Democratization and democratic transition

DONATELLA DELLA PORTA and FEDERICO M. ROSSI

Social movements are increasingly considered as relevant actors in theorizations about democracy. Recently, an empirical linkage between movements and democratization processes has also been established. On the one hand, many of the processes that cause democratization generally promote social movements and "democratization as such further encourages people to form social movements" (Tilly 2004: 131). On the other, "under some conditions and in a more limited way, social movements themselves promote democratization" (Tilly 2004: 131). When looking at the impact of movements on democracy, the evidence is however mixed. First, some social movements support democracy, but some do not. Second, their relevance in democratization processes is discussed: while a "populist" approach to democracy emphasizes participation from below, with movements as important actors in the creation of democratic public spheres, the "elitist" approach considers democratization as mainly a top-down process.

Social movements support democracy and contribute to democratization only under certain conditions. Mobilization has frequently contributed to a destabilization of authoritarian regimes, but it has also led to an intensification of repression or the collapse of weak democratic regimes, particularly when movements do not stick to democratic conceptions. Labor, student, and nationalist movements brought about a crisis in the Franco regime in Spain in the 1960s and 1970s, but the worker and peasant movements and the fascist countermovements contributed to the failure of the process of democratization in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s (Tarrow 1995). Beyond a movement's propensity to support democracy, democratization processes might follow different paths, being more or less influenced by social movements. As the relationship between social movements and democratization is not simple, two main questions for research are: *When, how, and why do movements promote democratization?* And, *what are the consequences of their participation in the different stages of democratization processes?*

These questions could be addressed by bridging social movement studies and democratization studies. Notwithstanding the practical and theoretical relevance of the topic, the interactions between movements and democratization have rarely been addressed in a systematic way. Additionally, even though social movements are increasingly recognized, in political and scientific debates, as important actors in democracies, interactions between the two fields have been rare. On the one hand, movements have been far from prominent in the literature on democratization, which has mainly focused on either socioeconomic pre-conditions or elite behavior. On the other hand, social movement scholars, until recently, have paid little attention to democratization processes, mostly concentrating their interest on democratic countries (especially on the Western European and North American experiences), where conditions for mobilization are more favorable.

THE ROLE OF MOVEMENTS FOR DEMOCRATIZATION STUDIES

Studies on democratization have traditionally assigned a limited role to social movements and protest. Democratization studies developed within a structuralist approach. Within *modernization theory*, Lipset (1959) associated the chances for the emergence of a democratic

The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements,
Edited by David A. Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klandermans, and Doug McAdam.

DOI: 10.1002/9781405198431.wbespm066

regime with economic development. Although powerful in explaining the survival of established democracies, modernization theory tended to ignore the role of social actors and movements in *crafting* democracy, leaving the timing and tempo of democratization processes unexplained. When they did examine the role of organized and mobilized actors in society, they tended – as in Huntington (1991) – to consider mobilization, in particular of the working class, as a risk more than an asset.

A different vision dominated some of the main works in *historical sociology*, which linked democratization to class relations. Among others, Bendix (1964) and Marshall (1992) recognized the impact of class struggles in early democratization. More recently, Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) have pointed to the role of the working class in promoting democratization in the last two waves of democratization in Southern Europe, South America, and the Caribbean; and Collier (1999) confirmed their important impact in recent waves of democratization in Southern Europe and South America. Although recognizing a path of democratization from below, these studies still tended to explain these mainly on the basis of structural conditions.

The "structuralist bias" is criticized by the *transitologist approach*, which stresses agency, as well as a dynamic and processual vision of democratization, focusing on elite strategies and behavior (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986). While protests and movements are supposed to play an important role at the beginning of the transition process, this so-called "resurrection of civil society" is seen as a short disruptive moment when movements, unions, and society in general push for the initial liberalization of a nondemocratic regime into a transition toward democracy. Although this is a moment of great expectations, "regardless of its intensity and of the background from which it emerges, this popular upsurge is always ephemeral" (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986: 55–56). As in this wave of reflection the *"reforma/ruptura pactada"* in Spain was considered (explicitly or implicitly) as the model for successful democratization, the ephemeral life of a mobilized society tended to be perceived as not only inevitable, given the re-channeling of participation through political parties and the electoral system, but also desirable, in order to avoid frightening authoritarian soft-liners into abandoning the negotiation process with pro-democracy moderates. Several studies, however, have demonstrated the crucial role played by mobilized actors in the Spanish transition (cf. Maravall 1982; Tarrow 1995; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly 2001).

Within transitology, more systematic attention to civil society in democratization processes can be found in Linz and Stepan's (1996) model of extended transition, which addresses South American, and Southern and Eastern European cases. Contrasting it with a "political society" composed of elites and institutionalized actors, "A robust civil society, with the capacity to generate political alternatives and to monitor government and state can help transitions get started, help resist reversals, help push transitions to their completion, help consolidate, and help deepen democracy. At all stages of the democratization process, therefore, a lively and independent civil society is invaluable" (Linz & Stepan 1996: 9). Although they recognize its role in theory, these authors do not give much empirical space to civil society.

Linz and Stepan (1996), though, hypothesize that the type of nondemocratic regime influences the potential for the emergence of movements and protests that precede liberalization, and accompany democratization. *Totalitarian* regimes are those that, by eliminating any pluralism, jeopardize the development of autonomous organizations and networks that could then be the promoters of democracy. *Sultanistic* regimes, due to the high personalization of power, include the manipulative use of mobilization for ceremonial purposes and through para-state groups, discourage and repress any kind of autonomous organization that could sustain resistance networks. *Authoritarian* regimes, that were mainly installed in countries with previous (semi-)

democratic experience, are those which generally experience the most massive mobilizations, and the best organized underground resistance based on several networks that either pre-dated the regime or were formed later thanks to higher degrees of pluralism. Adding to this argument, within authoritarian regimes, we may expect mobilization opportunities to be different for *bureaucratic-authoritarianism*, where a technocratic civic–military elite commands the depoliticization of a mobilized society for capital accumulation (O'Donnell 1973), and *populist-authoritarianism*, where the elites mobilize the society from above for the legitimation of the regime while incorporating the lower classes (cf. Hinnebusch 2007). Mobilization during democratic consolidation also seems to be more difficult the longer the life of the authoritarian regime (cf. Ulfelder 2005).

Different transition paths can also offer different opportunities to social movements. Linz and Stepan (1996) singled out the specific challenges of multiple simultaneous transitions, where regime changes are accompanied by changes in the economic system and/or in the nation-state arrangement. It is important not only whether the previous regime was authoritarian or totalitarian, but also whether it was a capitalist or a communist one. In particular, when there is a triple transition, the problem of nation-state building is reflected in the emergence of nationalist movements mobilizing in the name of contending visions of what the *demos* of the future democracy should be (Beissinger 2002). The moderation versus radicalization of claims for autonomy/independence has been mentioned as favoring or jeopardizing the transition to democracy.

Even though the dynamic, agency-focused approach of transitology allowed for some interest in the role played by movements in democratization to develop, transitology tends to consider movements as manipulated by elites. Transitology stresses the contingent and dynamic nature of the democratization process, but tends to reduce it to bargaining among political elites in a context of uncertainty. In addition to their "elitist bias," transitologists have been criticized for emphasizing the role of individuals over collective actors, thereby reducing the process to strategic instrumental thinking, for ignoring class-defined actors such as unions and labor/left-wing parties, and for being state-centric, subordinating social actors to state actors (Collier 1999).

THE ROLE OF MOVEMENTS FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS STUDIES

Within the social movement approach, attempts to look at social movements in democratization phases have been very rare (Rossi & della Porta 2009). Especially in Latin America, the *new social movement approach*, which addressed the emergence of a new actor in post-industrial society, was widely applied in the 1980s and 1990s to single out the cultural and social democratization produced by movements (Escobar & Álvarez 1992). The *political process approach* – that highlights the interrelationship between governmental actors, parties, movements, and protest – was instead sometimes applied to explain regime transformation in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Beissinger 2002). Yet this approach has also been criticized as overly structuralist.

Even if the systematic analysis of processes of transition from below is scarce, there has been some fresh research on movements and democratization. The emergence of the Global Justice Movement pushed some social movement scholars to pay more attention to issues of democracy, as well as to movements in the Global South. Some pioneering research aimed at applying social movement studies to authoritarian regimes, from the Middle East (Wiktorowicz 2004) to Asia (Boudreau 2004). More generally, recognizing the structuralist bias of the political process approach, a more dynamic vision of protest has been promoted, with attention paid to the social mechanisms that intervene between macro-causes and macro-effects

(McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly 2001). Recently, some scholars within this approach proposed the reformulation of the transitology perspective, taking into account the role played by contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly 2001; Tilly 2004; Schock 2005). Similarly to the transitology approach, they have stressed agency as well as the importance of looking at democratization as a dynamic process.

Some reflections have pointed to the democratizing role of civil society – theoretically located between the state and the market – with diminishing confidence in the role played by political parties as carriers of democratization. The *global civil society perspective* emphasizes the democratizing role played by a worldwide organized civil society in democratization on a supra-national scale. In some of these interpretations, civil society is conceptualized as almost synonymous with social movements.

MOVEMENTS IN DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESSES

Case studies have indicated that democratization is often linked to two contentious dynamics, which could affect different steps of the democratization process: (a) a pro-democratic cycle of protest, and (b) an increasingly massive and nonsyndical wave of strikes (cf. Foweraker & Landman 1997; Collier 1999; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly 2001). In Spain, Brazil, and Peru, for instance, strike waves were very important during the whole or part of the democratization process (Collier 1999). While Peru's democratization is very much associated with a strike wave (1977–1980) against a highly unpopular authoritarian regime (Collier 1999), Brazil experienced a strike wave (1974–1979), followed by a cycle of protest (1978–1982) mainly mobilized by urban movements. Sometimes cycles of protest and strike waves converge. On many other occasions strike waves are stronger in the first resistance stages, decline later, and then reemerge during liberalization and transition in coordination with the upsurge of a cycle of protest originating from underground resistance networks. An attempt to identify a sequence of stages where movements play different roles in democratization processes can be carried out following the literature on movements (Rossi & della Porta 2009).

First, underground networks of resistance often undermine the legitimacy and the (national and international) support for authoritarian regimes. Human rights movements, unions, and churches promote the delegitimation of the authoritarian regime in international forums such as the United Nations, and in clandestine or open resistance to the authoritarian regime at the national level. The resilience of resistance networks under the impact of repression can lead to splits in the ruling authoritarian elites (Schock 2005). Among those organizations that have played a pro-democratic role are church-related actors (Osa 2003), and human rights networks, sometimes in transnational alliances (Keck & Sikkink 1998), as well as, very often, the labor movement (Collier 1999). Social networks of various types have emerged as fundamental, especially for some paths of mobilization under authoritarian regimes (Osa 2003).

Second, the increased open mobilization for a regime change during liberalization pushes the process to a transition notwithstanding some elites' resistance. Protests or strikes often constitute precipitating events that start liberalization, spreading the perception among the authoritarian elites that there is no choice other than opening the regime if they want to avoid an imminent or potential civil war or violent takeover of power by democratic and/or revolutionary actors (e.g., Bermeo 1997; Wood 2000). During *liberalization*, social and political organizations publicly (re)emerge in a much more visible fashion (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986): unions, labor/left-wing parties, and urban movements, mainly in shantytowns and industrial districts, have often pushed for democracy (Collier 1999), sometimes in alliance with transnational actors (Keck & Sikkink 1998). During the *transition*

to democracy, old (labor, ethnic) movements and new (women's, urban) movements have often participated in large coalitions asking for democratic rights as well as social justice (Tarrow 1995).

Third, the consolidation of a procedural democracy is related to the struggle among sectors pushing for an authoritarian return and the (re)mobilization of social and political organizations for sustaining and expanding democracy. In transitology literature, *consolidation* is generally linked to the end of the democratization process as signaled by the first free and open elections, the end of the uncertainty period, and/or the implementation of a minimum quality of substantive democracy (Linz & Stepan 1996). In some cases, this is accompanied by a demobilization of some organizations as energies are channeled into party politics; in others, however, demobilization does not occur (e.g., on Argentina, Bolivia, and the Andean region). In fact, social movement organizations (SMOs) mobilized during liberalization and transition rarely totally disband. On the contrary, democratization often facilitates the development of SMOs (e.g., the women's movement in Southern Europe). The presence of a tradition of mobilization, as well as movements that are supported by parties, unions, and/or religious institutions, can facilitate the maintenance of a high level of protest, as in the Communist Party's promotion of shantytown dwellers' protests in Chile, the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) and part of the Roman Catholic Church working with rural workers' movements and unions in Brazil, or the environmental movements in Eastern Europe (Flam 2001). In this stage, movements might claim the rights of those who are excluded by "low intensity democracies" and ask for a more inclusive democracy (i.e., land reform, employment, indigenous and women's movements) and the end of authoritarian legacies (Eckstein 2001). Movements' alternative practices and values help to sustain and expand democracy. Furthermore, movements' networks play an important role in mobilizing against persistent exclusionary patterns and authoritarian legacies. Keeping elites under continuous popular pressure after transition can facilitate a successful consolidation.

Finally, there are major transnational influences that play out during the whole process of democratization and which are linked to the evolving interstate rules that define the global normative context for action by states as well as linking states and social organizations against human rights violations. All of these aspects have an indirect or direct impact on movements' participation in democratization processes (cf. Keck & Sikkink 1998), with particular tensions between the conceptions of democracy expressed by local SMOs and the Western conceptions promoted by transnational actors.

SEE ALSO: Decolonization and social movements; Democracy and social movements; Human rights movements; "Orange" and "colored" revolutions in former Soviet Union; Political opportunity/political opportunity structure; Politics of grief and grieving "mothers" movements; Tiananmen student movement (China); Velvet Revolution of 1989.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

Beissinger, M.R. (2002) *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Bendix, R. (1964) *Nation Building and Citizenship*. Wiley & Sons, New York.

Bermeo, N. (1997) Myths of moderation. *Comparative Politics* 29, 205–322.

Boudreau, V. (2004) *Resisting Dictatorship*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Collier, R.B. (1999) *Paths Toward Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Eckiert, G., and Kubik, J. (2001) *Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989–1993*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

Eckstein, S. (ed.) (2001) *Power and Popular Protest*, 2nd edn. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Escobar, A., and Álvarez, S. (eds) (1992) *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America*. Westview, Boulder, CO.

Flam, H. (2001) *Pink, Purple, Green. Women's, Religious, Environmental and Gay/Lesbian Movements in Central Europe Today*. Columbia University Press, New York.

Foweraker, J., and Landman, T. (1997) *Citizenship Rights and Social Movements: A Comparative and Statistical Analysis*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Hinnebusch, R. (2007) Authoritarian persistence, democratization theory and the Middle East: An overview and critique. In: Volpi, F., and Cavatorta, F. (eds), *Democratization in the Muslim World: Changing Patterns of Power and Authority*. Routledge, London, pp. 11–33.

Huntington, S. (1991) *The Third Wave*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

Keck, M., and Sikkink, K. (1998) *Activists Beyond Borders*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

Linz, J., and Stepan, A. (1996) *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Lipset, S.M. (1959) Some social requisites to democracy. *American Political Science Review* 55, 69–105.

Maravall, J.M. (1982) *The Transition to Democracy in Spain*. Croom Helm, London.

Marshall, T.H. (1992) Citizenship and Social Class. In: Marshall, T.H., and Bottomore, T. (eds), *Citizenship and Social Class*. Pluto Press, London, pp. 3–51. (Orig. pub. 1950.)

McAdam, D., Tarrow, S., and Tilly, C. (2001) *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

O'Donnell, G. (1973) *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

O'Donnell, G., and Schmitter, P. (1986) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Osa, M. (2003) Networks in opposition. In: Diani, M., and McAdam, D. (eds), *Social Movements and Networks*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 77–104.

Rossi, F., and della Porta, D. (2009) Social movement, trade unions and advocacy networks. In: Haerpfer, C., Bernhagen, P., Inglehart, R., and Welzel, R. (eds), *Democratization*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 172–195.

Rueschemeyer, D., Stephens, E.H., and Stephens, J. (1992) *Capitalist Development and Democracy*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Schock, K. (2005) *Unarmed Insurrections*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Tarrow, S. (1995) Mass mobilization and regime change. In: Gunther, R., Diamandouros, N., and Puhle, H. (eds), *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, pp. 204–230.

Tilly, C. (1993–1994) Social movements as historically specific clusters of political performance. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 38, 1–31.

Tilly, C. (2004) *Social Movements, 1768–2004*. Paradigm, Boulder, CO.

Ulfelder, J. (2005) Contentious collective action and the breakdown of authoritarian regimes. *International Political Science Review* 26, 311–334.

Wiktorowicz, Q. (ed.) (2004) *Islamic Activism*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Wood, E. (2000) *Forging Democracy from Below*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.