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Introduction: Puzzling Trends in Waves of Contention

Political regime changes and conflicts over such transitions often occur in clusters and advance like waves. As one country transforms its constitutional framework, discontented actors in other countries take inspiration from this precedent and start to undertake similar efforts. The frontrunner's success encourages them to challenge their own rulers and push for transforming the way in which political authority is exercised. As a result of such demonstration effects, regime contention frequently snowballs and sometimes triggers avalanches (Markoff 1996; Berg-Schlosser 2009; Hale 2013). For instance, the French revolutions of 1830 and especially 1848 set in motion dramatic diffusion processes; within one month of "Citizen King" Louis Philippe's overthrow in February 1848, half of Europe stood aflame, engulfed by protests and rebellions against autocratic princes (Sperber 1994; Dowe et al. 2001). The Russian revolutions of 1917 also spurred contention and regime change throughout Central and Eastern Europe from 1917 to 1919, and the "third wave of democratization" that started in Southern Europe in 1974 rippled across the world during the subsequent two decades (Huntington 1991; Kurzman 1998; Markoff 2009; Lehoucq 2011; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán forthcoming).

These waves of regime contention have had divergent characteristics, however. The differences in timing are particularly striking. Regime conflict during the third wave unfolded over the course of two decades (1974 to early 1990s), whereas the 1848 revolution spread explosively within days (Traugott 2010: 131–42): Louis Philippe's downfall on February 24 triggered mobilization and protests in Baden on February 27 (Real 1983: 47–50), Stuttgart on March 3, Munich on March 6–7, Vienna on March 13–15, Berlin on March 18–19, and Copenhagen on March 20–21. Beginning in April, it also had repercussions in faraway Brazil (Quintas 2004: 67–95), Colombia (Posada-Carbó 2002: 224–40), Chile (Collier 2003: 79, 84–92; Wood 2011: 158–64, 193–202), and even the United States, where it helped set the context for the July 1848 Seneca

Falls Convention for women's rights (Howe 2007: 846–47; broad overviews in Dowe et al. 2001 and Thomson 2002; see also Hobsbawm 1996a: 10–11). Thus, contention spread almost as fast as news of the Paris events traveled before television and cell phones. Rebellion also proved quickly contagious in 1830, when the French king's overthrow in July triggered protests and uprisings in Belgium, the Prussian Rhineland, Brunswick, and Southern England in August, Berlin and some German middle states such as Saxony in September, Switzerland in October, and Poland in November (Church 1983). In November, the Parisian July Revolution also gave an impulse to the English movement for electoral reform, contributing to the suffrage extension of 1832 (Ertman 2010: 1007, 1009).

In the twentieth century, by contrast, regime contention in Europe and Latin America spread much more slowly. The wave of rebellions inspired by the Russian revolutions of 1917 got under way only in late 1918 and early 1919, more than a year after the triggering events. The third wave of democratization advanced at an even more leisurely pace. In South America, for instance, regime contention erupted two to three years after the Mediterranean precedents in Peru in 1977, then in Bolivia in 1978 and again in 1982, in Argentina in 1982, in Brazil and Chile in 1983, and in Uruguay in 1984. Actual transitions happened in Ecuador in 1979, Peru in 1980, Bolivia in 1982, Argentina in 1983, Uruguay in 1984, Brazil in 1985, Paraguay in 1989, and finally Chile in 1990. Thus, the third wave took more than a decade to unfold in Latin America (Markoff 2009: 58), whereas the 1848 revolutions swept across Europe in less than one month. The data in Tables 1.1–1.4 demonstrate these stark differences in diffusion's speed.[1]

That efforts at regime change in Europe and Latin America diffused more quickly during the nineteenth century than the twentieth is puzzling.[2] Given tremendous advances in communication and transportation, one would expect acceleration. But the fastest diffusion process in the history of democratization occurred early, in 1848.[3]

Speed does not equal success, however. On the contrary, there is an inverse relation between diffusion's speed and its success – defined here as significant, non-fleeting steps toward political liberalism and democracy (specified in greater detail in the concept section in this chapter). In the most dramatic wave, 1848, challenges against rulers spread immediately, but rarely led to significant effective transformations; the only substantial advance toward liberal

[1] These measurements rely on Polity IV because it is the only comprehensive data set that covers the nineteenth century. Certainly, however, Polity IV – like all these kinds of datasets – has serious problems (Munck and Verkuilen 2002; Bowman, Lehoucq, and Mahoney 2005).

[2] An obvious exception is the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, which the concluding chapter discusses in some depth.

[3] Even the wave of regime contention that started to sweep across the Arab world in early 2011 (which is also examined in the Conclusion) did not unfold as rapidly as the day-by-day progression of the tsunami of 1848.

TABLE 1.1 *Speed of Emulative Regime Contention and Change in Polity Scores in Europe, 1847–50*

	Speed in Years	Democracy	Autocracy	Δ Polity Score	Comment
Britain	.1	6–6	3–3	0	
Belgium	.1	2–2	6–6	0	
Netherlands	.1	0–3	7–6	+ 4	
Denmark	.08	0–5	9–3	+ 11	
Norway	.1	0–0	7–7	0	
Sweden	.1	0–0	7–7	0	
Russia	.2	0–0	10–10	0	
Baden	.02	1–0	5–7	−3	
Württemberg	.03	2–2	6–6	0	
Bavaria	.04	0–0	8–7	+1	
Saxony	.05	0–0	9–7	+2	
Prussia	.06	0–0	9–8	+1	
Austria[a]	.05	0–1	10–7	+4	Big overestimation
Hungary[b]	.03	–	–	–	Worsening oppression
Moldavia[b]	.15	–	–	–	No change
Walachia[b]	.15	–	–	–	No change
Papal States	.1	0–0	9–9	0	
Piedmont	.1	0–0	10–7	+3	
Modena	.1	0–0	10–10	0	
Parma	.1	0–0	10–10	0	
Tuscany	.1	0–0	10–10	0	
Average	~ .1			1–1.2	

[a] Progress in Austria is strikingly overrated, e.g., by comparison to Prussia, which kept and applied its royally decreed constitution, whereas Austria never put it in operation and abrogated it quickly.

[b] Not being independent states, Hungary, Moldavia, and Walachia are not covered by Polity IV. But they were important sites of contention in 1848 and are therefore included here based on scholarly analyses, especially Dowe et al. (2001) and Sperber (1994).

democracy resulted from preemptive reforms in Denmark, Piedmont, and – to a lesser extent – the Netherlands. By contrast, twentieth-century challenges spread more slowly, but had a higher rate of success, as evident in Germany's and Austria's democratization and British, Italian, and Swedish suffrage reforms in 1918–19.[4] In Hungary, however, an incipient communist revolution was violently suppressed, ushering in authoritarian rule. There were even more successful regime transitions during the third wave; in South America, democracy prevailed sooner or later, even where authoritarian incumbents

[4] The substantial democratic advances of 1918–19 appear clearly in the statistical analysis of Freeman and Snidal (1982: 320–21, 323, 325) and the comparative-historical investigation of Collier (1999: 35, 77–79).

TABLE 1.2 *Speed of Emulative Regime Contention and Change in Polity Scores in Europe, 1916–19*

	Speed in Years	Democracy	Autocracy	Δ Polity Score	Comment
Belgium[a]	1	8–9	1–0	+2	
Netherlands	~ 1	4–10	6–0	+12	
Sweden[a]	1	9–10	1–0	+2	
Germany[b]	1 – 1.5	5–6	3–0	+4	Big underestimation
Austria	1 – 1.5	1–8	5–0	+12	
Hungary	1	1–1	5–2	+3	Too positive
Britain[a]	1	8–8	0–0	0	Underestimation
Italy	2	3–3	4–4	0	
France[a]	1.5	8–9	0–0	+1	
Average	~ 1.3			+ 4	

[a] Progress in Belgium, Sweden, Britain, and France started from an already high level of "democracy" and low level of "autocracy"; therefore, it was inevitably limited by this ceiling effect, which was not at play in 1848.

[b] Progress in Germany is underestimated greatly. The country instituted a competitive democracy in 1919, so by any reasonable assessment, the change on the democracy score should be much higher than +1.

TABLE 1.3 *Speed of Emulative Regime Contention and Change in Polity Scores in South America, 1974–90*

	Years of Contention	Speed in Years	Democracy	Autocracy	Δ Polity Score	Comment
Argentina	1982–83	6	0–8	8–0	+16	
Bolivia	1977–80	2–4	0–0	7–7	0	First effort
Bolivia	1981–82	5–6	0–8	7–0	+15	Second effort
Brazil	1983–85	8/1 Arg	2–7	5–0	+10	
Chile	1983–85	8/1 Arg	0–0	7–6	+1	First effort
Chile	1986–89	10–13	0–8	6–0	+14	Second effort
Ecuador	1978–79	2–3	0–9	5–0	+14	
Peru	1977–80	1–4	0–7	7–0	+14	
Uruguay	1983–85	8/1 Arg	0–9	7–0	+16	
Average		~ 5			+11	

Note: The average includes both the initial failures and the eventual successes in Bolivia and Chile. "I Arg" in Speed column means one year after the Argentine protests erupting in 1982.

offered stubborn resistance (as in Chile) or where fleeting new dictatorships temporarily interrupted a transition (as in Bolivia).

Thus, as the diffusion of regime contention has diminished in speed, its success rate has increased over the last 200 years in the Western world. In 1848,

TABLE 1.4 *Speed of Emulative Regime Contention and Change in Polity Scores in Europe, 1830–31*

	Speed in Years	Democracy	Autocracy	Δ Polity Score	Comment
Belgium[a]	.1	1–2	7–6	+2	Underestimation
Britain	.2	4–4	6–6	0	Yet 1832 reform
Switzerland[b]	.3	–	–	–	Progress in several cantons
Spain	.6	1–1	7–7	0	
Poland (Russia)	.3	0–0	10–10	0	Worsening oppression
Saxony	.2	0–0	10–7	+3	
Prussia	.2	0–0	10–10	0	
Austria	.2	0–0	10–10	0	
Papal States	.5	0–0	9–9	0	
Piedmont	.5	0–0	10–10	0	
Modena	.5	0–0	10–10	0	
Parma	.5	0–0	10–10	0	
Tuscany	.5	0–0	10–10	0	
Average	~ .4			~ .4	

[a] Progress is underestimated in Belgium, which adopted a liberal constitution that turned into a model for Continental Europe.
[b] Because of its decentralized structure, Switzerland in 1830 is not covered by Polity IV.

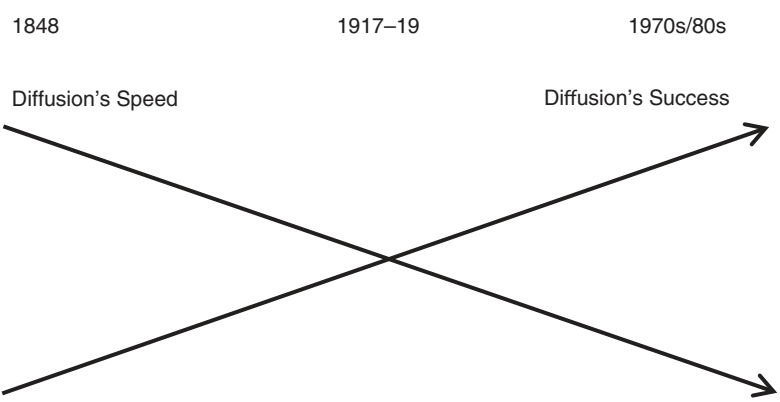

FIGURE 1.1 Negative correlation of diffusion's speed and success.

many dominoes quickly trembled but few were knocked down; in the twentieth century, they did not shake immediately, but then many did fall. The inverse relation between the speed of diffusion and the degree of regime change that it managed to prompt is clear. Figure 1.1 depicts this inverse relationship.

What accounts for these two trends and their negative correlation? My study seeks to answer this puzzling question by comparing the mechanisms that propelled the spread of regime conflict in 1848, 1917 to 1919, and the late 1970s to 1980s in Latin America. Based on a wealth of contemporaneous documents, eyewitness reports, and personal interviews with leading participants in three third-wave cases, the book reconstructs the perceptions, thoughts, and decision making of the protagonists. In this way, it elucidates how and why they took inspiration from foreign precedents; why some actors sought to emulate the triggering event immediately whereas others preferred to wait; and why some succeeded in advancing much farther toward their goals than did others.

With this analysis, the book sheds new light on political processes that have attracted tremendous scholarly attention. Starting in the late 1970s, democratization has arguably been *the* single most-studied topic in comparative politics; thousands of articles and hundreds of books, many written by the leading lights in the field, have investigated all aspects of regime transition and consolidation. Most of these studies have focused on domestic factors, however, following the guidance of seminal early contributions, especially O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 18–19). Only during the last decade have scholars picked up on some early conceptual and theoretical discussions (see especially Huntington 1991: 31–34, 100–06; Kurzman 1998; Whitehead 1986) and conducted systematic empirical studies of external impulses and democratic diffusion. These efforts to capture the wave-like character of regime change have mostly applied statistical techniques to establish that "diffusion is no illusion" (Brinks and Coppedge 2006; see also Wejnert 2005; Gleditsch and Ward 2006; Teorell 2010: 80–89, 99; Torfason and Ingram 2010). Yet whereas these analyses convincingly document powerful demonstration and contagion effects, they do much less to unearth the causal mechanisms that produce these horizontal impulses (Teorell 2010: 11, 15, 99, 155; see also Graham, Shipan, and Volden 2013: 690–96).

The present book attempts to push the democratization and diffusion literature a step forward by investigating the forces that drive the spread of regime contention. What are diffusion's underlying causes and driving mechanisms? Why do political impulses cross borders? In particular, why do discontented sectors in one country infer from a regime change in another nation that they can accomplish the same feat? And how do these causal forces shape the patterns of diffusion, giving rise to the negative correlation between speed and success highlighted in the beginning? By addressing these kinds of questions, the book elaborates the international dimension of regime transitions and helps rectify the imbalance arising from the long-standing emphasis on domestic factors.

This analysis contributes new insights not only to the vast literature on democratization but to the study of modernization and globalization as well. The striking slowdown of diffusion in Europe and Latin America challenges the conventional wisdom, which predicts acceleration, given tremendous advances in communication and transportation and an increasingly dense

web of transnational contacts, links, and networks (e.g., Huntington 1991: 101–02). But contrary to these views, the swiftest diffusion processes occurred early in the history of Western democratization. In fact, as Chapters 3, 4, 6, and 7 show, foreign precedents had a more direct and powerful impact in 1848 than during the third wave.

These counterintuitive findings suggest the need to rethink modernization and globalization and their effects on political change. The conventional image depicts these processes like a stream – a fairly uniform process by which international factors steadily advance, gain greater force, and increasingly reshape domestic structures and processes. But maybe modernization and globalization are more like a tangle of currents and eddies – an ever more complicated intermingling of multiple processes that may flow together, but also interfere with each other (cf. Rosenau 2003: ch. 9)? This growing complexity may blunt globalization's impact and give domestic actors room of maneuver to pick and choose which impulses to act on and which ones to deflect. Rather than overwhelming domestic forces and homogenizing internal structures and processes, modernization and globalization may paradoxically augment the menu of choice and produce growing variety and diversity.

In sum, by shedding new light on the much-discussed processes of democratization, modernization, and globalization, this book holds considerable theoretical and substantive relevance.

THE MAIN ARGUMENT

What explains the surprising slowdown in the spread of political regime contention and the simultaneous increase in its success? This book advances a novel theory that invokes mechanisms of bounded rationality and that – as its main explanatory factor – highlights organizational developments, especially the emergence and spread of mass parties and broad-based interest associations.

Why do people emulate a foreign precedent, such as an autocrat's downfall in a neighboring country, and engage in regime contention in their own polity? My research suggests that this decision is not based on careful, rational cost/benefit calculations that thoroughly process the relevant evidence. Instead, people regularly resort to cognitive shortcuts that draw disproportionate attention to striking, dramatic events, such as the unexpected overthrow of a seemingly powerful prince, and that inspire rash, exaggerated hopes in the replicability of this successful transformation. Specifically, two cognitive shortcuts that people commonly use to cope with complex, uncertain information – the heuristics of availability and representativeness – propel the diffusion of regime contention.

The availability heuristic makes people attach a rationally unjustified degree of significance to particularly vivid, striking, easily accessible events, such as a regime collapse across the border. This inferential shortcut gives a foreign precedent disproportionate weight and impact on their judgments.

The representativeness heuristic, which overrates similarity as a base of judgment and therefore draws excessively firm conclusions from small samples, induces people to conclude from this single case of a regime change in another country that they can accomplish the same feat in their own polity. People thus overestimate the evidentiary value of this foreign success and jump to the conclusion that a challenge to their own government is feasible and promising as well. These facile inferences provide the underlying impetus for regime contention to spread and thus propel waves of democratization.

The heuristics of availability and representativeness are crucial for explaining dramatic yet largely unsuccessful tsunamis of regime contention, as in 1848 (Weyland 2009; see also Weyland 2012a). Applying these cognitive shortcuts, critical masses of people rashly inferred from the overthrow of the French king that they could accomplish a regime change in their own country as well. Therefore, they quickly poured into the streets and started to protest. But their beliefs soon proved wrong and their high hopes turned to frustration. The established authorities in Central and Eastern Europe stood on much firmer ground than did their colleagues in Paris. In particular, they retained command over the forces of organized coercion, which they used to renege on initial concessions, suppress mass mobilization, and tighten the reins of autocratic rule again. In sum, people's heavy reliance on cognitive shortcuts produced quick but unsuccessful diffusion: Haste made waste.

My theory argues that organizational developments account for the subsequent slowdown and increased success of diffusion. Before the secular growth of mass parties and labor unions beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, decisions on whether to challenge established rulers were made by individuals or small, often informal groupings (cf. Rudé 2005: 245–46, 259–68). These people commonly had sparse information, limited processing capacity, and little experience in making political decisions. Therefore, the cognitive heuristics of availability and representativeness held particular sway, triggering a quick, rash spread of contention; yet these ill-conceived challenges frequently failed.

After the emergence of mass organizations, by contrast, common people tended to follow cues from their representative leaders, whose institutional position gave them much better access to information, greater processing capacity, and considerable experience in politics. Leaders were therefore less subject to cognitive heuristics. While also imperfect and distorted by inferential shortcuts, their rationality was less bounded than that of common individuals was. Consequently, leaders did not as easily throw caution to the wind and get carried away by foreign precedents. Instead, they assessed the prevailing opportunities and risks more carefully and led their followers into challenges only where the chances of success seemed reasonable (cf. Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975: 192–97, 212, 227, 237, 254). As a result, regime contention spread more slowly, but was more successful. Because organizational ties extended the bounds of rationality, regime challenges diffused in a less indiscriminate and more realistic way (Weyland 2012b).

As Chapter 5 shows, representative leadership made a crucial difference in the democratization wave that followed upon the emergence of mass organizations and that was triggered by the Russian revolutions of 1917. Interestingly, both the tsar's overthrow in February and the Bolshevist power grab in October stimulated – in line with the heuristics of availability and representativeness – some immediate unrest at the mass level. But party and union leaders, less susceptible to the rash inferences suggested by cognitive shortcuts, did not believe the time was ripe for regime contention in the midst of total war. Therefore, they undertook strenuous efforts to tame this spontaneous unrest. Instead, they proceeded to push for democratization when Austria's and Germany's defeat in World War I opened up a golden opportunity for achieving constitutional change, and these efforts were crowned with success. The experiences of 1917–19 thus show that the emergence of organizational leadership had expanded the bounds of rationality. As a consequence, regime contention spread more slowly than it did in 1848, but attained significantly greater success.

What then explains the further slowdown and even greater success of contention's diffusion during the cluster of Latin American transitions in the 1970s and 1980s? Whereas my theory points to changes on the reception side of diffusion to account for the differences between the first two waves investigated in this book, it highlights the transformation of the stimulus side to explain the distinctive features of the third wave of democratization in Latin America. The precedent that exerted the greatest effect in stimulating emulation efforts was not revolution à la France (1848) and Russia (1917), but rather Spain's negotiated regime change. This pacted transition turned into the main foreign model that Latin American opposition forces sought to imitate. The change in the principal impulse of contagion and demonstration effects, which resulted from the further advance of organizational development, entailed an additional reduction in diffusion's speed, and an even higher rate of actual transitions to democracy.

How did the emergence and proliferation of broad-based organizations reshape the external stimuli that set in motion diffusion processes? Before the rise of mass parties, challengers lacked the capacity to sustain collective action. To effect regime change, they had to rely on crowd protests and "revolutionary" efforts to overwhelm reigning autocrats quickly. This all-or-nothing strategy was highly risky, but when it did achieve success, it served as a dramatic, powerful signal that stimulated a rash of emulation efforts elsewhere. The resulting diffusion waves spread quickly, but brought many failures.

By contrast, after political parties arose and achieved institutional consolidation, opposition forces could apply pressure over the medium and long run. Therefore, they backed away from dangerous crowd assaults and moved instead toward reformist strategies. Once well-organized parties, which had emerged first on the left, spread across the ideological spectrum during the twentieth century, most relevant societal forces acquired political representation. Therefore, they could work out disagreements and conflicts, including

the question of regime change, via negotiation and compromise with the established authorities. Because of their lower costs and risks (compared to "revolutionary" challenges), pacted transitions therefore came to prevail, especially during the third wave of democratization in Europe and Latin America. While more likely to bring success, however, these prudent efforts were sober and unexciting. Therefore, they did not turn into dramatic signals that would have elicited mass enthusiasm and triggered a rash of imitation attempts. But organizational leaders in other polities learned from pacted transitions and looked for the right moment to proceed in similar ways. For these reasons, the impact of advanced organizational development on the stimulus side of diffusion contributed to the deceleration of contentious waves as well as their increasing success.

While the transformation of the reception side of diffusion and the subsequent change on the stimulus side most clearly explain the different features of the three democratization waves under investigation, additional consequences of organizational development contributed to the inverse correlation between the speed and success of contention's diffusion. In this vein, the formation of mass organizations and their spread from the left to the center and right of the political spectrum entailed the crystallization and differentiation of ideological positions. The new parties and unions defined and announced their goals and programs and established relations to foreign organizations of similar orientation. Accordingly, different political forces gravitated toward different foreign precedents and took inspiration from diverse sources. Whereas in 1848 all eyes were directed toward Paris, during the third wave there were various foreign models that appealed to different parties and groupings.

This variety of foreign models helped slow down the eruption and advance of regime contention, because there was no consensus on which path to take. But this diversity also stimulated a process of learning. Opposition forces experimented with a menu of options and – sometimes after considerable trial and error – figured out which strategy held the greatest promise. Whereas in 1848 challengers put all their bets on emulating the Parisian rebellion, opposition forces in the third wave had various irons in the fire. Therefore, they had a higher chance of ending up with the right weapon for dealing authoritarian rule the decisive blow. While it took a while to weed out unpromising alternatives and settle on a predominant strategy, this variety of options increased the likelihood of eventual success.

The emergence of organizations also shifted the balance of political attention from foreign to domestic developments, which helped give the diffusion of political regime contention lower speed but greater success over the course of European and Latin American history. The appearance of mass organizations clarified the political landscape and gave people a much better sense of the domestic constellation of power. Before the rise of political parties and unions, the distribution of political preferences and effective power capabilities was shrouded in fog. In an amorphous polity, it was virtually impossible to