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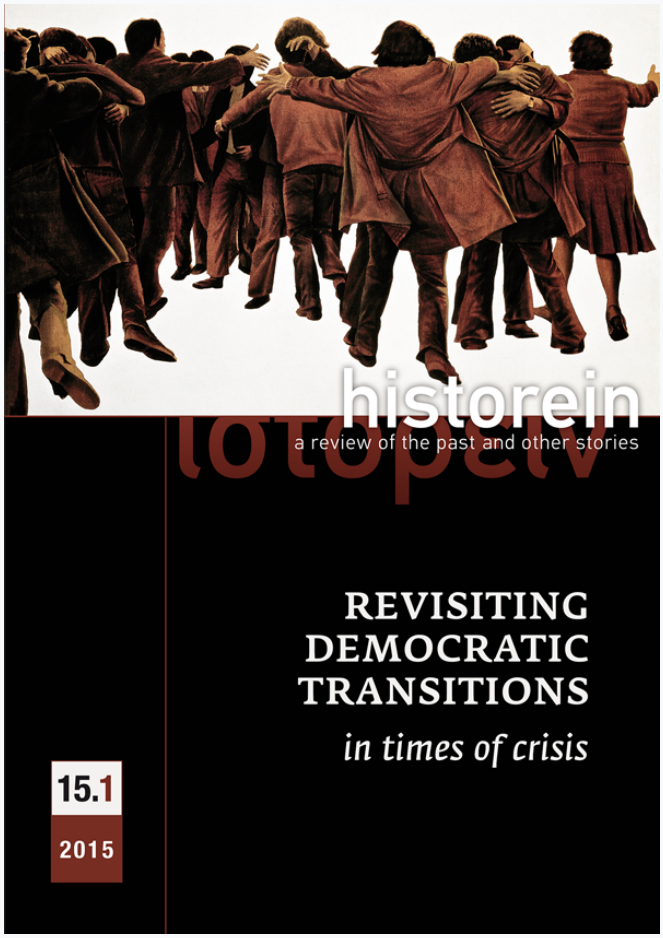
Historein

Vol 15, No 1 (2015)

Revisiting Democratic Transitions in Times of Crisis



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doi: 10.12681/historein.288

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To cite this article:

Morlino, L. A. (2015). Transitions to democracy: what theory to grasp complexity?. *Historein*, *15*(1), 13–31. https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.288

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Transitions to democracy: what theory to grasp complexity?

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Within the comparative analysis of democratisations, the transition towards democracy is still challenging scholars and practitioners in search of more meaningful theoretical results. In fact, the process displays such a great variety of modes, aspects and events as to make it impervious to every attempt at systematic description and explanation. If we consider the most recent time span, from the early 1970s through to 2015, when, relatively speaking, the largest number of transitions occurred, successful or otherwise, the empirical universe to include covers all areas of the world. If we just take successful or quasi-successful transitions, then the cases to be considered include at least: Portugal, Spain and Greece in Southern Europe (3); Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico in Latin America (14); Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in Eastern Europe (12); Indonesia, South Korea and Taiwan in East Asia (3); South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Ghana in Southern and Central Africa (4); and Tunisia in North Africa (1). This universe is thus made up of 37 countries, while the total number of liberal democracies in 2015 is 89 (40 years earlier there were 43).[1] The main questions we should address in these cases include: First, are there key, recurring actors and factors we should take into account when analysing all these cases in depth? Second, are there recurring patterns of successful or unsuccessful transitions? Third, are there one or more key recurring mechanisms that critically explain successful transitions? And, finally, fourth, are there obstacles which make it impossible to achieve a successful transition and which destine such a process to failure?[2]

Before dealing with each question in a specific section, some basic preliminary considerations and definitions are required. First, it should be made clear that this article is not an updated review of the literature on this subfield of comparative politics.[3] Here, we are simply trying to respond to the questions at hand by recalling the available empirical knowledge; the quotations will therefore relate to the works strictly relevant for that purpose, in addition to my own work on the cases. Second, the phenomenon to be scrutinised is a process that unfolds over a span of time that: a) is impossible to anticipate or predict; b) implies several interactions among actors and external conditions, which again are almost impossible to spell out explicitly. Third, the definition of the process can be simplified for the purposes of research feasibility by considering only the set of events starting with the breakdown of a nondemocratic regime and ending with at least the installation of a minimalist democracy.[4] This means that I consider a transition to be successful if a minimalist democracy is achieved and to have failed if it is not. Any criticism regarding a kind of teleological definition and research would be off the mark as the aspects relating to changes towards democracy are explicitly and consciously singled out. Of course, the kind of analysis suggested here is necessarily an ex post one. If it had pretensions to being an ex ante analysis, then the critique of maintaining a teleological, biased perspective would be appropriate. Fourth, the literature that inserts transitions towards democracy within so-called waves[5] is largely misleading as it inappropriately lumps together several factors that need to be differentiated and highlighted, such as the role and impact of external actors as well as that of various internal, domestic factors and actors in individual cases, which may differ from case to case in what is supposedly the same wave (see below). Fifth, in reconstructing the process, domestic and external actors sometimes cannot be adequately distinguished because of the dense interactions between them, but also because the very distinction between external and internal may be impossible to draw neatly on some occasions.

Are there recurring actors and factors?

Once all the cases have been analysed, the most obvious and simple reply to the question contained in the title of this section is "no". But we do not need here to support a radical position, such as the one expressed by Whitehead, who views transition as a long-term, nonlinear, open-ended process, and consistently develops an "interpretavist" approach, which "avoids spurious rigour and untenable claims of causal necessity".[6] Nor is it necessary to share the disappointment of Carothers when the new experiences of several countries are analysed and the need for new frameworks becomes evident.[7] With the experience of these years of research, I believe O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead,[8] as regards the "transitions from authoritarian rule", and Linz and Stepan,[9] in their analysis of transitions (and consolidations) in the three main areas of the world (Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe), were and are still right to have chosen a methodologically moderate approach by adopting the well-known strategy of "multidimensional specific configurations".[10] That is, in each case a set of factors and actors should be explored, always the same ones, but in the end only a few of them will emerge as the key aspects, which are also differently combined and characterise each transition. If this methodological approach is accepted as the one that best understands and explains the analysed cases, then the most important step is – of course, bearing in mind a number of hypotheses – to check all the cases and see

which specific configurations of factors and actors, taken all together, best describe and explain each case. This implies the development of theoretical frameworks, as O'Donnell and Schmitter, as well as Linz and Stepan, do.

Alternative choices provide meagre results. First, as stressed by Geddes: "The basic problem faced by analysts is that the process of democratisation varies enormously from case to case and region to region. Generalisations proposed have failed either to accommodate all the real-world variation or to explain it."[11] Second, in another thorough overview of the literature, Bunce reaches fairly obvious conclusions, though distinguishing between theoretical propositions at a high level of generalisation and regional propositions.[12] In fact, at a higher level of abstraction Bunce singles out five broad propositions, which basically recall previous classic analyses. The first proposition regards how a high level of economic development is a guarantee of democratic continuity; the second concerns the centrality of political leaders in the founding and designing of democracy; the third stresses the assets of parliamentary rather than presidential systems for "the continuation of democratic governance"; the fourth considers the salience of the settlements of "national and state questions" for "the quality and survival of democracy"; and the fifth concerns the key importance of the rule of law for a fully-fledged democracy. In addition, regional generalisations relate to the salience of "pacting", that is, of reaching agreements and accommodation in the democratic transitions of Southern Europe and Latin America; the advantages of breaking with the past in Eastern Europe; the high correlation between democratisation and economic reform in a capitalist direction in Eastern Europe; and the threat to democracy in Latin America and postsocialist Europe because of the weakness of the rule of law. To strengthen the conclusion that "pacting" is salient only in a few cases pertaining to Southern Europe and Latin America, Geddes "found little evidence in a set of 163 regime transitions ... for the claim that pacts increase the likelihood of democracy";[13] and McFaul shows that in Eastern European countries "successful democratic transition did not follow the pacted path" and, consequently, "in the long stretch of history, the successful transitions from communism to democracy may look like the norm, while the pacted transitions and transitions from above in Latin America and Southern Europe may look like the aberration".[14]

Second, when considering "the state of art" in a more systematic way, as Berg-Schlosser[15] and Munck do,[16] they present and discuss a set of concepts and the main empirical findings in the field, such as: research concerning social classes as "prime agents" of democratisation is inconclusive; the explanations of democratic transitions are extremely varied; the old proposition about the association between the level of economic development and democratic stability is still very solid; and the influence of international factors can be strong.[17] Moreover, when switching the focus to international factors, they became a core feature of Eastern European transitions, through authors such as Whitehead, who points to the three mechanisms of "contagion", "control" and "consent",[18] or again Linz and Stepan, who discuss the salience of the foreign policies of other countries – the USA for one – together with the terms "zeitgeist" and "diffusion",[19] or those who have been conducting research into the enlargement of the European Union.[20] Thus, on the whole, old generalisations are recalled or restated, but no theory emerges.

Finally, third, when including other contributions and research,[21] the analyses proposed by those who have worked on several cases in Southern Europe and Latin America focus on the following:

the main characteristics of the previous regime; the important role performed by "pacts" or elite agreement on the institutions to be built (see also above); the role or "resurrection" of civil society; the limited role of political parties; the salience of contingent consensus on the institutions to be set up; the enormous uncertainties of the entire process of transition; and the importance of the first, founding elections. Put differently, what all these authors actually propose is a *theoretical framework* that points to key factors to address when conducting an analysis of one or a small number of cases. In such a framework, *actors, institutions, timing and the very notion of process play a central role in the analysis* of countries in two geopolitical areas, that is, Southern Europe and Latin America. Pridham also pursues a similar design by suggesting an appropriate framework for analysing mainly Southern and Eastern European changes as an overall phenomenon comprising historical determinants, modes of authoritarian breakdown, formal regime transition, the role of elite actors, economic transformations, the mutual influence of elite and civil society, the possible role of statehood and national identity in the transition, and the impact of international factors.[22] All of these are aspects that should be considered together in the "dynamics of transition" when analysing specific cases. Schmitter ultimately seems to support this position when, to analyse transitions, he suggests taking the following into consideration: the immediate and revised situation, the possible outcomes and eventual outcomes, the available agents and "real-existing" agents, the potential and actual modes of transition, the prevailing international context, and the unit of government.[23] On the whole, then, the approach of O'Donnell and Schmitter and of Linz and Stepan is the dominant path in analysing transitions to democracy.

When, more specifically, the focus in on explanation,[24] the political traditions of the country stand out as a key factor. More precisely, the key variables are: the organisation and control of civil society by a hegemonic party and the consequent manipulated participation through which the regime was able to destroy the social structure and previous political and social identifications; the consequent socialisation and resocialisation carried out by party organisations and other ancillary organisations to create new loyalties and identifications; and the suppression of the opposition. These variables were relevant because during transition they heavily conditioned the subsequent activation of a democratic civil society together with its social and political structures. In other words, an authoritarian regime that has been able to carry out effective policies of socialisation and suppression may leave a passive, weak, fragmented, poorly organised civil society during the subsequent transition. In this perspective, that is, the tradition of the country, an appropriate way of achieving a better explanation of different transitions (and previous authoritarian breakdowns) is to conduct an empirical analysis of those breakdowns and the characteristics of authoritarian regimes, as Geddes and her collaborators do by building a massive data set and reaching some conclusions to the effect that – for example – there is a higher probability of transition to democracy if the authoritarian regime is a military one.[25]

As stressed above in recalling McFaul, within the transitions to democracy that occurred in the different areas of the world spatial and time differences were also characterised by additional aspects, such as the change of polity boundaries and, consequently, of territory and population, as happened in several Eastern European cases, but not in the Southern European and Latin American transitions. Moreover, in the Southern European and Latin American cases the salience of economic factors has been totally ignored. These were highly relevant in Eastern Europe, while in Southern Europe there was no problem of changing the economy from a collectivist to a capitalist

system with markets and private property. But the considerable attention devoted to the relationships between economic and political aspects in Eastern Europe has led some scholars to re-examine similar relationships in Southern Europe, as it was considered a mistake to think that there are no differences between an economy coexisting with an authoritarian regime and an economy coexisting with a democracy. With some exceptions,[26] most analyses of Southern European transitions simply overlook those important aspects, and, to mention one feature, they largely glossed over the reshaping of the relationships between more or less organised interests and parties and between those interests and the bureaucracy with or without a large public sector in the economy.

To avoid confusion and misinterpretation, it should be added that over the years the connections between democracy and the economy have become a classic topic of empirical, behavioural political science, at least since the famous work by Lipset;[27] and that, as stated by Geddes,[28] Bunce,[29] Berg-Schlosser[30] and others, the positive relationship between development and democracy can now be taken for granted. But in their analysis of transitions, Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi very effectively spelled out that there is no linear relationship between economic development and transitions to democracy.[31] On the contrary, transitions are compatible with a wide range of economic levels, and there is only a definite strong relationship with the survival, if not consolidation, of democracy. A subsequent work by Epstein et al. tries to disprove these conclusions by stating that "higher incomes per capita significantly increased the likelihood of democratic regimes, ... by promoting transitions from authoritarian to democratic systems".[32] However, it only partially cast doubts on the conclusions of Przeworski et al. In fact, one of the main reasons why Epstein et al. obtained that particular empirical result stems from their classification of regimes into democratic, partial and nondemocratic ones, while Przeworski et al. preferred a dichotomous variable (democracy/nondemocracy). Although from an empirical perspective the addition of an intermediate regime makes sense,[33] the key element is that in recent decades an imitation or demonstration effect has made the level of economic development much less significant than previously, and this is well captured by the analysis of Przeworski et al.[34] Finally, we should not lose sight of the focus of our analysis. In fact, the question does not concern the "likelihood of democratic regimes", but the possibility of singling out the recurring actors and factors when analysing all cases in more depth. And economic development or growth is not a factor we always encounter. Thus, we are once again prompted to consider the "multidimensional specific configurations" approach.

How did it come about that, with the additional aspects illustrated above, the approach proposed by Linz and Stepan became the dominant one? The first reason stems from a serious, methodologically conscious reflection on the failure of functionalist theories, systems analysis, formal rational choice and other general theories, which were in "fashion" from the early 1950s to the early 1970s. When submitted to empirical tests, those empirical theories displayed all their analytic and explanatory flaws, and were practically abandoned or subjected to a major overhaul with much better results, as happened in the case of rational choice theory.[35] This has led to an evident search for different, maybe less ambitious, but empirically more solid, theoretical choices and consequently better results. The awareness of this failure and the new directions have been thoroughly charted by several scholars, especially by Ostrom, when she stresses the need for "the development of theory" in political science and, at the same time, the fact that what "we do achieve will be

limited in scope to specific types of theoretically defined situations rather than sweeping theories of society as a whole".[36]

The second reason derives from the achieved awareness of the complexities and major differences between various cases around the world. Such differences extend to the temporal plane as well, even in the arc of a limited 40-year period (1974–2014) during which several profound social and economic changes have taken place internationally.[37] Such awareness is additionally strengthened by the evident fact that in most comparative political research conducted in recent decades, democratisation has been the dominant leitmotiv, following in this respect the spectacular developments of reality: when the world's five main geographic areas are considered, what immediately stands out is that hundreds of articles and books have been written on the topic in English alone, not to mention the ones in Spanish and various other languages.

Thus, on the whole, the variety of processes is so wide that the strategy of developing a broad theoretical framework is the only appropriate one, and any attempt to establish general patterns of transitions in connection with definite explanatory factors is bound to fail, if we also wish to avoid platitudes. The dominance of the "theoretical framework" approach, for the reasons illustrated above, had a strong focus on transition and, at the same time, overlooked the related and partially overlapping process of democratic installation. I suspect that the simple reason for this is that in Latin American cases the installation process is short and very difficult to distinguish from transition, whereas in several European cases the constitutional subprocess, the building of parties and the reshaping of interest groups, allowed scholars to single out the process of installation more clearly. But O'Donnell and other specialists of Latin America were the most influential group of scholars when this subfield took off in terms of theory frame and research.[38] A second possible reason for not breaking the analysis into two processes, which empirically overlap, stems from the fact that such a distinction would bring additional difficulties and unwanted confusion to already empirically complex analyses. Here, a different opinion is supported, although admittedly a minority one in the literature. Going back to O'Donnell and Schmitter, their focus is on "transitions from authoritarianism",[39] that is, the point of departure is relatively well known (authoritarian regime) and nothing can be anticipated from the developments of the process. Consistently, in addition to the empirical aspects on Latin American cases, their focus has to be on transitions. When the phenomenon became more widespread with Eastern European, South Asian and African cases, the focus gradually switched towards "transitions towards democracy", where the point of arrival should be better known, but the one of departure became uncertain.[40] It could be an authoritarian regime, but also a traditional, sultanistic, postcolonial one. If the logical consequences of such a switching are consistently accepted, then there has to be also an analytic switch with attention also being devoted to installation specifically. Thus, the distinction between the two processes became more appropriate.

Let it be added here that the analysis conducted on Southern European and Latin American transitions and possibly democratic installation has ignored the economic factors. Even though it is a mistake to think that there are no differences between an economy that coexists with a democratic regime and one that coexists with an authoritarian one, because of the inevitable and dense strands of interdependence, almost all scholars who have dealt with those cases have neglected these aspects. As far as Eastern Europe is concerned, the transformation of the economic structures from

prevalently collectivist economies and their failure to capitalist economies with varying degrees of space for free enterprise and private property, has evidently been too wide-ranging and profound to ignore. Some authors identify three transitions regarding many Eastern European countries between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, not only from authoritarianism to democracy, but also from a statist economy to one in which the market and enterprise play a central role, and, in some cases (Slovakia, the Czech Republic and even the former East Germany), from a certain territory and population to another territory and hence to another state entity.[41]

Are there recurring patterns?

The approach of singling out a framework is not the only existing and possible theoretical choice. If a more limited time span and a more precise area is accepted, then more ambitious theoretical achievements are actually possible. In this vein, the main path has been the development of models or patterns of transition for a defined, usually small, number of cases. Over the years Stepan,[42] Karl and Schmitter,[43] Higley and Gunther,[44] Munck and Skalnik Leff,[45] Berins Collier[46] and Bunce and Wolchik[47] are some of the main authors who have proposed such models. Some of the differences between them can be explained simply in terms of the different cases considered. For example, Stepan and Berins Collier also include the classic Western European cases of the past in addition to Southern and Eastern European ones; Karl and Schmitter and also Munck and Skalnik Leff encompass the Latin American transitions as well as the Eastern European ones of the early 1990s. The similarities between these attempts lie in the fact that all the authors quoted above mainly focus on two macrovariables: the actors of transition, whether authoritarian incumbent elites or those of the opposition, even at a mass level, and the strategies they pursued, either accommodating or conflictive.

Thus, for example, Munck and Skalnik Leff come up with four models: "revolution from above", when the actors of transition are the authoritarian elites who pursued a conflictive strategy of confrontation; "conservative reform", when those elites chose agreements and compromises; "social revolution", when counterelites were at the heart of transition and pursued a conflictive strategy; and "reform from below", when counter-elites at the heart of transition adopted an accommodating strategy. The advantages and limits of such models are fairly evident and connected. One of the main points is that the more immediate understanding of a country is counterbalanced by a strong simplification of many relevant aspects. In addition, the adoption of mixed models is very common. Consequently, strong simplification is accompanied by a loss of theoretical efficacy that would have been, to some extent, rescued with the "pure" models.

From their perspective, which focuses on a few postcommunist countries, Bunce and Wolchik developed a pattern of "electoral revolution", which is characterised by four key features: a "conscious deployment of an electoral model of democratisation"; an "upsurge in mass participation also in the streets before and sometimes after the elections"; a "turnover in governments"; and an "improvement of democratic performance after the election".[48] The electoral model had a few favourable political conditions in the institutional legacy of the communist regimes (for example, the nonpoliticised army)

and was facilitated by the intervention of the international democracy-promotion community, who helped local activists. Bunce and Wolchik explicitly stress how: "The electoral revolutions that have swept away illiberal governments in the postcommunist region since 1996 reflect two sets of factors which are as important as they are difficult to disentangle: the favourable domestic conditions for such revolutions and the role of the international democracy-promotion community."[49]

In the search for recurring patterns, an alternative to focusing on a limited time span and a small number of cases belonging to the same or a similar area is to pick one salient theoretical dimension and build a few related patterns of change or, here in this analysis, of transition. The most recent, relevant example is that of Della Porta, who proposes three patterns of transition on the basis of the role of social movements in it. Thus, there can be: an "eventful democratisation", when a key role is played by social movements and protest in bringing about regime change; "participatory" or "participated pacts", when social movements are also able to get reforms through a bargaining process; "participated coups d'état" or "troubled democratisation", if élites manipulate mass protest to defeat other groups, even to the point of giving nationalist social movements a role.[50] In the three patterns, the democratic result is not taken for granted. However, what is analytically salient are the "attribution of political opportunities", principally with regard to splitting within the élites, and resource mobilisation, where the role and strength of civil society is crucial. The democratic or nondemocratic outcomes are much less relevant.

Other examples could be given.[51] Here, to conclude this section, the different theoretical purposes of the two kinds of patterns or ideal type can again be stressed. On the one hand, there are patterns that propose a comprehensive view of each whole case where the result is the focus on a different set of factors and/or actors to explain the resulting pattern. Those patterns are circumscribed in terms of time and space. On the other hand, there are patterns or ideal types where one or more actors or factors is assumed as the most important one and the impact of it/them on the process or on the result is assessed and consequent patterns built. These patterns are much less delimited in terms of time and space.

Is there a key recurring mechanism?

When dealing with this question, there is an obvious switch towards an explanatory goal. If the approach continues to be in terms of framework and multidimensional specific configurations, then each case will present its own explanation. However, albeit only rarely, explanations have also been attempted considering a large area, for example Latin America. Despite the fact that most of the focus of their work is on survival, stability and breakdown, Mainwaring and Perez-Liñan also deal with transition, devoting two of their five main hypotheses to it: first, a normative preference for democracy by important actors, such as parties, leaders or government, makes transition to democracy more likely; second, a regional environment favourable to democracy makes transitions to competitive regimes more likely.[52] It should be recognised, though, that their real and outstanding contribution is the sophisticated empirical analysis of Latin American cases over a long period in relation to survival and breakdown. Considering transition only, their hypotheses overlap with results already presented in previous literature (see above, Berg-Schlosser and others).

Alternatively, on this question, the "rational choice"[53] approach, with its focus on and search for "explanatory mechanisms", helps to provide an effective reply.[54] The appropriateness of such a proposal is that it may enable theoretical advances while, at the same time, not being at so high a level of generality that our statements become platitudes or pompous affirmations of the obvious, a trap which – as is well known – a number of rational choice contributions were unable to avoid.[55] If the "solution" suggested by rational choice is accepted with its stress on theoretical priorities, looking for causal or explanatory "mechanisms" still leaves some important issues open. First, despite the broader formulation by Elster, the core meaning of "mechanism" always brings to mind some combination of cams, gears, belts and chains, or at least a set of links or connections designed to achieve a certain outcome. In other words, a sort of determinism comes with the term, and this is unacceptable in our topic due to everything that empirical research has shown in these years, if not for another methodological reason, namely that attaching some sort of determinism to this term mutes a basic feature of democratisation phenomena: they are "open-ended" changes. Second, in all phenomena of democratisation, *time*, *timing*, *sequences* and *identification of time-bound windows of opportunity* are key aspects to analyse[56] and, although possibly present within the notion of mechanism, time does not lie at the core of this notion. Despite what Pierson affirms about mechanisms that are or should be "temporally oriented",[57] the same author adopts the term "process" when the time to be considered is a long one.[58] Third, however, when conducting empirical field research it is not always possible and is often difficult to gather consistent (fairly) complete data that is time bound. Thus, all considered, singling out empirical mechanisms is a potentially important theoretical step. But in addition we should embed the mechanism/s we are able to find into a meaningful "process", where time, timing and sequencing, when singled out, are essential components.

Accordingly, at the core of empirical research there is the singling out of a "process" as a "set of recurring interactions among individual and collective actors within changing structures, which is spread out over time, may or may not unfold in an expected result, is on occasion unilinear, but is always open ended".[59] Inside this definition of process there is room for mechanisms minimally defined as "recurrent links or connections". These definitions help to overcome a possible objection by Vanhanen and other scholars, who stress how "process-oriented analysis resorting to various proximate factors cannot lead to any general theoretical explanations, although they may produce useful descriptions of democratisation".[60] As a general theoretical explanation is actually impossible, as shown by empirical research in recent decades, singling out key processes and related mechanisms, conceived as above, may be the best theoretical achievement to obtain.

Moreover, such an issue helps to clarify how the oft-proposed distinction between "structure" driven and "process" driven explanations,[61] which usually focus on transition to democracy only, can be overcome: different interactions among actors and structures, to be considered as salient contextual variables, are recurring elements of analysis within transition or consolidation processes.[62] There is also no doubt that not only is there a random component in the actual unfolding of those macroprocesses, but they can be open-ended, often convoluted, and never teleological, as Whitehead rightly stresses.[63] To better understand this point, it suffices to recall that an individual or collective action or set of actions, for example, an implemented political strategy, can be teleologically driven, but a process by itself cannot be such because it unfolds through several, often unexpected or unwanted interactions, even among different strategies, within a given or changing context with

again sometimes unexpected, unwanted results.[64] In a different perspective, a simple point can be added: when analysing empirically the modes of transitions and installation, the best way of doing it is to focus on the actors, but when switching to explanations of behaviour and results with regards to the democracies that are effectively established, the role of structures, whether socioeconomic or of some other kind, can become a predominant aspect.[65]

With this in mind, if the search for a recurring mechanism is at the core of research on transitions and installation, although it has received no explicit, direct attention within the literature on transition, the key question becomes: what ultimately is the mechanism or the key reason accounting for all those political changes that so greatly affected the lives of millions of people during and after the last decades of the twentieth century. If, despite what has been stated up to now, we have to try to suggest an effective reply, pointing to the "waves"[66] can be mainly relevant for an analysis of imitation or demonstration effects, that is, on the one hand, it can be considered a partial reply for a few cases only and, on the other hand, it does not grasp the key, domestic mechanism to which the question is referring. Moreover, such a hypothesis has never been – and very likely cannot be – precisely supported by accurate empirical analyses: instead, it is an interesting persuasive hypothesis bound to remain as such and which complements other, more relevant aspects.

The best reply seems very simple and, at the same time, difficult to detect precisely, but has to be mentioned as the main theoretical lesson to draw from the existing literature, our own research included. In recent decades, an effective learning process can be detected at the elite and mass levels; this has been gradually spreading due to the failures of alternative regimes, such as military authoritarianisms in Latin America and communist mobilisational regimes in Eastern Europe, or even other civil-military authoritarianisms and traditional regimes in other areas.[67] Despite specific events and unavoidable ups and downs, there has been a gradual legitimation of democracy as the most flexible and adaptable of all institutional arrangements, which is at the same time able to change the governing elites and to avoid the suppression and suffering of the people. Sen on democracy as a universal value[68] and Sartori on the reasons why democracy can "travel" by setting up "demo-protection", resulting in a free people not bound to suppression, and "demo-power", which leads to a relatively more self-assertive people,[69] point in the same direction.

In the final analysis, the thrust for political change stems from the people, who learn from their failures or by looking at what happens in other, maybe neighbouring countries, and change their attitudes and behaviour, with all the obstacles, distortions and changes of direction that such a cultural transformation may involve. What we can see at work is a reaction of key actors, collective ones included, to existing, perceived legacies[70] or new close-by realities, to cope with the present problems within a context of delegitimation of previous institutions. In this very process, *learning* emerges where past experiences and the present situation, also influenced by external events, interact with each other with potentially different results, and where who learns what is often influenced by chance.[71] On the whole, and within Tilly's perspective, such a mechanism brings together relational and cognitive features, but also an environmental one.

To better understand how the learning process actually works, a more precise hypothesis and some streamlined empirical references can be helpful. First of all, the salience of learning can be immedi-

ately seen and analysed if there has been an important traumatic event in the country, such as the civil war in Spain (1936–39) or the overthrowing of Allende in Chile (1973). The transitions towards democracy in those countries and the moderation of elites and collective actors would be impossible to explain without paying full attention to that legacy. Again, it is impossible to explain the evolution of the Portuguese transition in the mid-1970s if the attention and influence of external events and the environment are not taken fully into consideration. In Southern Europe a large number of citizens affirmed that they had been Francoists or Salazarists, but that in the 1970s and 1980s, in a different environment, they had accepted the democratic regime.[72] If we change area and consider other Latin American or Eastern European cases, the learning process again emerges, for example, to best explain the Brazilian transition, where dealing with legacy was highly important; or the Romanian transition, which would be impossible to explain without analysing how domestic elites learnt about the external context. But what about when there is no learning? Or rather, what are the obstacles to learning?

What are the obstacles to successful transitions?

The fourth question, addressed in this section, could be worded differently. In failed transitions what are the factors, or even the actors, that have prevented transition by maintaining a nondemocratic regime, the previous or a different one,[73] or by stalemating it in a hybrid situation? This question has almost never been explicitly discussed in depth in the literature, except in the work edited by Stoner and McFaul.[74] A more systematic reply to it should refer to the three theoretical possibilities we explored in the previous sections of this article.

Thus, first, if the theoretical framework approach is taken, then the explanation of the failure is in a specific multidimensional set of reasons that can partially or largely vary from one case to another. Accordingly, the simplest reply is to refer to the lack of conditions and aspects that assured the success of newly achieved democracies. In this perspective, there is not much to say except to analyse the specific cases with a reversed framework vis-à-vis the one adopted for the cases of success. Second, if singling out patterns or models is the theoretical goal, then this is what Stoner, Diamond, Girod and McFaul actually do in the introductory chapter of Stoner and McFaul's work (see above).[75] In doing this they stress how a failed transition is usually an elite-led one, that the lack of three domestic factors, such as mass mobilisation, indigenous civil society organisations, and independent media and communications technology, is crucial to explain the failure and that the absence of any external international help for a number of reasons[76] is also a salient aspect.

In replying to the question addressed in this section, the third theoretical possibility seems the most relevant and revealing one. In fact, if attention is devoted to the analysis of key mechanisms of change or, in this opposite perspective, continuity, then a few considerations are in order. To start with, when singling out the learning process as a key mechanism at the core of transitions, the actual question is how elites and people change their minds, or do not, and choose the democratic path. The basic reply to this question is: through trial and error. Elites and people learn the negative effects of nondemocratic arrangements and, with or without the help of external institutions and governments, can come to try out democratic solutions that eventually appear more favourable and acceptable for everyone interested.

Maintaining this perspective, however, prompts a number of other important reflections. First, as is obvious, the learning process may also work the other way: elites and people may follow other lessons and accept nondemocratic solutions, or simply obey them. If we look back over past experience, it is very well known how, in the early 20th century and later on, Southern European or Latin American elites learned to stop changes in a democratic direction by reflecting on their own experience or that of other nearby or related countries.

Second, there are ideologies and beliefs that retain strong identities and consequently set up serious, tough obstacles to changes in the mindset of people. The two strongest obstacles of this kind that we saw at work are religion – in recent years Islam has been especially effective in this regard – and ethnic identities, particularly in several African countries. Such obstacles have usually been well institutionalised for years. This implies that beliefs and identities are powerfully strengthened by vested interests that support them. Of course, there are exceptional cases where a democratic, charismatic leader or small groups are able to overcome these obstacles. In South Africa Mandela founded a democracy in a situation where vengeance and conflict would have been broadly understandable and expected. With his moral authority and leadership abilities, he was able to win over other elites, other leaders close to him included, and even to bring about a change in people's attitudes on the political direction to undertake. In Tunisia a democratic elite was able to find and follow a very narrow path by managing to have a mainly secular constitution approved in January 2014 and laying the foundations for a fragile, but possibly viable democracy.

Third, an unfavourable international context, such as being related to and dependent economically on a nondemocratic country – as happened in 2014 in the Middle East and the Eurasian area with postcommunist countries – and the related existence of an apparently successful nondemocratic alternative, such as a number of nondemocratic regimes in the Middle East or Russia, form the basis for the failure of transition, if started.

Finally, it is difficult to forget one of the most obvious aspects. The most robust basis of a failed transition is set up by the absence of a democratic elite. In other words, even a charismatic leader or a minoritarian elite – although, of course, not strongly minoritarian – can manage to bring about a successful transition within a favourable context (see above). But the absence of that leader or elite and an unfavourable cultural and international context dooms any transition to failure. It is a platitude to recall that, despite the positions of a very minoritarian elite, the largest part of the elite and the people who were active during the Egyptian transition were not democratic, and their goal was a religious one, although characterised by varying degrees of fundamentalism.[77]

A few concluding remarks

The question addressed in this article is very simple: after at least four decades of transitions towards democracy since the early 1970s, and various different pieces of research on this phenomenon, to the extent that an entirely new subfield of comparative politics, comparative democratisation, blossomed in this period, what theoretical results have been achieved? In the early days of

the development of the subfield, the possibility of achieving accepted theories was very low and the overall prospects were gloomy, to say the least. In fact, one of the most authoritative statements on the issue was made by O'Donnell and Schmitter: "We did not have at the beginning, nor do we have at the end ... a 'theory' to test or to apply to the case studies."[78] Several years later, McFaul echoed this statement: "the project of constructing a general theory of democratisation may very well fail ... The unique patterns generated by the fourth wave of regime change in the postcommunist world suggest that the search for a general theory of democratisation *and* authocratisation will be a long one."[79]

Here, to provide a reliable reply to the question above, the analysis was broken down into four more specific issues, to which each section was devoted. Thus, first, when asking if there are – and if so, which – recurring actors and factors we should take into account to analyse every different transition in depth, a double result was achieved: the best approach for the purpose was to develop a theoretical framework where all possible actors and factors are included and, when empirically tested, each actor and each factor turns out to be combined in specific multidimensional configurations; moreover, when over the years the focus switched more and more to democracy as a result of transition, consequently stronger attention should be devoted to democratic installation and related aspects.

Second, there are recurring patterns of successful transitions, and they are of two kinds with different theoretical purposes. On the one hand, there is the proposal of comprehensive multidimensional ideal types or even typologies that characterise a small number of specific cases, usually very close in time and space, where the result is the focus on a combination of a different set of factors and/or actors. On the other hand, at a higher level of abstraction and with possible regard to a broader area and a longer time span, ideal types or typology are proposed where one or more than one actor or factor is assumed as the key aspect, and the impact of it/them on the process or on the result of it is assessed and consequent patterns built.

Third, if one shares the theoretical approach suggesting that the search for and detection of key mechanism/s is the most important theoretical result that scholars of comparative democratisation can and should achieve, then, despite the problems and difficulties, at least one key mechanism emerges in the research on transition, which at least contributes to explaining critically successful transitions and indirectly suggests why other transitions are unsuccessful. This is the *learning* process, which is characterised by the interaction between past, perceived experiences and the present opportunities and involve both leaders and people.

Fourth, especially on the basis of experience in the most recent years, singling out obstacles that make successful transition impossible can be done in connection with the different theoretical goals that can be set up. Thus, if referring to a theoretical framework, the failure is explained by the lack of conditions and aspects that assured the success of newly achieved democracies. If singling out patterns or models is the theoretical goal, then a failed transition is an elite-led one and the lack of mass mobilisation, indigenous civil society organisations and independent media and communications technology, as well as the absence of international help, are key aspects, above all in the recent postcommunist transitions. If the focus is on key mechanisms of continuity, then, in order to better

understand the basic reasons of failed transitions, four aspects should be kept in mind: a) the learning process, which was considered the key mechanism of change, may also work in the opposite way: elites and the people can work and opt for nondemocratic solutions; b) the two strongest obstacles to change are religion and ethnic identities, powerfully strengthened by vested interests; c) an unfavourable international context and the related existence of a successful nondemocratic alternative lay the basis for the failure of transition, if started; and finally, d) the most robust basis of a failed transition is set up by the absence of a democratic elite, which may also be a minoritarian one.

NOTES

* This article is a largely revised draft of a paper delivered at the conference on "Re-examining Democratic Transitions in Times of Crisis", organised by the Centre for European and Mediterranean Studies of NYU in Berlin and the Free University of Berlin on 22–23 November 2013. I would like to thank all the colleagues who intervened and commented on the paper. Moreover, special thanks must go to the anonymous referees who contributed to improving the article.

1 Successful transition to democracy means that the political regime is at least a minimalist democracy. Quasi-successful transition means that the regime is very close to complying with all the requisites of a minimalist democracy. For the cases, see the annual Freedom House reports (www.freedomhouse.org), and on Latin American countries, see also Leonardo Morlino, *La calidad de las democracias en América Latina* (Stockholm: IDEA International, 2014). For the definition of minimalist democracy, see note 4.

2 In this paper, I develop a few reflections that I began in *Changes for Democracy: Actors, Structures, Processes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 4.

3 There are several contributions of this kind. See, for instance, ibid., chaps. 1 and 4.

4 There is breakdown of a nondemocratic regime when the "limited pluralism" characterising that kind of regime is broken and transformed (see ibid., chap. 3). About the minimalist definition of democracy "a regime should be considered democratic if it has at least the following: a) universal male and female suffrage; b) free, competitive, periodic and fair elections; c) more than one political party; d) different and alternative sources of information." (Ibid., 32).

5 See, in particular, Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

6 Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization: Theory and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 34. For an analysis of the sensitive definition of democracy discussed by Whitehead (chap. 1), see Morlino, *Changes for Democracy*, chap. 3.

7 Thomas Carothers, "The End of Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13/1 (2002): 5–21.

8 Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Lawrence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

9 Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

10 My recollection is that this sort of approach was first developed by Linz and Stepan in their edited volume on the crisis of democracies. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

11 Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 117.

12 Valerie J. Bunce, "Comparative Democratization: Big and Bounded Generalizations," *Comparative Political Studies* 33/6–7 (2000): 715.

13 The essay by Geddes is also relevant as it gives an excellent picture of the literature about transition at the end of the twentieth century. "What Do We Know," 140.

14 Michael McFaul, "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Non-cooperative Transitions in the Post-communist World," *World Politics* 54/2 (2002): 213, 243.

15 Dirk Berg-Schlosser, ed., *Democratization: The State of the Art* (Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 2007).

16 Gerardo L. Munck, "Democracy Studies: Agendas, Findings, Challenges," in *Democratization: The State of the Art*, ed. Dirk Berg-Schlosser (Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 2007), 45–68. The first four chapters of the book by Graeme Gill are still a good, balanced review of the literature, especially on the transition to democracy. *The Dynamics of Democratization: Elites. Civil Society and the Transition Process* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

17 When we also consider a very well-written book like the one by Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies throughout the World* (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2008) or the exhaustive textbook edited by Christian W. Haerpfer et al., *Democratization* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), or other good textbooks, such as Jean Grugel, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); José V. Ciprut, ed., *Indeterminacy: The Mapped, the Navigable, and the Uncharted* (London: MIT Press, 2008); Georg Sørensen, *Democracy and Democratization: Processes and Prospects in a Changing World* (Boulder: Westview, 2008), we realise how rich the field has become in terms of research carried out and how high the level of interest is for a lot of people, including university students. The methodological and theoretical conclusions expressed in the text remain the same.

18 Laurence Whitehead, "Three International Dimensions of Democratization," in *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas*, ed. Laurence Whitehead (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3–25.

19 Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition*, 72–81.

20 See Geoffrey Pridham, Eric Herring and George Sanford, eds., *Building Democracy? The International Dimension of Democratisation in Eastern Europe* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994); but also, among others, Jon C. Pevehouse, "Democracy from Outside-in? International Organizations and Democratization," *International Organization* 56/3 (2002): 515–549; Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, eds., *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) and Amichai Magen and Leonardo Morlino, eds., *International Actors, Democratization and the Rule of Law: Anchoring Democracy?* (London: Routledge, 2008).

21 See again Morlino, *Changes for Democracy*, chap. 4, for additional details.

22 See Geoffrey Pridham, *The Dynamics of Democratization: A Comparative Approach* (London: Continuum, 2000), esp. chap. 1.

23 Philippe C. Schmitter, "Reflections on 'Transitology' – Before and After," in *Reflections on Uneven Democracies: The Legacy of Guillermo O'Donnell*, eds. Daniel M. Brinks, Marcelo Leiras and Scott Mainwaring (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 71–86.

24 See Morlino, *Changes for Democracy*.

25 Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright and Erika Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set," *Perspectives on Politics* 12/2 (2014): 313–331. Although not strictly relevant, the data set they developed shows, beyond any doubt, the salience of the previous regime in the transition process. As, however, there are different types of authoritarianisms, traditional regimes and other nondemocratic regimes, the conclusions of this section are actually strengthened.

26 See especially Deane Ethier, ed., *Democratic Transition and Consolidation in Southern Europe, Latin America and Southeast Asia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

27 Seymour M. Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1960). For an analysis on Lipset that reviews such a connection, see Larry J. Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered," in *Reexamining Democracy: Essays in Honor of Seymour Martin Lipset*, eds. Gary Marks and Larry Diamond (London: Sage, 1992), 93–139. See also the excellent overview in Pippa Norris, *Driving Democracy: Do Power-sharing Institutions Work?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 4.

28 See Geddes, "What Do We Know."

29 See Bunce, "Comparative Democratization."

30 See Berg-Schlosser, *Democratization*.

31 See Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, José A. Cheibub and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-being in the World, 1950–1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98 and 103.

32 David L. Epstein, Robert Bates, Jack Goldstone, Ida Kristensen and Sharyn O'Halloran, "Democratic Transitions," *American Journal of Political Science* 50/3 (2006): 566.

33 See again Morlino, *Changes for Democracy*, chap. 3.

34 See also Adam Przeworski, "Democracy and Economic Development," in *The Evolution of Political Knowledge*, eds. Edward D. Mansfield and Richard Sisson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 300–324. Boix's 2003 work is sometimes referred to as well, and although a chapter of the book is devoted to "a theory of political transition", he actually analyses the conditions of stable democracies, in addition to other aspects. See *Democracy and Redistribution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). See also Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, "Inequality and Regime Change: Democratic Transitions and the Stability of Democratic Rule," *American Political Science Review* 106/3 (2012): 495–516, for a partial refutation and revision of Boix's work, specifically on distributive conflicts as a key aspect of transitions. Despite its empirical limitation, the work by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson belongs to the same group of works: ultimately, the actual focus is instead on the survival or consolidation of political regimes. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

35 For an additional analysis of this matter, see Leonardo Morlino, "How We Are, or how We Say that We Are: The Post-war Comparative Politics of Hans Daadler and Others," *European Journal of Political Research* 37/4 (2000): 497–516.

36 Elinor Ostrom, "Beyond Positivism: An Introduction to this Volume," In *Strategies of Political Inquiry*, ed. Elinor Ostrom (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982): 13 and 26.

37 They are so well known that there is no reason to discuss here phenomena such as the oil crisis with all its consequences, the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the change in the capitalist economy and different markets, and the reshaping of the middle classes.

38 O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*.

39 Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, "Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies," in *Transition from Authoritarian Rule*, eds. Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 53–56.

40 Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

41 See, for example, Klaus Offe, "Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe," *Social Research* 58/4 (1991): 865–892. The present analysis limits itself to illustrating the transition towards and installation of democratic regimes, leaving to one side the economic aspects, which, however, reappear in the analysis when they impinge on the structures of the political regime. See also Morlino, *Changes for Democracy*, chap. 1, first section.

42 Alfred Stepan, "Paths toward Redemocratization: Theoretical and Comparative Considerations," in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 65–84.

43 Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe," *International Social Science Journal* 128/2 (1991): 269–284.

44 John Higley and Richard Gunther, eds., *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

45 Gerardo L. Munck and Carol Skalnik Leff, "Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 29/3 (1997): 343–362.

46 Collier, Ruth Berins, *Pathways toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

47 Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, "Favorable Conditions and Electoral Revolutions," *Journal of Democracy* 17/4 (2006): 5–18.

48 Bunce and Wolchik, "Favorable Conditions," 5–18.

49 Ibid., 14–15.

50 Donatella Della Porta, *Mobilizing for Democracy: Comparing 1989 and 2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

51 See again Morlino, *Changes for Democracy*, chap. 4.

52 Scott Mainwaring and Anibal Perez-Liñan, *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 18.

53 A rational choice approach has also been applied to transition – for example, Adam Przeworski, "Some Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy," in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rules*, eds. Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 47–63; Josep M. Colomer, *Game Theory and Transition to Democracy: The Spanish Model* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1995) – especially to pacted transitions or transitions by agreement (see Josep M. Colomer, *Strategic Transitions: Game Theory and Democratization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000)), again with close attention to elites and their choices and strategies. The building of democratic institutions is basically the product of those strategies and choices. The analyses by Colomer (*Game Theory* and *Strategic Transitions*) can be mentioned, as, starting from the analysis of a specific case, that of Spain, he develops a theoretical proposal to apply to all cases of transition by agreement, such as Brazil and Chile, or also to other cases, such as the dissolution of the USSR and the transition to democracy in Poland and other Eastern European countries.

54 For example, Jon Elster, "Social Norms and Economic Theory," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 3/4 (1989): esp. 9–10, explicitly states that the key theoretical goal should be singling out explanatory mechanisms of "human action and interaction" as recurring "ways in which things happen". But this is also a path undertaken by other comparativists working in areas other than democratisation, such as Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), who explicitly shares Elster's point, or George Tsebelis, with his analyses of *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2002).

55 The nonrational choice scholar who has most systematically and perceptively adopted this perspective, applying it to the phenomenon of democratisation, is Charles Tilly, who envisages the possibility of singling out different sorts of mechanisms (environmental, cognitive and relational). See esp. "Mechanisms in Political Processes," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 21–41.

56 See especially Juan J. Linz "Democracy's Time Constraints," *International Political Science Review* 19/1 (1998): 19–37, and Andreas Schedler and Javier Santiso, "Democracy and Time: An Invitation," *International Political Science Review/Revue internationale de science politique* 19/1 (1998): 5–18.

57 Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 7, but also 1–16 and 54–78.

58 Ibid., 79–102.

59 See Morlino *Changes for Democracy*, 20.

60 See Tatu Vanhanen, *Prospects of Democracy: A Study of 172 Countries* (London: Routledge, 1997), 26.

61 See, for example, Herbert Kitschelt, "Political Regime Change: Structure and Process-driven Explanations," *The American Political Science Review* 86/4 (1992): 1028–1034.

62 Although actors have often been a dominant focus in the analysis and reality of transitions, Renske Doorenspleet shows the salience of structural context in several transitions. See "The Structural Context of Recent Transitions to Democracy," *European Journal of Political Research* 43/3 (2004): 309–335.

63 Whitehead, *Democratization*, 238ff.

64 On this issue, Guillermo O'Donnell, "Illusions about Consolidations," *Journal of Democracy* 7/2 (1996): 34–51, sees this flaw in the notion of democratic consolidation itself.

65 See also Leonardo Morlino and Amichai Magen, "Scope, Depth and Limits of External Influence: Conclusions," in *International Actors, Democratization and the Rule of Law: Anchoring Democracy*, eds. Amichai Magen and Leonardo Morlino (London: Routledge, 2008), 224–258.

66 See, for example, Huntington, *The Third Wave*; John Markoff, *Waves of Democracy: Social Movements and Political Change* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1996), and others.

67 Learning is defined by Nancy Bermeo as "the process through which people modify their political beliefs and tactics as a result of severe crises, frustrations, and dramatic changes in environment". See "Democracy and the Lessons of Dictatorship," *Comparative Politics* 24/3 (1992): 274; See also Pridham, *Dynamics of Democratization*, esp. 53–57.

68 Amartya Sen, "Democracy as Universal Value," *Journal of Democracy* 10/3 (1999): 3–17.

69 Giovanni Sartori, "How Far Can Free Government Travel?" *Journal of Democracy* 6/3 (1995): 101–111.

70 On this, see Antonio Costa Pinto and Leonardo Morlino, eds., *Dealing with the Legacy of Authoritarianism: The "Politics of the Past" in Southern European Democracies; Comparative Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2011).

71 It is particularly telling what Victor Perez-Diaz recalls in terms of building a memory of the past, that it can be largely manipulated if not artificial, as this makes clear that the mechanism we are discussing is actually very difficult to grasp empirically. See *The Return of the Civil Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

72 See Leonardo Morlino, *Democracy Between Consolidation and Crisis: Parties, Groups, and Citizens in Southern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 4.

73 As happened in Egypt.

74 Stoner and McFaul devoted to this question four chapters on Algeria, Iran, China and Azerbaijan. They are also two very distinguished experts of Russia, but curiously put this country, which was a well-established electoral authoritarianism in 2014, among the successful cases of transition, only considering the collapse of 1991 and the transitional phase of 1993. See Kathryn Stoner and Michael McFaul, eds., *Transitions to Democracy: A Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

75 See Kathryn Stoner, Larry Diamond, Desha Girod and Michael McFaul, "Transitional Successes and Failures: The International–Domestic Nexus," in *Transitions to Democracy: A Comparative Perspective*, eds. Kathryn Stoner and Michael McFaul (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 3–26.

76 In the cases they analyse, the presence of oil altered the willingness of international actors to promote democracy. See ibid., particularly the section on external influences.

77 The cognitive heuristics that Kurt Weyland discusses in his analysis of the Arab Spring ("The Arab Spring: Why the Surprising Similarities with the Revolutionary Wave of 1848?" *Perspectives on Politics* 10/4 (2012): 917–934) is actually what I label the "learning process" here. See above and also Bermeo, "Democracy and the Lessons of Dictatorship," and Pridham, *Dynamics of Democratization*.

78 O'Donnell and Schmitter, "Transitions from Authoritarian Rule," 3.

79 McFaul, "Fourth Wave of Democracy," 244.