

# Why did democracy become consolidated only in the Twentieth century?

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

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

Democracy is today the prevailing and consolidated form of government in developed countries and tends to be so in the middle-income countries. Democracy has become such strong political value that nobody challenges it, and major countries feel authored to require from the others that they are democratic. Yet, this consensus is as recent as modern democracy itself. Advanced countries and many middle income countries became real democracies only in the twentieth century, when the poor and women finally won the right to vote and to be elected. Why did democracy become the dominant form of government so late historically? Why, since the Greeks, did philosophers prefer some form of monarchy or aristocracy to democracy? Why are democracies consolidated in some countries while in others, not? There are no simple answers to these questions, but I will offer some answers consistent with political theory and historical observation, and with the extensive empirical research undertaken by other political scientists on the subject. We know that economic development and democracy are linked. We know also that in the historical transition from traditional to modern societies, in the capitalist revolution taking place in each national state, a new and large bourgeoisie gradually assumed economic and political dominance and,

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eventually, came to support democracy after rejecting for a long time in name of liberalism. Thus, the capitalist class was the first ruling class to accept democracy. In this paper, I try to understand why this was so, discussing why the capitalist class removed successively its vetoes on democracy. And to explain why the democracy turned consolidated in rich countries and in an increasing number of middle income countries.

The method I use is historical; I am interested in generalizing from empirical experience rather than either being normative or depending on specific processes and leadership that is usual in the political science literature on democratic transitions and consolidations. I look for new historical events that changed the social reality that I am studying on the assumption that to explain democratic transition and consolidation we have to look for the new historical facts or processes that changed collective political behavior. I ask also for the rational motives behind the consolidation of democracy, but not *a priori* as propose rational choice but *a posteriori* – just as an additional explanation to the change that the new historical facts originated.

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

In the first section of the paper, I note that political philosophers only turned favorable to democracy in the twentieth century. In the second, I make a short review on the literature on democratic transitions. In the third, I define the two basic concepts used in this paper: democracy and capitalist revolution. In the fourth, I present the basic argument: with the capitalist revolution, the emergence of market instead of administrative coordination of the economy changed the form of economic surplus appropriation and removed the first veto that the ruling classes exercised over democracy. In the fifth section, I discuss three other historical factors that contributed to the removal of the fear of expropriation of the elite by the poor, and the complementary role of workers demanding democracy. In the sixth section, I argue that the method I use takes rational behavior as an *a posteriori* explanation to the facts historically analyzed. In the seventh, I ask on the predictive power of the model in relation to democratic transitions, and conclude that it is good in general cases but fails on a case by case basis due to foreign pressure on poor countries to democratize. Finally, in the eighth section, I focus on democratic consolidation, make a short review of the literature, make the same question of the previous section, and conclude that in this case the capitalist revolution model proves strong predictive capacity even in a case by case basis. This is

primarily a theoretical, not an empirical paper, but I in this section I also present the empirical evidence in relation to democratic consolidation.

### **The philosophers' view**

In the ancient world, the normative view about the good political regime was clear: it should be monarchical or aristocratic, not democratic. The most that people could accept was Aristotle's 'mixed regime', in which some aspects of democracy were combined with authoritarian rule. Since the philosophers' main political objective was social order or security, they were either outright authoritarian, like Plato, or moderate, like Aristotle and Polybius, who were concerned to balance rich and poor for the sake of both stability and justice. Democracy alone was dangerous, subject to factions, instability and corruption. Today, ancient Greek democracy cannot be viewed as true democracy, given the exclusion of women and foreigners and the existence of slaves. Yet it was an extraordinary political development – just as Greek civilization as a whole was an exceptional historical phenomenon. In the Roman republic some of the characteristics of Greek democracy were present, but in a limited way. Only many centuries later, with the great revolutions in France and in the United States, inspired by Greek democracy and especially Roman republicanism (Pocock 1975), did democracy once again come into the minds of people as a possibility. Yet these were liberal rather than democratic revolutions: they gave priority to the protection of civil rights and the rule of law over the affirmation of political rights, particularly universal suffrage. After Greek democracy and the Roman republic, which offered opportunities for creative political thought, the idea of the good political regime reappeared between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries in northern Italy in the form of republican city-states. Politics – the art of governing through argument and compromise, and not just by the use of force – began gradually to resurface. Politics reappeared in the Italian merchant city-states with the republican humanists and particularly with their major representative, Machiavelli. After centuries, in a particular region of the world the times were suitable for doing and thinking politics. Yet, with the rise of the modern national-states in the form of absolute monarchies, such opportunities for politics and political thought seemed to fade. Not so. The Reformation changed Europe in political and cultural terms. On the other hand, given that the emerging nation-states were the outcome of a political alliance of the monarch with the emerging bourgeoisie, the members of this social class started to participate in the creation of new institutions. Eventually, with the

American and the French revolutions, not only the fortune of markets but also the times of politics and of political thought gained a new momentum.

With industrialization, the capitalist revolution was completed in England, and shortly thereafter in France and in the United States. The new market economy required a non-arbitrary political regime: a liberal state, respectful of property rights and contracts, in which the rule of law prevailed, but not necessarily a democratic one. Political philosophers were still a long way from democracy; they lived in absolute monarchies, and, realistically, saw the liberal or constitutional state, not democracy, as the alternative form of political regime. The absolute monarchies, however, were already a manifestation of the capitalist revolution, and, with Thomas Hobbes and the social contract theory, the legitimacy of political power was transferred from tradition or from divine right to the people. After that, a new breed of enlightened or liberal political philosophers emerged. Liberalism is originally the ideology of the bourgeoisie, but it involved a larger range of interests. After Locke, the first great liberal philosopher, liberal thinkers were constitutional monarchists. Liberalism was not an alternative to monarchy, but a form of constitutionally limiting the powers of the monarch. With the American and the French revolutions, liberal ideology became dominant, but the word 'democracy', long forgotten, returned to public debate only in the French Revolution. In the American Revolution, democracy was rejected, and, as John Dunn (2005: 72-73) remarks, only in retrospect, as America's new constitution was put to work, and after Alexis de Tocqueville explained Americans to themselves, did the new nation view itself as a democracy. In the French Revolution, there was a radical democratic project, which proved self-defeating in the hands of the Jacobins. Jürgen Habermas (1988: 465), writing on the French Revolution and on the dialectic between liberalism and democracy, emphasizes that "democracy and human rights form the universalistic core of the constitutional state that emerged from the American and French Revolutions in different variants". However, such a universalistic core would take a century to become reality. After the two revolutions, liberals often identified democracy with the worst excesses of the French Revolution, or as the dictatorship of the majority. In light of their historical experience, liberal political philosophers – such as for instance Benjamin Constant – remained hostile to democracy, which would entail instability and disorder, thus demonstrating the inherent incapacity of the people to govern. Even Rousseau, who is usually associated with democracy, was not really in favor of modern, i.e., representative, democracy. Being a citizen of the republican city-state of Geneva, he believed only in direct democracy. For large empires, or even in nation-states, he had the same view as Montesquieu: government was much more complex and difficult, and there was no alternative to a kind of despotism. The basic criterion distinguishing liberal from liberal-democratic regimes – the inclusion of women and the poor as citizens – would not be accepted by Rousseau. As Dahl (1989: 123) remarks:

There (in the *Social Contract*) Rousseau occasionally appears to be asserting an unqualified right to membership in the demos. Rousseau makes it clear that he means no such thing. Though, he lauds Geneva, even though its demos consisted of only a small minority of the population. Children were, of course, excluded. But so were women. What is more, a majority of adult males were also excluded from the Genevan demos.

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

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

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

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

### **Short review on democratic transitions**

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

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

Both approaches derive from Dankwart Rustow's 1970 paper on transitions, which rejected the assumption that the causes of democratization are also the causes of consolidation. Rustow thereby created space for choice or agency; but this kind of approach either leads to abstract rational models like those used in neoclassical economics where choice becomes mere maximization, or ends up in case-by-case studies that lack predictive capacity. More recently, Charles Boix (2003), Boix and Stokes (2003) and Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) to the democratic transitions issue that are related to the argument in this paper and made knowledge on the subject to advance, but as I will argue ahead they just show that democracy is less threatening to the rich once economic development takes place, while my argument is that a consolidated democracy is impossible before the capitalist revolution takes place.

Instead, this paper is part of the tradition of thought, the historical one that looks for new historical facts and the structural, cultural and institutional determinants of social and political action. It is akin to approaches by Seymour Lipset (1959) and Barrington Moore (1966), Robert Dahl (1971), Samuel Huntington (1991), Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber and John Stephens (1992), and Gerard Alexander (2002) who look for structural forces behind democratic transitions and consolidations.<sup>1</sup> Yet Rueschemeyer, Huber and Stephens observed that "the causal forces that stand behind the relationship between development and democracy remain, in effect, in a black box" (1992: 29). In fact, capitalist development and democracy appear together but there is no clear explanation why. In this paper I hope to offer a contribution toward opening the black box and, above all, toward understanding democratic consolidation. It argues that democratic transition may follow different paths, but, once the capitalist or industrial revolution is completed in one country and democratic transition has taken place, the probability that it will fall back into authoritarianism is very small or zero. Before the capitalist revolution a country may become democratic out of imitation or under foreign pressure, but democracy will be unstable; after it, the country may remain authoritarian for some time, but it will eventually make the transition to democracy; once this happens, the probability of falling back to authoritarian regime will be very small: democracy will be consolidated.<sup>2</sup>

## Two concepts: democracy and capitalist revolution

In the more economically advanced countries, in late nineteenth or early twentieth century, after they adopted universal suffrage, democracy became finally dominant. Table 1 presents the first countries to adopt universal suffrage up to the 1940s. The first was New Zealand, in 1893. The adoption of the universal right to vote did not mean that a country had completed its transition to democracy, but in most advanced countries this was clearly the case. Such countries had long had constitutional or rule-of-law regimes. Freedom of thought and association and regular elections had also existed for some time. When the propertyless and women were finally entitled to vote, the minimum conditions for democracy materialized. As Wanderley G. Santos (1998) observes, the number of voters doubled, or more than doubled, in most countries in the year that universal suffrage is adopted. The fact that democracy is a twentieth century phenomenon is quite clear from Table 1. The question is why only at that moment democracy became a viable form of government.

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

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

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

It is time, now, to make clear two basic concepts that are in the core of this paper: the concept of democracy and of capitalist revolution. Democracy is the political regime in which all adult citizens vote (universal suffrage), elections are free and regular, and the constitution assures the rule of law involving principally freedom of association, of speech

and of information, and protection of minority rights. In other words, I understand as democratic the political regime that satisfies Dahl's criteria defining a polyarchy (1971; 1989: 233).<sup>3</sup> This is a "minimal" concept of democracy, and corresponds to the first historical form of democracy – liberal democracy. As political development takes place, the quality of democracy is expected to improve, but we need a minimal concept of democracy to distinguish the authoritarian from the democratic state and be able to discuss democratic transition and consolidation. In this paper, I do not discuss the quality of democracy.<sup>4</sup> When we discuss democratic transition and consolidation, we should not ask more of democracy than a political regime is able to offer, nor fall back on the old distinction between formal and substantive democracy.

We also need a short definition of capitalist revolution. The capitalist revolution represented a tectonic shift in the history of civilization. It began with the commercial revolution and the emergence of the bourgeoisie, advanced with the formation of the nation-states, and got "completed" in each country with the industrial revolution. It involved, at the economic level, the transition from the appropriation of economic surplus with the use of direct force by an oligarchy controlling the state to a mode of self-enrichment in a market-coordinated economy; it turned profit into the economic motive, and capital accumulation embodying technical progress into the means to that end. At the political level, it brought the transition from the absolute state to the liberal state – the ones that assures the rule of law but is not democratic. At the administrative level, it implied the separation of the public from the private patrimony, or, in other words, the transition from the patrimonial state, where rent seeking was part of the game, to the modern bureaucratic state where rent-seeking turned a disease. With the capitalist revolution, the new nation-states were able to develop three basic institutions: the modern state apparatus, the legal-constitutional system, and the national market. At the cultural level, it involved the transition from tradition and revelation as sources of knowledge to reason and scientific research. The capitalist revolution begins with the emergence of a bourgeois middle class in the cities since the thirteenth century in Italy and "ends" with the industrial revolution and the rise to the working class in late eighteenth century in England. After that we can view the capitalist revolution as "completed" in each country in so far as the appropriation of economic surplus ceases to take place principally through the control of the state to be achieved in the market.

Marx made the classical analysis of the capitalist revolution, but, since he was concerned with the transition to socialism, he was unable to derive from capitalism its two major political consequences: the formation of the nation-states,<sup>5</sup> and the emergence of the democratic regimes. Barrington Moore (1996: 426) did this job: he made the classical analysis of the bourgeois-democratic revolution – he showed "the English Civil War, the French Revolution and the American Civil War as the stages of *the* bourgeois-democratic revolution". Writing one hundred years later, when democracy in England, France and United States was consolidate, but the experience of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes in other countries, recent, he asked which had been the historical conditions in capitalist development that led to democracy. It was clear to him that the capitalist or bourgeois revolution was the central condition. Yet, since this fact was already well known when he wrote, his more specific question was which other conditions were required – conditions

that were present principally in England, and also in France and United States, but not in Germany, or Japan, or Russia, or China, or India. His innovative response as consequence of a major study for that was that, in the sixteen and the seventeenth centuries, the advance of commerce and the increased demand of absolutist rulers for cash led the English landed aristocracy to turn to a form of commercial farming and to a political alliance with the bourgeoisie. His illuminating theory relating liberalism and democracy to the emergence of the 'gentry' – a numerous proprietary stratum below the aristocracy and above the rich peasants and the new bourgeoisie – is well known. But he underlines that, above the gentry, the overlords also got involved in commercial agriculture and in political coalition with the bourgeoisie. For him, to reduce the bourgeois-democratic revolution just to a conflict between these two classes won by the bourgeoisie is “a caricature” (p.428). While in a country like Germany, the aristocracy conserved throughout the nineteenth century a firm position against democracy, Moore underlines that the radical opposition to democracy was a marginal current in the British aristocratic class. Yet, he underestimates the liberal resistance to democracy in Britain, or in the United States, or in France – a resistance that in name of the risk of the “dictatorship of the majority” delayed for a century democracy.

### **The basic argument**

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

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

My central concern in this paper is not in discussing the historical conditions that proved to be more favorable to liberalism and democracy in some countries than in others. Yet, it is central to my argument bourgeoisie's interest in democracy – the fact that bourgeoisie will be a class that, differently from the previous ruling classes or oligarchies, originally did not oppose and eventually sponsored democracy. Before the capitalist revolution, production was organized at the family level, and economic surplus was appropriated through ownership of land and particularly the use of political power to tax people, to reduce them to slavery or servitude. In order to be rich one was supposed to own land and be politically powerful, to be part of the oligarchy controlling the state. The distribution of income was essentially a political question. Land property had also a political origin. To obtain wealth and prestige, one had first to be politically powerful – share control of the state. Dominant groups appropriated economic surplus out of land rent and war; they fought for booty, they enslaved the defeated or imposed heavy taxes on the colonies, and they appropriated land. As society changed from tribal to more complex forms, like city-states and empires, taxation became increasingly important. The military aristocracy, with the

support of a patrimonial bureaucracy and a religious hierarchy, appropriated the economic surplus from merchants, while landowners collected rents from peasants. Religious legitimacy was always an essential part of the process, but the very existence of empires and dominant oligarchies depended on their capacity to retain political power and wage war. In the last form of pre-capitalist state organization, the patrimonial state, taxation was essential to finance a court aristocracy and a patrimonial bureaucracy. There was no separation between the public and the private patrimony: to be economically rich depended on being politically dominant.

The poor, identified since Aristotle as the sponsors of democracy, would often press for freedom, for some sort of democracy, but the dominant group resisted, resorting to all forms of violence to keep the state under their political control. Since markets had just a marginal existence, there was no other way to distribute wealth and income than through the control of the state. Occasionally the people or the merchants could gain some power, and establish some form of republic, but the powerful interests involved in political power would soon corrupt and wipe out the new regime. After the industrial revolution – when the capitalist revolution culminates –, this situation changed dramatically. Now, constitutional and market systems coordinate society. Now profits and high salaries gain relevance in making people rich while rents and taxation lose it. The state continues to play a role in the acquisition and distribution of income, but is no longer a condition for the existence of the economic elite. It is not easy to determine whether a country underwent its capitalist revolution, but besides wealth, a good measure is whether rent seeking, the patrimonial capture of the state, still plays a major role in making people rich.

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

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

In the historical moment that each national society changes from authoritarian to mercantile or capitalist appropriation of the surplus, state power ceased to be a necessary condition for acquiring wealth. States continue to play a major economic role, which, however, is no longer to support oligarchic appropriation, but to create the institutional conditions for investment and profit realization in the market. The control of the state continued to be crucial to the new ruling class, but businessmen could leave the responsibility of governing and of protecting militarily the new nation-states from foreign aggression to politicians and bureaucrats.

At this moment, when argument and persuasion finally prevailed over force, the era of politics began. Now, people had the possibility of discussing and creating liberal and democratic institutions. The eighteenth century had already experienced a hint of it when some thinkers contrasted the harshness of aristocracy with the softness of capitalism. Montesquieu, above all, underlined commerce's "douceur".<sup>6</sup> Albert Hirschman (1977), commenting on this view, observes that while the warrior aristocrats were subject to great and sometimes heroic passions, the bourgeoisie was limited to more modest and moderate traits. Analyzing Shaftsbury's, Hutcheson's and Hume's, he shows how these philosophers viewed economic activity as a 'calm passion'. England was the first country to complete its industrial revolution; it is not by accident that it was also the first nation-state and the first liberal political regime in the world. In the early nineteenth century, England was ready for liberalism, not for democracy. The first veto on democracy, which reflected the need for authoritarian appropriation of the surplus, had been more or less eliminated, but fear of expropriation by the poor remained strong. Thus, civil rights could be assured, not political rights. It would take 100 years after the completion of the Industrial Revolution to English elites admit universal suffrage.

### **The three additional new historical facts**

Thus, according to this capitalist revolution model of democratic transition and consolidation, the fact that profits did not depend on the direct control of the state led the capitalist class as the ruling class not to impose an absolute veto on democracy. Yet it would take a century and the occurrence of three additional historical events to make democracy the preferred and widespread political regime. The second historical fact was the bourgeoisie losing fear of expropriation by a majority of workers winning elections. The industrial revolution opened the way for the liberal but not for the democratic state. The control of the state remained naturally a central political objective. One of the roles of the state, besides assuring property rights and contracts, was to create conditions for further income accumulation in order to finance economic growth.

The new capitalist class, formed by a large middle class and a small upper class, will be originally liberal. Its members strove for profits and for the guarantee of their hard-won civil rights. Their memory of the arbitrary rule that characterized absolutism was alive and well. With the liberal order, they had ceased to be subjects to become citizens endowed with rights. Yet, just as it took time for the aristocracy to grant full citizenship to the bourgeoisie, so it would take time for the new business class to accept that workers had full citizenship

by the institution of universal suffrage. The new capitalist class was liberal but not democratic. Although the seeds of democracy were in the liberal state, classical liberals fought democracy principally during the first half of the nineteenth century. They did so in the name of freedom. The argument was that freedom and equality conflicted one with another, that equality of rights – which is a condition for democracy – would be intrinsically inconsistent with civic liberties, in so far as equality of rights would lead to the tyranny of the majority and the denial of freedom. As Lindblom (1977: 163) underlines, the first modern political philosophers “are all liberals first, and democrats, second, if at all”. He also sees a close relation between democracy and capitalism, which he calls “the private enterprise market system”. Both would be “methods for popular control over ‘public’ decisions”, the former through the vote, and the latter through consumers’ individual preferences.

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

While the first and the second new historical facts opening the way for democracy were on the supply side of democratic participation, the third and the fourth are on the demand side: the demand of the middle classes and of the working class. The rise of the middle classes – a bourgeois middle class, and a professional middle class – is the third new historical fact contributing to the historical process of democratic transition and consolidation that occurs in the twentieth century. The existence of this large layer between the rich and the poor worked as a main stabilizing factor thus circumventing the classical problem of early democracies: political instability.<sup>7</sup> After the completion of the capitalist revolution, the bourgeoisie was a large middle class that required, besides the guarantee of civil rights, formal rules that permitted that its members to participate in government. Democracy emerged eventually as the ensemble of such rules. As industrialization advanced, a new professional middle class also emerged, and the two middle classes began to represent an increasing share of the total population – and they also demanded democracy. Besides, the fact that they were situated between the rich and the poor was also a reason for the rich to be less fearful of the poor and accept universal suffrage.

The fourth and final historical fact that led modern societies to democracy was the pressure of the poor or of the working class for democracy. Despite all their internal contradictions, democracy was always a demand of the poor when they were able to express themselves politically. Integrated in large factories under the capitalist system, part of the

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

By the end of the nineteenth century, the arguments against universal suffrage or on the risk of the dictatorship of majority had lost their force, while the demand for democracy increased, and the first countries that granted the universal suffrage became the first real democracies.<sup>8</sup> As Dahl (1989: 234) asserts, "although some of the institutions of polyarchy appeared in a number of English-speaking and European countries in the nineteenth century, in no country did the demos become inclusive until the twentieth century".

### ***A posteriori* rational motives**

Although democracy was originally a demand from the poor or the working class and the middle classes, it became gradually a rational option for the rich, provided that the liberal principles associated to the rule of law prevailed in the new democratic system. Unlike the old aristocracy of landowners, the capitalist class depended less on the state, and valued more the liberties that liberal democracy assured. Therefore, capitalists gradually changed their views on democracy either because they were under pressure, or because they ceased to fear it, or still because they understood that they could continue to rule in the new system. First, the capitalist class realized that the poor did not really represent a threat because they did not have a real alternative to the capitalist system. Second, they realized that democracy did not really endanger property and profits. Third, it became conscious that a democratic regime could be more stable, more effective in assuring social order, than just a liberal state in which ultimate power was in the hands of a sovereign or a ruler. In other words, unlike to the old aristocracy, the new rich were not intrinsically opposed to democracy; they were intrinsically liberal, but since capitalism was not a zero-sum game,

they realized that liberalism combined with democracy – liberal democracy – would adequately protect their interests regardless of the fact that it also protected the poor and the middle classes.

In the historical model that I am presenting here, the rich business class chose democracy at first because pressure from the lower classes had increased, but eventually it realized that this was a more effective and stable way to assure law and order, property rights and contracts, than the authoritarian alternative. In endorsing democracy, the rich lost political power, but not much. They knew they could count on conservative and even on social-democratic political parties to protect them since they controlled, or exercised veto power on, investment and economic growth. They kept control of the form of financing electoral campaigns, and of the media. They compromised on political power but not on liberal political values and principles: they made sure that the protection of minority and civil rights remained core elements in each national constitution.

This historical model of democratic transition and consolidation makes sense on two conditions: first, the understanding on the part of workers that a socialist revolution was not rational; second, that a satisfactory long-term rate of profit was assured to capitalists. Adam Przeworski (1985: 139, 177, 180) argues persuasively for the workers' rationality in refusing to support a socialist revolution. According to him, workers in advanced democracies had strong motives to feel no attraction for a revolution expropriating the rich; if workers had the right to vote, they would rationally vote for socialist political parties committed to the socialist revolution. Yet they do not, because, on one hand, as long as capitalists control investments, they "are in a unique position in the capitalist system: they represent the future universal interests while interests of all other groups appear as particularistic and hence inimical to future developments". On the other hand, according to Przeworski, workers did not have the assurance that moving to socialism would immediately improve their material conditions. On the contrary, they are not certain that socialism is more efficient than capitalism and, even if it is, the transition to socialism may involve a deterioration of workers' welfare. Thus, he concludes, since "workers have the option of improving their material condition by cooperating with capitalists, the socialist orientation cannot be deduced from the material interests of workers".

The second condition – that capitalist development keeps the rate of profit at a satisfactory, or, in Herbert Simons' (1957) words, at a satisfying long-run level – is an empirical fact. After the industrial revolution, the rate of profit did not fall as predicted by the classical economists but kept reasonably constant at a satisfactory level from the point of view of investing entrepreneurs. On the theoretical level, Bresser-Pereira (1986; 2004), in his model of growth and distribution, argued that contrarily to the classical economic theory the rate of profit, not the wage rate, should be viewed as given or constant in the long-term growth process, while wages should be seen as the residuum. Proceeding from the inversion of the classical distribution model, he showed that wages increase at a smaller, equal, or higher rate than productivity depending on the type of technical progress: capital using, neutral, or capital saving. Why is the rate of profit constant in the long term? Essentially because, on the one hand, a satisfactory rate of profit – that which keeps

entrepreneurs innovating and investing – is a condition for capitalist development, and because, on the other, given capitalism’s capacity to innovate and increase productivity, there is no alternative form of economic organization to capitalism.<sup>9</sup> Thus, workers’ wage increases depend on a satisfactory profit rate. In other words, the “countertendencies to the fall of the rate of profit” referred by Marx had to prevail: capitalist societies develop technologies, institutions, and ideologies that assure a satisfactory rate of profit. As wages and salaries increase at the same time as productivity rises, the profit rate is kept constant in the long run – which means that the game between the rich and the poor was not a win-loss but a win-win game that makes democracy much less threatening than was initially thought.

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

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

Thus, gradually, all major political actors realized that democracy was the form of government that was most favorable to business as well as to the workers. The times when greedy and turbulent factions, referred to by the Greek philosophers, plagued democracy

were over. For a long time, democracies that followed the steps discussed here would confront crises and unrest, but they embodied a sizable relative increase in political stability. Workers, capitalists, and the middle classes informally signed a new social or political contract. The fight for justice, the condemnation of corruption and privilege, and the possibility of constructing more efficient and more just models of capitalism continue to be major political tasks, but democracy has become established as the universally preferred form of conducting such republican efforts.

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

### **Predicting democratic transition**

The capitalist revolution model here presented is useful for predicting the overall transition to democracy, but when individual cases are examined, there are many exceptions. As Ruth Collier (1999: 20) argues, many are the paths to democracy, "in most cases the politics of democratization is a combination of processes from above and below, involving combinations of class interests, strategic actors, and forms, sites, or arenas of action". Additionally, foreign influence may lead to democratic transitions that otherwise would not

occur (consider Haiti, for instance), or, on the opposite side, successful authoritarian rulers may stay in government much beyond what the evolution of economic and social variables would lead us to predict, as in the case of Singapore. Today there is a large number of countries that, not having completed their capitalist revolution, are still democratic – either because of foreign pressure, or/and because nationals also don't see better alternative.

Robert Dahl (1989) writes of three periods of polyarchy growth: 1776-1930, 1950-59, and the 1980s. Samuel Huntington (1991), probably inspired by this, identifies three waves of democratization. In each wave, countries that had become capitalist and liberal made their transition to democracy as predicted, while others just followed as a result of imitation, pressure from the poor, or pressure from other countries. At the end of the twentieth century, besides most of the English-speaking and European countries, all Latin American countries and an increasing number of countries in the other continents were democratic. Democracy had become widespread – the dominant form of government. In the Asian countries, which have been undergoing an extraordinary process of economic growth since the 1950s, bureaucratic and capitalist elites resist democracy, but, in the last decade, democratic transitions have become a reality.

In the case of democratic transitions, we have many cases of countries that turned democratic before the capitalist revolution could be seen as completed, and a few countries that only made their transition late, long after having developed an entrepreneurial and a large middle class. And some continue authoritarian, as in the case of Singapore.

The model presented in this paper aims to offer a general explanation of democratic transition and consolidation based on the assumption that the same theory should explain both phenomena, but is on firmer ground on the second than on the first. Historically, a full change from state to market appropriation of the economic surplus is a necessary and sufficient condition for democratic consolidation, not democratic transition. No country experienced democratic consolidation before having changed the coordination of the economy from the state to the market, and reduced substantially the patrimonial aspects of its state, but the same cannot be said in relation to democratic transitions. Many countries make their transitions to democracy while the capture of the state by private interests remains crucial to elites; the resulting democracy, however, is unstable.

### **Predicting democratic consolidation**

Thus, the capitalist revolution model here presented is effective in predicting that an increasing number of countries will turn democratic as they grow and complete their capitalist revolutions, but fails to be a secure case by case predictor of democratic transitions. In the case, however, of democratic consolidation, the model is strong also on a country by country basis. After a country that has the necessary conditions for democracy undergoes democratic transition, its democracy is consolidated: the probability that it will

fall back in authoritarian rule turns vanishingly small. Probably the most extraordinary case of a consolidated democracy established in a country where the conditions for it were not clearly present is India. Probably enlightened leaders like Gandhi and Nehru played a major role in it, but when the transition took place there was already a large capitalist class in India. On the other hand, the tragic failure of the Weimar democracy in Germany is an exception to our rule, but we must consider that the transition to democracy in this country happened just after World War I, in a situation of hyperinflation and deep resentment toward the defeat and the harsh conditions imposed by the victors. Besides this case, I do not see exceptions to the rule here proposed. The fallback to authoritarian rule of countries like Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland after World War II cannot be viewed as an exception given the presence of imperial domination by Soviet Union. On the other hand, although statism in these countries was intended to be a means to socialism, eventually, it was a path to industrialization and capitalism. When these countries made in 1989 their sudden transition from statism to capitalism happened, paradoxically, most of the capitalist revolution had already taken place under communism.

Juan Linz (1990: 156) classically defined democratic consolidation as a state of affairs “in which none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces, or institutions consider that there is any alternative to democratic process to gain power, and... no political institution or group has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers”. Yet, theories on democratic consolidation usually just list the characteristics that are common to consolidated democracies, instead of explaining democratic consolidation. In relation to democratic consolidation, we find the same theoretical dividing line between the historical or socio-economic approach and the processes and leadership approach that exists in the discussion of democratic transitions. This fact is partially related to the approach adopted. Scott Mainwaring (1992: 327) notes that “the most important dividing line in contemporary work on democracy is between those who see it primarily as a result of propitious economic, social, or cultural conditions and those who see it primarily as a result of political institutions, processes, and leadership”. Radical manifestations of the later current turn democratic consolidations void of historical content. Larry Diamond (1997: xxxii), for instance, asserts that “the opportunity for democratic development and consolidation is not ruled out for any country, however poor”. Other researchers have offered some valuable contributions, but they have been more successful in defining a consolidated democracy than in explaining why it becomes consolidated. Philippe Schmitter (1997: 247) stresses that “the presence of civil society contributes (positively) to the consolidation of democracy” – which is true but fails to explain what the historical conditions are that make room for a lively and robust civil society. John Carey (1997: 68) tries to show “why institutional analysis is of particular importance to the consolidation of democracies”. In fact, consolidated democracies usually have strong democratic institutions, as they also have a reasonably democratic culture, but these assertions just define or characterize consolidation, they do not explain it.

Adopting a more fruitful historical or socio-economic approach, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996: 55) tried to encompass all forms of transitions and consolidations with the help of four types of non-democratic regime whose characteristics would influence

decisively the transition and consolidation paths. From that, they described the typical institutional, cultural, and economic framework existing just before transition in one of the four types of non-democratic regime, namely, the authoritarian: “a robust civil society, a legal culture supportive of constitutionalism and the rule-of-law, a usable state bureaucracy that operates within professional norms, and a reasonably well-institutionalized economic society.” According to them, Spain, for example, presented such conditions in the early 1970s. The two authors do not refer to capitalist revolution, but their view is consistent with the one I am proposing here since no country that did not undergo a capitalist revolution will have such characteristics. On the other hand, a country coming from another of the four types, like Haiti and “sultanism”, may experience transition, but these conditions will not be in place and democracy will be eminently unstable. Actually, besides income per capita, the characteristics that Linz and Stepan listed are a good way to evaluate whether a country has completed its capitalist revolution. In relation to the Brazilian democratic transition, Francisco Weffort (1984) argued that it turned conservative as the process eventually came under the control of the business industrial class. This indeed happened (Bresser-Pereira, 1978, 1984), and is part of the explanation why the Brazilian democracy is a consolidated democracy. Scott Mainwaring (2000), looking for the causes of the increased survivability of democracies in Latin America, sees three factors explaining it: “the first explanation evolves around the structural transformations unleashed by modernization... second, from left to right of the spectrum, political attitudes changed... Finally, international support for democracy, especially from the United States, increased...” This is also a historical approach to democratic consolidation consistent with the view presented here.

In the growing literature on democratic transition, Gerard Alexander’s (2002: 57) contribution is particularly relevant. He is able to present a broad picture of the consolidation process. Yet he fails to offer a solution to the very problem that he defines as central: “what leads the right to expect its well-being and safety to be predictably better secured in democracy than under authoritarian rule?” The question is in agreement with the model presented in this paper, because it locates the problems in the preferences of the rich or of the capitalist class toward democracy, and because Alexander shows that this class may rationally change its preferences as new factors emerge. As it happened in Brazil, in the early 1960s democracy was not rational for the business class, whereas it became rational – more able to meet that class’s need for economic well-being and security – after the late 1970s. Yet, as he does not adopt an historical approach, Alexander does not have an answer to the question he correctly poses. Alexander (2002: 66-67) practically admits the limits of his method when he asks on what conditions will political actors make the forecast that the expected payoffs from democracy are predictably higher than those from authoritarianism, and he responds: “posing that question is as far as rational choice principles can take us.” Several factors reduce the right’s expected payoff from authoritarian projects, “but they can do so only on a basis actors perceive as temporary, and therefore they can induce *provisional* support for democracy. But they cannot influence expected payoffs in ways actors perceive as predictable and therefore cannot create commitment to democracy or democratic consolidation”. Since he started from correct assumptions and posed an excellent question, if he had adopted an historical approach he probably would have been more conclusive. He almost does that, as he underlines the role of structural factors in democratic transition and

consolidation, but he eventually fails to identify them. He asserts that “European conservatives found democracy predictability more attractive only when they believed a change in a ‘structural’ factor had taken place”. Which is this structural factor? It happened, according to Alexander, “when they [the European conservatives] believed that the left became predictably and not merely tactically moderate”. This fact corresponds more or less to the second historical condition that I advanced in this paper for democratic consolidation: the loss of fear of expropriation on the part of the rich. It does not explain, however, why the capitalist class could change its view on the behavior of the left or of the workers, while the previous ruling classes could not.

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

One can say that the hypothesis here developed is not empirically falseable due to the difficulty of defining the moment in which a country completed its capitalist revolution. Yet, I believe that there is already sufficient evidence that this claim is true. Historical experience abundantly shows that, after a country completes its capitalist revolution, it will tend to become democratic; subsequently, when it becomes democratic, its democracy will be consolidated. But, besides this general historical experience, would we dispose of some stronger evidence that a country that completed the historical requirements for democracy, and democratized, will not fall back into authoritarianism? This is an interpretative paper using a broad brush to identify a common long-term trajectory. I have not carried out new research on the subject. The evidence already available, however, strongly supports the hypothesis presented here on the consolidation of democracy. The entire literature linking democracy with economic development actually supports it. After the classic paper by Lipset, all the research confirmed the basic finding. If are the more economically advanced a nation-state that have for longer democracy as their political regime, this means the more developed economically is a country, the more consolidated will be its democracy.

The research by Adam Przeworski and associates’ (2000) on economic development and democracy offers a definitive substantiation for the strong relation between capitalist revolution and democratic consolidation. In their study of democracy for the period 1950-1990, they concluded that there is no relationship between levels of economic development and transitions to democracy. The claim is radical, but concurs with the caveat that I have already made, namely, that in predicting democratic transitions the completion of the capitalist revolution faces many exceptions deriving from earlier transitions. Yet, from their research we can infer that democratic consolidation is strongly associated with economic development. Besides showing the positive relation between economic development and

democratic consolidation, they claim, based solidly on their data that “where they are established, democracies are much more likely to endure in more highly developed countries”: in rich democracies (above US\$6,000.00 per capita, per annum) they conclude that the probability that the regime will fall back into dictatorship is practically zero. If we accept that the assumption that non-oil exporting countries with per capita incomes above US\$6,000.00 per annum have completed their capitalist revolution (a reasonable or conservative one), it follows that the completion of the modernization process implies democratic consolidation. As I have already acknowledged, there may be a few exceptions to this rule, but Przeworski and associates did not find any.

## **Conclusion**

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

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

What is the relevance of the theory presented in this paper? First, it permits us to better understand the past. With it, we understand why democracy became the preferred and widespread form of government only in the twentieth century. Second, we understand why democracy was consolidated initially in the countries that first underwent capitalist revolutions, i.e., England, France and the United States. Third, we have now a criterion by

which to predict whether a country making its transition to democracy will end up with a consolidated democracy. If it emerges endogenously, as an outcome of the capitalist revolution and the overcoming of the fear of expropriation, it will be consolidated, whereas if it is the outcome of external pressure or of the attempt by local elites to imitate the institutions of the more advanced societies, it will not be.

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<sup>1</sup> I used this approach originally in 1978 to analyze and predict the Brazilian transition to democracy that would occur eight years later. I assumed that Brazil had already completed its capitalist revolution. Yet, due to the 1959 Cuban revolution, and the political radicalization that followed, the Brazilian bourgeoisie opted, in 1964, for an authoritarian regime. Thirteen years later, however, this fear had disappeared, and the capitalist class gradually joined forces with the other sources of democratic pressure (Bresser-Pereira, 1978; 1984).

<sup>2</sup> For a recent survey on transitions to democracy from a rational choice standpoint, see Barbara Geddes (2007).

<sup>3</sup> But note that, although I believe that Dahl's distinction between modern democracy and polyarchy is useful in certain circumstances to distinguish an ideal form of government from reality, and also from Greek democracy, in this paper I use 'modern democracy' or just 'democracy' and 'polyarchy' as synonyms.

<sup>4</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell (2004) wrote an encompassing essay on the quality of democracy.

<sup>5</sup> The first task – to derive from the capitalist revolution the nation-state – was principally done by Charles Tilly (1975, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> According to Montesquieu (1748: 609) 'où il y a du commerce, il y a de mœurs doux' ('wherever there is commerce, manners are soft').

<sup>7</sup> For the classical philosophers the main reason why they view negatively democracy was the fact that this political regime was unstable and, so, inclined to demagoguery.

<sup>8</sup> In the United States, universal manhood suffrage had existed since the first part of the nineteenth century, probably because the Americans were the first to shake off the fear of expropriation.

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<sup>9</sup> For some time socialism was thought to be this alternative, but it changed into statism because bureaucrats, not workers, replaced capitalists, and statism, after succeeding in causing initial growth, failed to coordinate more complex economic systems and to make them competitive.