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THE "SEQUENCING" FALLACY

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In the second half of the 1990s, a counterreaction emerged to the heady enthusiasm about democracy and democracy promotion that flourished during the peak years of democracy's "third wave" in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Believing that the global democratic wave had been oversold, several policy experts and scholars produced a series of influential articles articulating a pessimistic, cautionary view. Fareed Zakaria, alarmed by what he saw as a dangerous rash of newly elected leaders restricting rights and abusing power from Peru and Argentina to the Philippines and Kazakhstan, warned that rapid democratization was producing a plague of "illiberal democracy."[1] Troubled by violent conflicts breaking out in former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere, Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder argued that democratizing states are in fact more conflict-prone than stable autocracies.[2] Disturbed by the specter of ethnic conflict in different parts of Asia, Amy Chua asserted that the simultaneous pursuit of democracy and market reform in countries with "market-dominant minorities" leads to ethnic conflict and antimarket backlashes.[3]

Although their specific areas of focus and analytic frameworks varied, these different accounts coalesced around a central argument that appealed to what might be called the need for democratic sequencing. In this view, it is a mistake to assume that democratization—especially open national elections—is always a good idea. When tried in countries poorly prepared for it, democratization can and often does result in bad outcomes—illiberal leaders or extremists in power, virulent nationalism, ethnic and other types of civil conflict, and interstate wars. To

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prevent such results, certain preconditions, above all, the rule of law and a well-functioning state, should be in place *before* a society democratizes. Therefore, the United States, and the West generally, should rethink their approach and commitment to democracy promotion. In some countries, staying with an existing autocratic regime is a better alternative. Where outside actors do want to promote positive political change in a nondemocratic society, they should concentrate first on helping it to achieve the rule of law and a well-functioning state. Only much farther down the road, when those preconditions are established, should outsiders push for elections and the other associated elements of what sequentialists refer to, warily, as "mass political participation"[4] or "mass plebiscites."[5]

Democratic sequentialism is one part of a wider body of skeptical thinking about democracy's global prospects that gained popularity in the 1990s in reaction to third-wave enthusiasm. This wider body, which might be called "democratic pessimism," is represented most vividly in the much-discussed writings of journalist Robert Kaplan.[6] Sequentialism has found a vital place in this more generalized pessimism thanks to its concrete policy implications and intuitive appeal: Pursuing a sequential path promises to rationalize and defang democratic change by putting the potentially volatile, unpredictable actions of newly empowered masses and emergent elected leaders into a sturdy cage built of laws and institutions.

Sequentialism met a warm welcome from various parts of the international policy community. Traditional realists, who had been uneasily eyeing the ascendancy of a prodemocratic policy outlook in the 1980s and 1990s, were happy to have an additional set of arguments for downplaying democracy promotion and maintaining cordial relations with friendly autocracies. Traditional developmentalists, still loyal to old-school modernization theory's notion that development must precede democracy and feeling upset by democracy promotion's sudden rise to prominence, were delighted to have a new set of contrarian allies. Finally, powerholders in some nondemocratic countries eagerly embraced sequentialism in order to argue that their reticence about opening up political competition actually reflected a deeper commitment to democracy in the long term.

Sequentialism has continued to gain attention and adherents in this decade. The initial articles by Zakaria, Mansfield and Snyder, and Chua have all returned in expanded form as successful books.[7] Democracy's continued trials and tribulations, from the backsliding in the former Soviet Union to the swelling populist currents in Latin America, have provided plentiful grist for pessimism regarding this form of government. The troubling results of the Bush administration's loudly proclaimed drive for democracy in the Middle East have been especially rich fodder. Sequentialists interpret the searing, dispiriting experience

of attempted democracy-building in post-Saddam Iraq as telling evidence of the consequences of an extreme application of a "no-preconditions" outlook on democratization. Similarly, the gains of Islamists in recent elections in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine appear to some observers to be further indications of the dangers of moving quickly toward elections in countries with little democratic history.

Democratic sequentialism raises important questions for the Western democracy-promotion community. Taking the measure of this line of thought is crucial, especially in the context of a deepening debate in the United States and worldwide over the legitimacy of democracy promotion and even the value of democracy overall. Some aspects of democratic pessimism may be useful correctives to what undoubtedly have been excesses associated with the democracy-promotion cause, such as the view of democratization as an international cure-all that will solve terrorism and many other scourges. But the idea of sequencing is problematic, as are the policy recommendations that flow from it. A more useful alternative for taking into account the many complications and risks of democratization and democracy promotion is *gradualism,* which aims at building democracy slowly in certain contexts, but not avoiding it or putting it off indefinitely.

Don't Wait for the Rule of Law

The idea of sequencing rests on a mistaken two-part premise: that a significant number of autocrats can and will act as generators of rule-of-law development and state-building, and that democratizing countries are inherently ill suited for these tasks. Autocracy, however, whether liberal or nonliberal, is inherently in tension with both rule-of-law development and state-building. New or struggling democracies certainly encounter many difficulties in building the rule of law and the state, but they do not face any such inherent contradiction in doing so and enjoy at least a few advantages as well.

With regard to rule-of-law development, the presumption of sequentialists appears to be that autocrats—at least the liberal ones who figure so large in sequentialist accounts—will sedulously pursue reform either because they are enlightened and thus instinctively committed to reform, or because they feel impelled to do so by the imperatives of economic development. That is to say, in order to advance economically—which they presumably want their countries to do to keep citizens happy—they will try to strengthen the rule of law on the assumption that more efficient courts, clear and predictable laws, and other such legally related reform elements are necessary for economic progress.

The reality, however, is otherwise. Despite the persistent hopes of the sequentialists, few autocrats are in fact enlightened. That is to say, few keep repression to a minimum, respect law, and are committed to a

serious long-term path of gradual political and governance reforms. Bluntly stated, for every Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore there have been dozens or even hundreds of rapacious, repressive autocrats posing as reformers, leaders for whom the rule of law represents a straitjacket to be avoided at all costs.

As for the notion that a desire for economic development leads naturally to rule-of-law reform, this mechanism is weaker than it may first appear. Some autocratic regimes are simply uninterested in economic development and the welfare of their citizens. These regimes care only about holding onto power and are willing to use unrelenting, harsh repression to do so. Many autocrats have some interest in developing their country but they subordinate it to other interests that not only compromise their socioeconomic policies but undermine any serious pursuit of the rule of law. Thus, despite some commitment to socioeconomic progress, such leaders may also be fixated on enriching themselves, protecting certain privileged groups or sectors in the society, and undercutting potential political rivals. These other interests usually require deforming the rule of law in significant, even systematic ways. The terrible socioeconomic conditions and weak rule of law apparent in so many developing countries are, in many cases, a legacy of decades of misrule by autocratic regimes that claimed a deep commitment to developmental goals but in fact gave greater priority to narrower, self-interested, and countervailing concerns.

A small number of nondemocratic governments are sufficiently committed to economic development to put other interests on a lower tier for the sake of pressing forward with hard, costly reform policies. The developmentally successful East Asian states, past and present, that sequentialists usually cite as models belong to this small set. These governments may well find that their economic drive does create a need for at least some rule-of-law reforms, such as updating commercial legislation and creating functional commercial courts. Yet it remains true that substantial economic progress can be achieved without major progress toward the rule of law. The cases of China and Vietnam are telling in this regard, and they weigh heavily in the calculations of policy elites in nondemocratic countries around the world as they contemplate their developmental options. Both countries are remarkable economic success stories, particularly in terms of lifting large numbers of people out of poverty, yet they have produced sustained growth without adopting substantial parts of the overall rule-of-law agenda.

In other words, to the extent that some autocratic governments do feel pushed toward rule-of-law reform by the desire for successful economic development, it is only in the direction of a highly truncated version of the rule of law. This version usually emphasizes elements directly relating to the commercial domain. Missing from it will be cardinal rule-of-law features such as civil and political liberties, the

subordination of political power to the law, and independence of the judiciary. Some Western observers hope that reforms in the commercial-law domain will over time engender reforms in the more political areas of the rule of law, with commercial law reform functioning as a sort of Trojan horse for broader rule-of-law change. Appealing though this idea may be, it is based more on hope than on experience. The story of rule-of-law development in countries with well-developed rule-of-law systems is not one in which the commercial domain drove progress in other areas. And careful analyses of whether the spreading of reforms across domains is actually happening in countries such as China have been reaching skeptical conclusions.[8]

Some autocratic governments trumpet their embrace of rule-of-law reform for reasons other than those of economic development. This embrace usually takes the form of anticorruption campaigns or crime-reduction policies. Again, however, these programs are typically quite limited in scope and avoid essential components of genuine rule-of-law reform. The anticorruption campaigns, for example, usually consist of some technocratic legal changes, public education about the evils of corruption, the establishment of an anticorruption commission, and perhaps a few selective prosecutions of corrupt officials. The campaigns rarely entail a serious effort to produce deep-reaching systemic change, starting from the top and working down, by applying the law impartially and fully to all public officials and eliminating political constraints on and manipulation of the principal law-enforcement agencies. Such campaigns are not natural precursors to democratization. On the contrary, they typically form part of a defensive strategy designed to mollify public discontent and undercut rivals, all with the aim of *enhancing* rather than reducing the durability of the autocratic government's grip on power.

Autocracy versus the Rule of Law

The core point is that rule-of-law development and autocracy (liberal or otherwise) go poorly together. Key elements of the rule of law directly threaten autocratic rule. An independent judiciary will be a source of power and authority beyond the executive's reach. Impartial adjudication, fair and equal treatment of all persons before the law, respect for political and civil rights—all these essential components of the rule of law restrict or remove the tools that autocrats typically employ to control political life and stay in power. Autocrats tend to block or at least truncate the rule of law. Thus the idea that rule-of-law development under autocracy is a natural precursor to democracy gets the story backwards. It is the lack of democracy—that is, the persistence of autocracy in many countries—that is a fundamental obstacle to rule-of-law development.

Egypt is a telling case in point. During the 1990s, the U.S. government pushed the government of President Hosni Mubarak to carry out rule-of-

law reforms, especially judicial reform, to facilitate Egypt's attempted economic reforms and to help lay the foundation for political reform and democratization further down the road. The U.S. Agency for International Development mounted one of its largest-ever rule-of-law assistance programs to help the Egyptian government move ahead in this domain.

Despite these efforts, however, rule-of-law reform made little progress in those years and remains blocked today. The Egyptian government continues to exert political control over the adjudication of sensitive cases and to oppose efforts by judges to exert greater independence. The Egyptian security forces continue to operate in an opaque and frequently abusive manner. The government maintains the 25-year-old state of emergency, limiting citizens' basic rights and preserving wide discretionary legal authority for the government.[9] Whether it is Western or Egyptian officials who voice it, the argument that Egypt must lay down a rule-of-law foundation before it can raise the edifice of democratization verges on the self-serving. It seems to provide a way for the West to justify its continued tolerance of a lack of democracy in Egypt, and for the Mubarak government to excuse its own nondemocratic behavior. Democratization in Egypt does not await the rule of law. Rather it is the lack of genuine democratization there—thanks to the Mubarak government's paralyzing grip—that is preventing rule-of-law development. Only if there is a serious political opening, including free and fair competition for the presidency, will there be any real hope for deep-reaching reforms to build the rule of law.

Russia provides another relevant example. When President Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, rule-of-law reform was one of his declared priorities. Many Russians, as well as Western officials, applauded this emphasis, believing that Russia had erred in the 1990s by proceeding too rapidly with democratization without having first created a proper rule-of-law base. Yet Putin's rule-of-law drive has foundered. The exercise of law in Russia today is marred by serious, systematic deficiencies that stem from Putin's approach to wielding political power: the politicized use of statutes to punish political opponents, the continued growth of a shadowy and unaccountable security elite with its hands on the state apparatus, and politically based favoritism and interference in adjudication.

Putin's backing away from democracy feeds these rule-of-law problems. Reduced media freedom, diminished tolerance for political opposition, and the undermining of electoral mechanisms that might establish basic political accountability undercut the capacity of Russian society to call attention to and push back against rule-of-law abuses and shortcomings. As in Egypt, prescribing more rule of law in Russia as the basis for eventual democratization gets it backwards: More democratization is vital to strengthening the rule of law.

Highlighting the intrinsic tensions between autocracy and the rule of law does not mean that rule-of-law development will be simple or

inevitable under democracy. Democratizing countries struggle hard with rule-of-law development and fall short in countless ways. Various aspects of democratization can directly contribute to rule-of-law problems. The introduction or reintroduction of elections into a formerly closed society can heighten political patronage in the judicial domain. The relaxation of authoritarian controls can fuel a generalized weakening of law enforcement, leading to a surge in crime. Political parties grasping for power in new democracies exhibit a distressing tendency to become cesspools of corrupt financing and influence.

At the same time, other aspects of democratization facilitate rule-of-law development. As Rebecca Bill Chavez shows in her illuminating study of the state of law in two Argentine provinces, alternation in power contributes significantly to rule-of-law progress by helping to break up stagnant concentrations of power.[10] The lines of accountability between citizens and the state that elections help to create, however imperfectly, fortify efforts to hold public officials to the law, a central part of rule-of-law development. Despite frequent failings in criminal-law enforcement, even very weak democratizing governments usually greatly reduce gross abuses of human rights compared to their authoritarian predecessors.

Most importantly, unlike with autocracy, no inherent conflict exists between democracy and the rule of law. On the contrary, the two concepts are inextricably intertwined. They share crucial components such as respect for political and civil rights and the subordination of power-holders to law. Many elements of democratization bring progress toward the rule of law and vice-versa. The close association around the world of established rule of law and consolidated democracy is not a coincidence. As Marc F. Plattner has argued, attempting to draw a line or posit a sequential path between rule-oriented liberalism and liberal democracy is futile—the history of the established Western democracies is in many places a story of their simultaneous development and mutual reinforcement.[11]

The State-Building Challenge

Similar arguments apply to state-building, the other precondition for democracy that sequentialists frequently prescribe. It is true that many democracy promoters have tended to underestimate the importance of a capable state. They have taken too long to move away from the assumption, which took hold during the peak years of the third wave, that the core challenge for democracy promotion in countries moving away from authoritarianism is diminishing or counterbalancing an overly strong state.[12] In many authoritarian societies, the state is heavy-handed and repressive but weak in terms of core capacity, for reasons discussed below. Thus in most postauthoritarian contexts, strengthening state capacity should usually be a priority alongside democratization.

In certain situations, democratization does need to wait for state-building. Where a state has completely collapsed or failed under the lash of civil conflict or other accumulated or acute calamities, moving rapidly toward open political competition and elections makes no sense. The state will need to have at least minimal functional capacity as well as something resembling a monopoly of force before such a country can pull itself onto the path of sustainable, pluralistic political development.

Yet the sequentialists are misguided in propounding the idea that democratization must wait until there exists not merely an adequate but a *well-functioning* state—one with capable, impartial institutions and a solid capacity to develop, legislate, and implement effective policies. This mistaken idea rests on the seductive but illusory notion that autocrats are natural state builders, harking to the image of firm, sober strongmen imbued with a state-building ethos, à la Mustafa Kemal Atatürk or Otto von Bismarck. Yet as with rule-of-law development, for every effective state-building strongman of the past century, there have been dozens more autocrats whose self-serving, erratic leadership has resulted in tremendously debilitated states rife with patronage, corruption, and incompetence.

As Joel Migdal observes in his definitive work on state-building in developing countries, autocrats are in fact poorly suited for the second phase of state-building—that is, the one that goes beyond asserting a monopoly on force and creating a basic state framework in order to develop an effective state bureaucracy that can carry out the many functions demanded of a modern state.[13] It is this second phase that sequentialists emphasize when they talk about the need for "a developed infrastructure of impartial administration" prior to democratization.[14] Like rule-of-law development, with which it is linked, this second phase of state-building is in fundamental tension with autocratic rule. Autocrats habitually misuse the state—as a source of corrupt income for themselves and their cronies, as a tool to persecute and suppress critics or rivals, and as a parking place for favored friends and groups. Conventional state-building goals such as efficiency and impartiality only render a state apparatus less malleable for the autocrats' purposes. An effective state enjoys significant political autonomy, as well as its own legitimacy and authority. In other words, such a state is independent in important ways from the political levers of power and therefore naturally threatening to an autocratic leader. This is not to say that autocratic governments are incapable of state-building, only that it is seriously misguided to view them as natural or likely masters of the process.

Fledging democratic governments also struggle with state-building. As with rule-of-law development, various aspects of democratization can complicate the task. New political parties looking for sources of strength may abuse the state in their push to build patronage networks. A period of weak, shifting coalition governments can set back institu-

tion-building and sustained policy implementation. At the same time, however, some parts of a democratization process can contribute to state-building. The establishment of public accountability through voting may create incentives for good state performance. Opening up a closed media will allow greater public scrutiny of poorly performing areas of state function. Creating space for independent civil society permits advocacy groups to monitor and critique state performance and work together with the state to offer new policy ideas.

State-building is not necessarily successful in new democracies. Yet unlike with autocracies, there is no basic underlying tension between an effective state and a successful democratic government. It is no coincidence that almost all of the most effective states in the world today are in democratic countries. As with the rule of law, state-building beyond the initial stage is best pursued at the same time as democratization, with an effort to find points of complementarity and mutual reinforcement. Doing this will involve many complications, of course, but the alternative—betting that an autocratic government will avoid lapsing into the dysfunctional habits that have undermined the state performance of so many autocracies in the past—is usually worse.

Overstating the Role of Outsiders

A further serious problem with the sequentialist outlook is its implicit notion that democratization in many countries can be put off until a better day if the United States and other Western powers would just stop pushing it so hard. The writings of the sequentialists give the impression that a substantial part of the global wave of democracy is merely electoral froth, caused by the West promiscuously pushing for elections all over the world. This view misconstrues the third wave, in particular by underestimating the normative shift in favor of elections that has occurred around the world. It also overestimates the consistency and power of Western support for elections and democracy in developing and postcommunist countries.

The third wave of democracy has certainly turned out to be less sweeping and successful than many had hoped. Yet it has reflected a genuine, often powerful impulse toward democracy on the part of people in vastly disparate regions and countries. The many plunges into democratization, often including rapid movement to elections, have usually occurred because citizens of those societies wanted it that way. This has been true where citizens rose up to drive dictators out—people mobilized not just against the existing regime but for their own political empowerment, for the right to choose their leaders themselves. It has also been true in cases where dictatorial regimes have simply collapsed due to the death of the leader, as in Nigeria in 1998 or Togo in 2005. Citizens in such contexts have responded to the sudden political dis-

juncture with a strong, quickly awakened desire for elections, deriving not from outsiders' urgings but rather from their own sense that "now it's our turn."

The global spread of the idea that being elected is the root of governmental legitimacy has been integral to the third wave. Yet the legitimacy that elections confer has often been much shakier than democracy promoters (and those elected) have hoped, and elections in many new democracies have done less than expected to create well-functioning mechanisms of democratic accountability. A handful of nondemocratic governments still maintain significant legitimacy without elections, whether through cultural norms concerning inherited rule, good economic performance (or at least the reasonably competent distribution of economic largesse from oil revenues), or the mantle of national struggle against foreign enemies. Weak and problematic though elections often are, they now form a crucial step in the process of attaining political legitimacy throughout most of the world. The laborious, often convoluted efforts of many semiauthoritarian leaders in the former Soviet Union, Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere to carry out at least vaguely plausible elections, rather than just to rule without them, are evidence of this fact. And frustrating though the quest for democratic accountability through elections has been in many places, the chances for building accountability under autocracy are usually worse. It may be true that in many countries democracy can barely live with elections, but in no country can it live without them.

The idea that there has been a rash Western drive for democracy at all costs would likely provoke a hearty, cynical laugh from people in most parts of the world if it were proposed to them. Certainly the United States, and to a lesser extent other Western powers, have often talked grandly in the past several decades about their commitment to global democracy. But underneath the rhetoric is a long record of a very mixed policy reality. Where democratic change in a particular country or region aligns with Western economic or security interests, it receives support. In many places, however, the United States and Europe have been and continue to be quite happy to support or get along with autocratic governments for a host of reasons.

Once democratization clearly starts somewhere, a collection of Western governments and other organizations usually steps in to back it. Much less frequently, however, is the West ahead of the political curve, pushing hard for change where autocracy is stable. The case of Indonesia in the final phase of President Suharto's rule is a valuable example to recall. As Suharto began to lose his grip, the United States and other Western powers were hesitant to push hard for democracy, loyal up to the very end to a leader who had been good to them, and fearful of what might come after him. It was only after Indonesians drove him out that the West came in with substantial diplomatic and material support for democracy.

The role of outside actors in most attempted democratic transitions is relatively limited. A wide range of governments, international organizations, aid groups, and transnational nongovernmental organizations provide what is usually nonconfrontational democracy assistance. They may cajole, beseech, or pressure officials in the country in question to move forward with democratic reforms. Western democracy promoters have supported hundreds of elections in new or struggling democracies through help with election administration, domestic and international election observing, and political-party training. Many of these democracy programs and policies are useful, but they overwhelmingly play only a supporting and not a leading role. Large though it has grown, the democracy-promotion community does not in most cases drive or even shape political transitions in the world. Instead, it backs them, trying to help domestic actors achieve what they have already decided they want for themselves.

This is usually true even when the external role is loud and seemingly large. It is a mistake, for example, to attribute the holding of various elections in the Arab world during the past two years to the much-publicized U.S. pressure for democratization. This attribution is often asserted as part of a critique: The Bush administration pushed Arab countries to hold elections, the argument goes, and look what it got—a string of Islamist victories. Palestinians themselves pushed to hold elections after the death of Yasir Arafat in 2004, who himself had been elected eight years before. Egypt has been holding regular parliamentary elections since 1976. The ones that it held in 2005, which resulted in sizeable gains by the Muslim Brotherhood, were just another in that series (although President Mubarak's decision that year to hold direct presidential elections may have resulted in part from U.S. pressure). Lebanon's 2005 elections were one more occurrence of elections in a series going back some years.

In a small number of cases, outside actors play a very large role in trying to help provoke or shape a democratic transition. One example is where the United States and some European actors pursue highly assertive policies of support for opposition movements in countries where a strongman whom the West dislikes is attempting to get himself reelected. Western support for the movements opposing President Slobodan Milošević in Serbia in the late 1990s and President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in Belarus in this decade are leading examples. Such cases, however, are rare. Moreover, although in these places the West is trying to push the political envelope, it is not trying to make elections happen where they are not planned, but rather is trying to influence the quality or outcome of already planned elections.

The other types of cases of an international elephant in the room of a country's political transition are forcible interventions or conflict-related international engagements: where the United States and some of

its allies intervene militarily to oust a dictator and attempt to establish a democratic government in his place, as in Panama, Afghanistan, and Iraq; or where the United Nations or another multilateral organization is involved in helping to end a civil war and stays on to take a significant part in the postconflict political-reconstruction process, as in Cambodia, Mozambique, and Bosnia in the 1990s.

The outside actors in such cases usually push for elections, often trying to rush the country to elections as part of their own exit strategy. Even in these cases, however, the idea of holding elections as a central component of the political-reconstruction process does not necessarily originate from the outside—it is something that citizens and major political actors frequently expect and want. The case of Iraq is instructive in this regard. After the ouster of Saddam Hussein, the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) tried to put off the holding of elections. Yet despite the apparently overwhelmingly powerful U.S. role in the country, homegrown demands by Iraqis that they be allowed to vote forced the CPA to back down and agree to relatively early elections.

In short, even if it were possible to ensure rule-of-law development and effective state-building under autocrats, sequencing would still be deeply problematic. Whatever might be theoretically preferable regarding paths of development, people in many parts of the world want to attain political empowerment *now,* not at some indefinite point in the future. Elections—even if held hurriedly and before all conditions are ideal—have become the most visible embodiment of their aspiration to self-rule and the urgency with which they feel it.

Even if one holds it morally defensible to let a generation endure more decades of autocratic repression for the sake of possible future benefits, persuading people to defer their ambition to vote in a free election is most often not an option. The sequentialist argument is dogged by a paradox: On the one hand, sequentialists advocate caution and minimalism regarding democracy promotion on the grounds that it is beyond the West's power to shape or control inevitably unpredictable processes of democratization. On the other hand, the core sequentialist argument rests squarely on the belief that the West does have power to shape political change in other societies precisely by convincing frustrated, mobilizing citizens to ignore—perhaps for decades—their own heartfelt desire to take part openly and actively in politics.

Gradualism, Not Sequencing

Sequentialists' ideas about democratic preconditions go too far. Their raising of the issue, however, is helpful. It highlights the need to pay more attention to the effects that a country's underlying economic, social, and political conditions, structures, and historical legacies will have on the chances that a democratic transition can succeed there.

With striking breadth and speed, the third wave upended the lingering conventional wisdom from the 1960s about democratic preconditions, which stressed the need for a middle class and other attributes of economic development. Democracy promoters in the 1980s and 1990s embraced the view that democracy could succeed anywhere, and could do so quickly. They focused on the mode of transition as a key determinant of success. In so doing, they tended to underestimate the complications that different underlying conditions could present and to overestimate the power of elections alone to produce fundamental political change.

As the third wave has aged, however, and many "transitional countries" have fallen short of early hopes, the importance of underlying conditions and structures for democratic success has become increasingly evident. A large array of such factors is relevant, but the record of recent years indicates that five are of particular importance:

- *Level of economic development:* In general, the wealthier a country is, the better will be its chances of consolidating a democratic transition.
- *Concentration of sources of national wealth:* Countries whose national wealth comes mainly from highly concentrated sources (such as oil or mineral deposits) tend to experience significant difficulties with democratization.
- *Identity-based divisions:* Countries where the population is divided along ethnic, religious, tribal, or clan lines often have a harder time with democratization than more homogeneous societies.
- *Historical experience with political pluralism:* Countries with little record of political pluralism almost always have a harder time with democratization than those having such experience.
- *Nondemocratic neighborhoods:* Countries in regions or subregions where most or all of the countries are nondemocratic usually struggle more with democratization than do countries in more democratic neighborhoods.

These five factors should not be thought of as preconditions, a term that causes considerable confusion among analysts. The factors are not prior requirements, without which democratization cannot advance significantly. Rather they are core facilitators or nonfacilitators. We should understand them as making democratization harder or easier, and not either certain or impossible. When several or all of them lean decisively in a positive direction, a country has a much better chance of succeeding with democratization than when they lean in the other direction. All of them come in gradations; they are not black-or-white conditions. Taken together they form a continuum of likelihood of democratic success, not a bipolar division between countries that can be democratic and countries that cannot.

We can see that these factors are not preconditions by thinking of the counterexamples that can be named with relation to each. The ranks of democracies, after all, include poor countries: not only India, that perennial favorite, but also Panama, Suriname, Botswana, Lesotho, and

Senegal. At least one very successful democracy, Norway, has highly concentrated sources of national wealth (North Sea oil). Many democracies, including some longstanding ones such as Switzerland, Canada, and Belgium, contain deeply entrenched identity-based divisions. A lack of experience with political pluralism has unquestionably hurt many third wave democratic efforts, but at least a few countries lacking such experience (Mongolia, Georgia, and Ukraine), have made a partially successful run at democracy. Nondemocratic neighborhoods are problematic but not a complete bar, as evidenced by India in the first few decades of its postcolonial existence, Costa Rica in the 1960s and 1970s, and Israel for decades.

Associated with the "no-preconditions" enthusiasm of democracy promoters has been a dominant model of transition featuring a decisive breakthrough in which the old regime collapses and the country moves very quickly to open national elections, followed by longer-term processes of state reform and civil society strengthening. Only a minority of countries in the past several decades have closely adhered to this model, however, and they have been (as in Central Europe) generally well positioned in terms of facilitative factors. Elsewhere, attempted transitions often have led to different outcomes, including hybrid polities and even outright reversions to autocracy. As a result, democracy promoters are increasingly seeking alternative approaches for countries that face complicating conditions.

One avenue of this search leads to a more gradualistic approach to democratization and democracy promotion. Democratic gradualism is different from sequencing. It does not entail putting off for decades or indefinitely the core element of democratization—the development of fair and open processes of political competition and choice. It involves reaching for the core element now, but doing so in iterative and cumulative ways rather than all at once. Gradualism can take different forms depending on the context.

With respect to societies emerging from violent conflicts, for example, a valuable debate has emerged among democracy promoters in recent years about the dangers of "premature elections." Advocates of moving more gradually toward elections in such contexts are not arguing for indefinite delay pending the creation of deep structural conditions. The idea, rather, is to put off elections for at most several years to allow in-depth negotiations between contending political groups, so that the main political forces can get used to dealing with one another peacefully and agree on the rules of the game before potentially divisive elections are held.[15] As the case of South Africa's unhurried approach to elections in the early 1990s demonstrates, citizens eager to have their chance to vote will be willing to wait if the delay in voting is clearly limited and if it is tied to an inclusive process of building a national consensus.

Authoritarian governments that show some genuine interest in re-

form, usually as part of a quest for economic development, often claim that they are gradualist democratizers. Such claims are usually false. The brand of pseudodemocratic gradualism that authoritarians tout typically overstates the political impact that economic reforms will likely exert, and limits political reforms to very minor steps. In places such as China and parts of the Middle East, democracy promoters are increasingly seeking a middle path between unrealistic calls for sudden political openings and excessive praise for minor reforms. This new approach highlights the need for small but significant steps that create space and mechanisms for true political competition and point the way to an eventual end of the rulers' monopoly on power. Such steps might include allowing independent civil society organizations that engage in politically related advocacy; permitting the establishment of political associations or other types of protoparties independent of the ruling party; holding local or provincial elections in which not just independent candidates but candidates representing these political associations can compete; and tolerating a modicum of open public space in which truly independent media can operate and criticism of the rulers can find voice.

In semiauthoritarian countries, powerholders often abuse the concept of gradualism by claiming that their partial political liberalization is a necessary halfway house on the way to democracy, when in fact it is a means to avoid altogether the kinds of far-reaching political changes that would threaten semiauthoritarian rule. Democracy promoters who are determined to avoid becoming enablers of such false gradualism should focus on strategies aimed at rendering more meaningful such political competition as does exist. A list of such strategies would feature the creation of a genuinely independent system of electoral administration; the legalization of excluded political parties; the reinforcement of those institutions, such as legislatures, in which a degree of real pluralism is already extant; the securing of permission for independent citizens' groups to monitor and criticize elections and other key aspects of the political process; and the diminution via constitutional reform of those zones of political power that remain exempt from the competitive process.[16]

Gradualism is not a magic bullet. It can be easily misused by those who are insincere about democratization. It gives democracy promoters no great new forms of influence that they can use to enhance their mostly modest role. It does not mean that democracy will never go awry or disappoint. And it is not universally applicable—there will still be places where pushing for rapid movement toward elections makes sense, and others where no signs of movement toward political pluralism are detectable at all. But gradualism is a vital additional approach that is being added, and should be further developed as part of the broader evolution of democracy promotion away from a standard transitional template. The difference between gradualism and sequentialism may at first appear subtle or merely semantic. In fact, however, it is fundamental. Gradualism is a

different way of engaging in or pushing for democratization now, in service of a belief in democratic possibility. Sequentialism is a method for putting off democratization until some uncertain future time, rooted in skepticism about democracy's value and chances.

NOTES

1. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76 (November–December 1997): 22–43.

2. Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and the Danger of War," *International Security* 20 (Summer 1995): 5–38.

3. Amy Chua, "Markets, Democracy, and Ethnicity: Toward a New Paradigm for Law and Development," *Yale Law Journal* 108 (October 1998): 1–108.

4. Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 273.

5. Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: Norton, 2003), 15.

6. See for example, Robert Kaplan, "Was Democracy Just a Moment?" *Atlantic Monthly,* December 1997, 55–80.

7. Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom*; Mansfield and Snyder, *Electing to Fight*; and Amy Chua, *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

8. Matthew Stephenson, "A Trojan Horse in China?" in Thomas Carothers, ed., *Promoting the Rule of Law Abroad: In Search of Knowledge* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, 2006), ch. 8.

9. U.S. Department of State, *2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2006).

10. Rebecca Bill Chavez, "A Construction of the Rule of Law in Argentina: A Tale of Two Provinces," *Comparative Politics* 35 (July 2003): 417–37.

11. Marc F. Plattner, "From Liberalism to Illiberal Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 10 (July 1999): 121–34.

12. Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (January 2002): 5–21.

13. Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

14. Mansfield and Snyder, *Electing to Fight,* 278.

15. See Krishna Kumar and Marina Ottaway, "General Conclusions and Priorities for Policy Research," in Krishna Kumar, ed., *Postconflict Elections, Democratization and International Assistance* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Reinner, 1998), ch. 13.

16. Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, 2003), ch. 7.