual consensus which reached back at least to the Principate of Augustus, it was a consensus which disappeared with surprising speed between 1776 and 1850 in Europe itself”. Thus, everything changed with the crucial historical process that was the capitalist revolution. The origins of my argument can be found in the following passage from Celso Furtado (1976: 33):

Two forms of appropriating surplus seem to have existed since the beginning of historical times. On one side is what we call the *authoritarian* form, which consists in extracting the surplus through coercion. On the other side we have the *mercantile* form, that is, the appropriation of surplus through exchange... The surplus utilized to appropriate another surplus is a *capital*, which entitles us to say that all socio-economic formations in which the surplus is predominantly captured through exchange belong to the *genus* capitalism.

In the historical moment when each national society changes from administrative to market appropriation of the surplus, the control of the state continued to be necessary to the new ruling class, but businessmen could leave the responsibility of governing and of protecting militarily the new nation-states from foreign aggression to politicians and bureaucrats including professional military men. At this moment, argument and persuasion start to prevail over force; the era of politics began. Now, people had the possibility of discussing and creating liberal and democratic institutions. The eighteenth century had already experienced a hint of it when some thinkers contrasted the harshness of aristocracy with the softness of capitalism. Montesquieu, above all, underlined commerce’s “douceur”.⁹ Albert Hirschman (1977), commenting on this view, observes that while the warrior aristocrats were subject to great and sometimes heroic passions, the bourgeoisie was limited to more modest and moderate traits. Analyzing Shaftsbury’s, Hutcheson’s and Hume’s analyses, Hirschman shows how these philosophers viewed economic activity as a “calm passion”.

England was the first country to form a strong nation-state, to make its industrial revolution and, so, to complete its capitalist revolution; it is not by accident that it was also the European country that was able to reduce to colony the ancient empires of Asia and Africa, and first liberal political regime in the world. In the early nineteenth century, England was ready for liberalism, not for democracy. The first and fundamental veto on democracy by the old oligarchies was not anymore in place, but a second veto – the fear of expropriation by the poor – remained strong. Thus, civil rights could be assured, but not political rights. It would take 100 years after the completion of the Industrial Revolution to this second veto be eliminated and the English elites admit universal suffrage.

The three additional new historical facts

According to this capitalist revolution model of democratic transition and consolidation, the fact that profits did not depend on the direct control of the state led the capitalist class to suspend the absolute veto on democracy. Yet it would take a century and three additional historical events to make democracy the preferred and widespread political regime. The second historical fact was that the bourgeoisie lost fear of expropriation by a majority of workers winning elections. The new capitalist class, formed by a large middle class and a small upper class, will be originally liberal. Its members strove for profits and for the guarantee of their hard-won civil rights. Their memory of the arbitrary rule that characterized absolutism was alive and well. With the liberal order, they had ceased to be mere subjects to become citizens endowed with rights. Yet, just as it took time for the aristocracy to grant full citizenship to the bourgeoisie, so it would take time for the new business class to accept that workers had full citizenship by the institution of universal suffrage. Although the seeds of democracy were in the liberal state, classical liberals fought strenuously democracy. They did so in the name of freedom, with the argument that freedom and equality conflicted with one another, that equal rights – which is a condition for democracy – would be intrinsically inconsistent with civic liberties, in so far as the equality of rights would lead to the tyranny of the majority and the denial of freedom. As Charles Lindblom (1977: 163) underlines, the first modern political philosophers “are all liberals first, and democrats, second, if at all”.

The capitalist class’ fear that universal suffrage would bring a dictatorship of the majority weakened gradually as the workers participated in elections and did not demonstrate such purpose. Workers proved not to be revolutionary: they demanded higher wages, increased labor protection, and democracy rather than socialism. Progressively capitalists realized that the workers did not vote as a bloc, and that the majority of workers would not vote for their expropriation. They observed that democratic politics tended to divide political parties ideologically, but the differences among them would tend to be increasingly small as they all had to converge to an ideological center identified with capitalism. In other words, they saw that a clear tendency to democratic elections involved change of policies but not of economic regime.

While the first and the second new historical facts that opened the way for democracy were on the supply side of democratic participation, the third and the fourth were on the demand side: the demand of the middle classes and of the working class. The rise of the middle classes – a bourgeois middle class, and a professional middle class – is the third new historical fact contributing to the historical process of democratic transition and consolidation that occurs in the twentieth century. The existence of this large layer between the rich and the poor worked as a main stabilizing factor thus circumventing the classical problem of early democracies: political instability.¹⁰ After the completion of the capitalist revolution, the bourgeoisie was a large middle class that required, besides the guarantee of civil rights, formal rules that permitted its members to participate in government. Democracy emerged eventually as the ensemble of such rules. With the advance of industrialization, a new professional middle class also emerged, and the two middle classes began to represent an increasing share of the total population – and they also demanded democracy. Besides, the fact that they were situated between the rich and the poor was also a reason for the rich to be less fearful of the poor and accept universal suffrage.

The fourth and final historical fact that led modern societies to democracy was the pressure of the poor or of the working class for democracy. Despite all their internal

contradictions, democracy was always a demand of the poor when they were able to express themselves politically. Integrated in large factories under the capitalist system, part of the poor turned into the working or salaried class, became better organized and more demanding. They demanded higher wages, increased labor protection, and democracy. Goran Therborn's essay on this subject (1977) is still the basic reference; Ruth Collier's 1999 book on the working class and elites in Western Europe and South America offers a major contribution to the theme. According to Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992: 8) "the working class was the most consistently pro-democracy force... The landed upper-classes which were dependent on a large supply of cheap labor were the most consistently anti-democratic force. The bourgeoisie we found to be generally supportive of the installation of constitutional and representative regime, but opposed extending political inclusion to the lower classes". When democracy won, it was a victory of the poor. Yet, I do not view the demand of workers or of the poor as the central cause of democracy; that was, rather, whether or not the elites kept their veto over it. It was only after the ruling classes relaxed it that the role of the poor, and also of the middle classes demanding more participation, became strategic.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the arguments against universal suffrage or on the risk of the dictatorship of majority had lost their force, while the demand for democracy increased, and the first countries that granted the universal suffrage became the first real democracies.¹¹ As Dahl (1989: 234) asserts, "although some of the institutions of polyarchy appeared in a number of English-speaking and European countries in the nineteenth century, in no country did the demos become inclusive until the twentieth century".

***A posteriori* rational motives**

Although democracy was originally a demand from the poor or the working class and the middle classes, it became gradually a rational option for the rich, provided that the liberal principles associated to the rule of law prevailed in the new democratic system. Besides realizing that democracy did not really endanger property and profits, the capitalist class became conscious that a democratic regime could be more stable, more effective in assuring social order, than just a liberal state. Since capitalism was not a zero-sum game as it was a permanent source of new wealth, the bourgeoisie realized that democracy mitigated by liberalism – liberal democracy – would adequately protect their interests regardless the fact that it also protected the poor and the middle classes.

In endorsing democracy, the rich lost political power, but in a limited way. They knew they could count on conservative and even on social-democratic political parties to protect their property rights since – as Adam Przeworski (1985) classically noted, they kept veto power on investment and economic growth. On the other hand, they kept control of the form of financing electoral campaigns, and of the media. They compromised on political power but not on liberal political values and principles: they made sure that the protection of minority and civil rights remained core elements in each national constitution.

This capitalist revolution model of transition and consolidation of democracy makes sense on two conditions: first, the understanding on the part of workers that a socialist revolution was not rational; second, that a satisfactory long-term rate of profit was assured to capitalists. Adam Przeworski (1985: 139, 177, 180) argues persuasively for the workers' rationality in refusing to support a socialist revolution. According to him, workers in advanced democracies had strong motives to feel no attraction for a revolution expropriating the rich; if workers had the right to vote, they would rationally vote for

socialist political parties committed to the socialist revolution. Yet they do not, because, on one hand, as long as capitalists control investments, they “are in a unique position in the capitalist system: they represent the future universal interests while interests of all other groups appear as particularistic and hence inimical to future developments”. On the other hand, according to Przeworski, workers did not have the assurance that moving to socialism would immediately improve their material conditions. On the contrary, they are not certain that socialism is more efficient than capitalism and, even if it is, the transition to socialism may involve a deterioration of workers’ welfare. Thus, he concludes, since “workers have the option of improving their material condition by cooperating with capitalists, the socialist orientation cannot be deduced from the material interests of workers”.

The second condition making this explanation of democratic transitions and consolidations – that capitalist development keeps the rate of profit at a satisfactory level, or, in Herbert Simons’ (1957) words, at a satisfying long-run level (that keeps entrepreneurs innovating and investing) – is an empirical fact. After the industrial revolution, the rate of profit did not fall as predicted by the classical economists but kept reasonably constant at a satisfactory level from the point of view of investing entrepreneurs. On the theoretical level, Bresser-Pereira (1986; 2004), in his model of growth and distribution, argued that, contrarily to the classical distribution theory, the rate of profit should be viewed as given or constant in the long-term growth process, while the wage rate should be seen as the residuum. Proceeding from this inversion of the classical distribution model, he showed that wages may increase at an equal, or at a higher rate than the increase in productivity while keeping the rate of profit at a reasonably satisfactory level provided that technical progress is neutral, or capital saving (only in the beginning of industrialization technical progress tends to be capital using). Thus, technical progress facilitates that the rate of profit is kept satisfactory and constant. Given that a satisfactory rate of profit is a required condition for businessmen to invest and the economy to grow, capitalist societies develop technologies, institutions, and ideologies that assure it. Workers soon realize that a satisfactory rate of profit is condition for the increase of their real wages, that the game between the rich and the poor is not a win-loss game, but a win-win game that makes capitalism more legitimate and democracy less threatening than it was initially thought.

These two conditions reinforce one another. On the one hand, workers had no rational motive to put their bets on the socialist revolution; on the other, as wages increased at approximately the same rate of productivity, they had good reason to keep participating in the economic system. The fact that the workers, eventually, had no better option was perceived not only by them but also by capitalists. Thus, as long as the latter understood this, they saw less and less reason to fear democracy. On the contrary, they became increasingly confident in democracy. The increase in the direct and social benefits entailed by democracy would not be a burden as long as they did not threaten the long-run rate of profit. Wage increases could sustain the rate of profit to the extent that they maintained effective demand, as Keynes demonstrated. As it became rational for workers individually, not just as a class, to support capitalism and to fight for democracy and for social rights, it also became rational for capitalists to support democracy. Workers increasingly understood the limits of their wage demands, while capitalists increasingly became persuaded that democracy could facilitate workers’ demands but, as a trade-off, provide a legitimate political system more able than authoritarian rule to assure political stability. In addition, capitalists realized that democracy made the rule of law much more secure – and nothing is more important for business activity than a stable constitutional and legal environment.

In this model, the rise of a large bourgeois middle class and of a larger professional middle class entered as a moderating factor reducing the conflict between the rich and the poor. Yet, if we understand that these two middle strata are part of the expanded ruling class that characterizes modern societies, we immediately realize that there is here an additional and relevant argument in favor of democracy. Being much larger than the old aristocracy, the new ruling class formed by the rich and the upper middle classes need institutions permitting groups within it to share political power or to rotate in government in an orderly way. Under these circumstances, democracy was the obvious rational choice, collectively and for each member. Democratic institutions created conditions for the resolution of their internal conflicts. Aristocratic groups, though plagued by internal and murderous struggles, were always small. They solved their conflicts personally. The emerging capitalist class, being large, had in democracy a better and more secure way of resolving its conflicts.

The arguments brought by Charles Boix (2003), Boix and Stokes (2003) and Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) to the democratic transition's issue are of a more strictly rational choice nature because they intend to find *a priori* rational motives. These authors argue that economic development causes democracy because when income distribution is more equal the elites' fear of redistribution, particularly through the imposition of higher taxes on the rich, will wane. This argument is in the same vein as the argument presented here in so far as it offers an economic explanation, but the similarity stops at this point. First, in relating democracy to economic development and income distribution it is assumed that there is a linear relation between the latter two variables, which is not the case. As Edward Muller (1997) showed, based on his own research and on many others', the relationship between economic development and inequality takes the form of a U- shaped curve, but the last 30 years showed that even this simple relationship can't be assured as inequality again increased. Second, in distinguishing the capitalist revolution model here presented from simple rational choice models, it is necessary to consider that, besides being economic, the model is political and historical. It uses rational arguments only *a posteriori*, considering new historical facts, while standard rational choice arguments and research are unable to take history into consideration. According to Acemoglu and Robinson (2006: XII) "since democracy will bring a shift of power in favor of citizens, why should the elite ever create such a set of institutions? We argue that this only occurs because the disenfranchised citizens can threaten the elite and force it to make concessions". This is too simple and does not explain too much. It says that democracy was won by the poor, or, more precisely, by the working class and the emerging new middle classes. But why did they win? Or, to what extent their demand was eventually co-opted by the capitalist class? On the other hand, if economic reasoning is in place, why not distinguish the loss of political power that the rich effectively suffered with the advent of democracy from the increased political stability that they gained – or, in other words, from the increased possibility of regularly achieving a satisfactory rate of profit?

Predicting democratic transition and consolidation

The capitalist revolution model here presented is useful to predict the overall transition to democracy, but when individual cases are examined, there are many exceptions. As Ruth Collier (1999: 20) argues, many are the paths to democracy. Foreign influence may lead to democratic transitions that otherwise would not occur (consider Haiti, for instance), or, on the opposite side, successful authoritarian rulers may stay in government much beyond what the evolution of economic and social variables would lead us to predict, as in the

case of Singapore. Today there is a large number of countries that, not having completed their capitalist revolution, are still democratic – either because of foreign pressure, or/and because nationals also don't see better alternative.

The model presented in this paper assumes that the same theory should explain transitions and democratic consolidation, but it is more solid in the second than in the first ground. Historically, a full change from state to market appropriation of the economic surplus is a necessary and sufficient condition for democratic consolidation, not for democratic transition. No country experienced democratic consolidation before having changed the coordination of the economy from the state to the market, and having reduced substantially the patrimonial aspects of its state, but the same cannot be said in relation to democratic transitions, because they often result from pressures from other and more powerful countries and from imitation.

The capitalist revolution model here presented is effective in predicting that an increasing number of countries will turn democratic as they grow and complete their capitalist revolutions, but fails to be a secure case by case predictor of democratic transitions. In the case of democratic consolidation, however, the model is also strong on a country-by-country basis. After a country with the necessary conditions for democracy undergoes democratic transition, its democracy is consolidated: the probability that it will fall back into authoritarian rule turns vanishingly small. The tragic failure of the Weimar democracy in Germany is an exception to this rule. After the defeat in World War I, the transition to democracy took place in a country that had already completed its capitalist revolution in the times of Bismarck; nevertheless, it fell back to authoritarian rule a few years later, with the support of the German nation. How can we explain that? Was fascism or Nazism the necessary outcome of late capitalist revolutions, as some argued? Or was it a reaction to the communist revolution in Russia? I believe that the first explanation is outright wrong, while the second makes more sense in Germany and Italy where the capitalist revolution had just ended and where strong socialist political parties were around. I believe that Mussolini's fascism was eventually a reaction to the fear of communism, but it does not represent an exception to the capitalist revolution theory because previously to fascism Italy could hardly be called a democracy. As to the Weimar republic, it was democratic, but we cannot say that the German people "conquered democracy" in 1919; actually, democracy was the outcome of a defeat in a major war. Immediately after the new democracy, Germany was miserably treated by the winning countries in the Versailles Treaty, and experienced hyperinflation in the following years. Thus, when Adolph Hitler took power, he profited from a deep resentment of the German people to assume full political power and resume war. World War II was a continuation of the first one.

Theories on democratic consolidation usually list the characteristics that are common to consolidated democracies, instead of explaining democratic consolidation. In relation to democratic consolidation, we find the same theoretical dividing line between the historical or socio-economic approach and the processes and leadership approach that exists in the discussion of democratic transitions. Radical manifestations of the process and leadership approach turn democratic consolidations void of historical content: are just lists of consolidation requirements. Scott Mainwaring (1992: 327) is right when he notes that "the most important dividing line in contemporary work on democracy is between those who see it primarily as a result of propitious economic, social, or cultural conditions and those who see it primarily as a result of political institutions, processes, and leadership". Looking for the causes of the increased survivability of democracies in Latin America, Mainwaring (2000) sees three factors explaining it: "the first explanation evolves around the structural transformations unleashed by modernization... second, from left to right of

the spectrum, political attitudes changed... Finally, international support for democracy, especially from the United States, increased...” This approach, as the one adopted by Linz and Stepan (1996) with the help of four types of non-democratic regime whose characteristics would influence decisively the transition and consolidation paths, is also a historical approach to democratic consolidation consistent with the view presented here.

In the growing literature on democratic transition, Gerard Alexander’s (2002: 57) presents a broad picture of the consolidation process. He defines a central question: “what leads the rich to expect its well-being and safety to be predictably better secured in democracy than under authoritarian rule?” The question is in agreement with the model presented in this paper, because it locates the problem in the preferences of the rich or of the capitalist class toward democracy, and because Alexander shows that this class may rationally change its preferences as new factors emerge. As it happened in Brazil in the early 1960s, democracy was not rational for the business class, but it became rational – more able to meet that class’s need for economic well-being and security – after the late 1970s. Yet, as Alexander does not adopt an historical approach, he does not have an answer to the question he correctly poses.

According to the capitalist revolution model, when a country makes its transition to democracy after having completed its industrial revolution, we may predict that it will probably remain democratic, because only a country that fulfilled this condition will have the social structure, the political culture and the required institutions for a consolidated democracy. A country may try to import democratic institutions, but it is impossible either to import the social structure and the culture that makes democracy rational to economic and political elites, or to import the respective democratic culture that is necessary to a consolidated regime. The more fully capitalist is a country, the more consolidated its democratic regime will tend to be.

The research by Adam Przeworski and associates (2000) on economic development and democracy offers a definitive substantiation for the strong relation between capitalist revolution and democratic consolidation. In their study of democracy for the period 1950-1990, they concluded that there is no relationship between levels of economic development and transitions to democracy. The claim is radical, but concurs with the caveat that I have already made, namely, that in predicting democratic transitions the completion of the capitalist revolution faces many exceptions deriving from earlier transitions. Yet, from their research we can infer that democratic consolidation is strongly associated with economic development. Besides showing the positive relation between economic development and democratic consolidation, they claim, based solidly on their data that “where they are established, democracies are much more likely to endure in more highly developed countries”: in rich democracies (above US\$6,000.00 per capita, per annum) they conclude that the probability that the regime will fall back into dictatorship is practically zero. If we accept that the assumption that non-oil exporting countries with per capita incomes above US\$6,000.00 per annum have completed their capitalist revolution (a reasonable or conservative assumption), it follows that the completion of the modernization process implies democratic consolidation.

Conclusion

One can say that the hypothesis here developed – the capitalist revolution model relating democracy and economic development – is not empirically falseable due to the difficulty of defining the moment when a country completes its capitalist revolution. Yet, I believe

that there is already sufficient evidence that this claim is true. Historical experience abundantly shows that, after a country completes its capitalist revolution, it will tend to become democratic; subsequently, when it becomes democratic, its democracy will be consolidated. But, besides this general historical experience, would we dispose of some stronger evidence that a country that completed the historical requirements for democracy, and democratized, will not fall back into authoritarianism? This is an interpretative paper using a broad brush to identify a common long-term trajectory. I have not carried out new research on the subject. The evidence already available, however, strongly supports the hypothesis presented here on the consolidation of democracy. The entire literature linking democracy with economic development actually supports it. After the classic paper by Lipset, all the research confirmed the basic finding.

Summing up, democratic transition was the outcome of four historical new facts all related to the capitalist revolution, involving the removal of the two vetoes exercised by the rich. Additionally, the argument developed here depends on two conditions: workers' lack of commitment to a socialist revolution, and the long-run constancy of the rate of profit while wages and salaries rise with productivity. When a country satisfies all these requirements and transition takes place, the resulting democracy will be a consolidated one. The same theory that explains why democracy became widespread in the twentieth century explains consolidation more specifically, country by country.

The model of democratic consolidation presented here does not establish a definite causal connection. Yet it shows that in a society where profits and salaries earned in the market become the dominant forms of surplus appropriation – the main indicator that the capitalist revolution in a given country has been completed – elites cease to veto democracy. Subsequently, as voting rights start to be extended to the poor, capitalist elites realize that this change does not really threaten property rights and contracts. Workers, in their turn, increase their demands for political participation, but in a moderately manner. Eventually, elites realize, based on their own and other countries' experience, that democracy promotes their interests better than authoritarian regimes: it is more stable and provides rules for its many members to share and rotate power. The middle classes, who grow extraordinarily, feel the same. In other words, after an industrial revolution makes the appropriation of the economic surplus dependent not on state control but on the market, authoritarian regimes cease to be attractive to capitalists. In a second moment, the professional class receiving salaries instead of wages grows and shares power with the capitalists. It too has no reason to prefer authoritarianism. Eventually, democracy becomes rational for all classes, despite the dissatisfaction that sharing power always causes.

What is the relevance of the theory presented in this paper? First, it permits us to better understand the past. With it, we understand why democracy became the preferred and widespread form of government only in the twentieth century. Second, we understand why democracy was consolidated initially in the countries that first underwent capitalist revolutions, i.e., England, France and the United States. Third, we have now a criterion to predict whether a country making its transition to democracy will end up with a consolidated democracy. If it emerges endogenously, as an outcome of the capitalist revolution and the overcoming of the fear of expropriation, it will be consolidated, whereas if it is the outcome of external pressure or of the attempt by local elites to imitate the institutions of the more advanced societies, it will not.

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¹ In this paper I assume the existence, today, of three types of countries: rich, middle-income and poor countries. Rich and middle-income countries are the ones that are already fully or completely capitalist; poor countries are the ones that are attempting to make their national and industrial revolution (their capitalist revolution) but did not get to it yet.

² For instance, in the printed edition of *The Economist* that I just read (December 11th 2010), there was a report on recent coups in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Madagascar. In Latin America, poor countries that elect left-wing presidents are permanently threatened by coups d'Etat.

³ For a recent survey on transitions to democracy from a rational choice standpoint, see Barbara Geddes (2007).

⁴ I used this approach originally in 1978 to analyze and predict the Brazilian transition to democracy that would occur eight years later. I assumed that Brazil had already completed its capitalist revolution. Yet, due to the 1959 Cuban revolution, and the political radicalization that followed, the Brazilian bourgeoisie opted, in 1964, for an authoritarian regime. Thirteen years later, however, this fear had disappeared, and the capitalist class gradually joined forces with the other sources of democratic pressure (Bresser-Pereira, 1978; 1984).

⁵ Although I believe that Dahl's distinction between modern democracy and polyarchy is useful in certain circumstances to distinguish an ideal form of government from reality, and also from Greek

democracy, note that in this paper I use “modern democracy” or just “democracy” and “polyarchy” as synonyms.

⁶ Guillermo O’Donnell (2004) wrote an encompassing essay on the quality of democracy.

⁷ We also read in Marx (1864: 1035): “With the real subsumption of labor under capital a complete (and constantly repeated) revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relations between workers and capitalists”. In Marx’s dialectical terms, in this moment, when technological progress turns inherent to capitalist production, the capitalist revolution is completed, but it is always in movement, it is always and necessarily changing.

⁸ The first task – to derive from the capitalist revolution the nation-state – was principally done by Charles Tilly (1975, 1992).

⁹ According to Montesquieu (1748: 609) “où il y a du commerce, il y a de mœurs doux” (“wherever there is commerce, manners are soft”).

¹⁰ The main reason why the classical philosophers view democracy negatively was the fact that this political regime was unstable and, so, inclined to demagoguery.

¹¹ In the United States, universal manhood suffrage had existed since the first part of the nineteenth century, probably because the Americans were the first to shake off the fear of expropriation.