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Where Did the Revolution Go? The Outcomes of Democratization Paths

Where Did the Revolution Go? An Introduction

Where did the revolution go? The main puzzle – revived by the recent events of the so-called Arab Spring – is the apparently sudden disappearance from the political sphere of the large social movements that contributed to episodes of democratization. Media, activists, and scholars have often used terms like Velvet Revolution or Jasmine Revolution – but also Carnation Revolution or Orange Revolution – to describe regime transition involving massive participation from below. However, with the emergence of political liberalization or even the installation of a democratic regime, observers are often surprised to note the sudden emptiness of the once-full streets, and even the rapid loss of influence of the oppositional leaders, once the new regime has been installed. Even more, those who fought for democracy seem quickly disappointed by the results of their own struggles, and choose to exit the movement. But is the disappearance real, or just an optical illusion, given the focus of mass media and scholarship on electoral processes and “normal politics”? Does it always happen, or only under some circumstances? Are those who struggled for big changes bound to be disappointed by the slow pace of transformation? And which mechanisms are activated and deactivated during the rise and fall of episodes of democratization?

These questions – which have rarely been addressed in the social science literature – refer, in their essence, to the effects of transition processes on consolidated democracy. The main theoretical frame of the research presented in this volume builds upon reflections on outcomes in the cognate fields of democratization and social movement studies, although read

through the lens of an approach that aims at reconstructing processes rather than identifying causes. I also bring in studies on revolutions, even if to a more limited extent. I do this because, although it would be inappropriate to define the episodes mentioned above as revolutions, some of them imply sudden breaks through mass mobilizations that can indeed be illuminated by that field of study. I believe, in fact, that there is much to gain in this theoretical endeavor in order to move toward systematic models for understanding social movements' impacts in terms of big transformations. While social movement studies have systematically addressed the crucial issues of their effects at the structural, political, and cultural levels, they have mainly adopted static models, singling out correlations but not causal mechanisms. Moreover, they have focused mainly on incremental changes in "normal" times. In contrast, democratization studies, even if largely overlooking social movements in favor of the elites, have focused on the strategic choices of the different actors, linking them to their preferences and interests. Finally, recent studies of revolutions have contributed to our understanding of moments of (big) changes through attention to the emergence of new actors and to their coalition-building, internal divisions, and dilemmas within a context of rapid transformation.

In combining these literatures, I aim at providing an understanding of the effects of mobilizations for democracy on social movements' actual and potential characteristics – an understanding that is dynamic, recognizing the relational nature of contention; constructed, stating the importance of cognitive assessments of a situation; and emergent, looking at the transformative emotional intensity of some events. My main assumption is that the forms and paths of mobilization during the episodes of mobilization for democracy have an effect on some of the qualities of the ensuing regime. In particular, I expect the participation of social movements in democratization processes to have important consequences in terms of specific civil, political, and social rights – as the call for a break with the past and increased rights for the citizens will be louder than in regime transitions that happen mainly through elite pacts. Episodes of mobilizations for democracy in fact represent critical junctures, which then affect democratic developments toward a higher or lower quality of citizenship rights. This means that even when these movements disappear from the mass-mediated public sphere, and even when they are mourned by their former activists as being in decline, we can still find traces of their effects on the recognition of citizens' rights to protest, the presence of channels of institutional access, and sensitivity to social justice.

This approach implies some caveats vis-à-vis existing literature that aims at explaining democratization and its quality, on the one hand, or rapid, revolutionary changes, on the other. First of all, my aim is not to assess democratic qualities in general – other researchers have already done so, using a variety of qualitative and quantitative techniques. Moreover, I do not aim at providing general explanatory models (parsimonious or otherwise) of the success or failure of democratization processes, with or without mass mobilization, as other literature on democratization does. Admittedly, there are therefore many conditions that affect the quality of democracy that I do not address. Rather, I would aim at singling out some causal mechanisms that, in the cases I studied, intervened on both the evolution of protest waves and their legacies. While democratization studies as well as studies of revolutions tend to neatly distinguish positive cases from negative ones, I address much more fuzzy evolutions. As social movement studies have often suggested, the effects of contentious waves are complex, never fully meeting the aspirations of those who protest, but rarely leaving things unchanged. In addition, while effects can happen at the policy level, they often develop first in terms of culture, evolving in the long term, with jumps and reversals. This is all the more relevant when looking at democratization – an extended process that in other epochs required many steps in a long process, but today is often expected to happen in a few short weeks.

While social movement studies allow for useful reflections on the long-term and complex assessment of movement outcomes, I would also like to go beyond some expectations present in that literature. First and foremost, I will not just look at protest as contributing to explaining policy or cultural changes. Rather, I want to investigate how protest actors – particularly social movements – also develop their own resources in action, not only using previously accumulated resources but also acquiring new ones; and not only exploiting existing opportunities but also opening new windows by breaking former alliances and by challenging the expectations upon which they were based. Protests, particularly the intense moments of mobilization for democracy, are therefore understood as eventful, given their capacity to transform structures through relational, emotional, and cognitive mechanisms (Sewell 1996; della Porta 2013b, 2014a;). As I argued in a previous work (della Porta 2014a), the transformative power of protest can be seen when analyzing episodes of democratization, defined, following Ruth Collier (1999), as moments toward a process of democratization, rather than necessarily bringing about a transition to democracy.

Without assuming that democratization is always produced from below, I have singled out – in the cases I have analyzed and without pretense of being exhaustive – different paths of democratization by looking at the ways in which masses interact with elites, and protest with bargaining. In all of these paths, social movement organizations are considered among the important actors in a complex field: they stage protests that have an impact in steering the change. Their relevance, however, lies in the fluid processes of breaking and recomposing, mobilizing and negotiating (Glenn 2001). In particular, I identified *eventful democratization* as defining cases in which authoritarian regimes break down following – often short but intense – waves of protest. Recognizing the particular power of some transformative events (Sewell 1996), I have addressed them as part of broader mobilization processes, including the multitude of less visible, but still important, protests that surround them (della Porta 2014a). While protests in eventful democratization develop from the interaction between growing resources of contestation and closed opportunities, social movements are not irrelevant players in the other two paths I singled out. First of all, when opportunities open up because of elites' realignment, *participated pacts* might ensue from the encounter of reformers in institutions and moderates among social movement organizations. Although rarely used, protest is also important here, as a resource to threaten on the negotiating table.¹ If participated pacts occur in relatively strong civil society that meets emerging opportunities, more *troubled* democratization paths develop in very repressive regimes that block the development of autonomous associations. In these cases, escalation of violence often follows from the interaction of a suddenly mobilized opposition with a brutal repressive regime. Especially when there are divisions in and defections from security apparatuses, skills and resources for military action fuel coups d'état and civil war dynamics.

Comparing eventful democratization with participated pacts, the claim I discuss in this volume is that the different forms and degrees of participation of social movements during transition, and their positions during the installation of the regime, have an impact on some of the qualities of the ensuing regime. Without taking a deterministic stance, but also without

¹ My typology has some resonance with the classification, widespread in research on democratization, that distinguishes transition by rupture from pacted transition according to continuity among elites. However, my typology has a different focus, being built upon two dimensions that are related with social movement participation: strength of civil society and amount of protest (della Porta 2014a, chap. 1).

decontextualizing agency, I will suggest some specific mechanisms that link protest for democracy to democratic qualities. This will require us to look at the evolution of the waves of protest that accompany episodes of democratization, singling out relational, affective, and cognitive dimensions in the periods before, during, and after regime transition.

I address these tasks via a research project based on a mixed-methods research design, combining in-depth interviews oriented to an oral history of contentious events in transition and post-transition with protest event analysis, as well as extensive use of secondary sources. Within a most-similar research design, I conduct an infra-area comparison of Central Eastern Europe (CEE) (in particular, contrasting Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic [GDR] as cases of eventful democratization, with Poland and Hungary as cases of participated pacts). Additionally, I broaden the scope of the comparison in space and time by looking at two eventful episodes of mobilization for democracy in the Mediterranean and North African region. For this part of the analysis, Tunisia and Egypt will be compared with two purposes in mind. First, looking for similarities within a cross-area, most-different research design, I will examine the extent to which some mechanisms identified in the CEE region are robust enough to travel to the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) area more than twenty years later. Second, a within-area comparison will allow me to shed light on the different outcomes of those mobilizations, with apparently more positive results in terms of citizens' rights in Tunisia than in Egypt.

THE THEORETICAL FRAME: HOW MOBILIZATION FOR DEMOCRACY AFFECTS ITS QUALITIES

How to understand the trajectory and effects of social movements mobilizing for democracy, as they interact with other actors in complex fields? How to make sense, then, of the results of transition paths on the quality of democracy? In addressing these questions, the focus is on the *how* rather than the *why*. In particular, I do not aim at developing a powerful but parsimonious model to explain democratic qualities, as other scholars have done with large numbers of cases and quantitative indicators. Instead, in the search for causal mechanisms that allow understanding how movements for democratization affect the movements to come, I looked for inspiration in three cognate areas of study that have often looked at the same events, but using different analytic lenses: democratization studies, revolution studies, and social movement studies.

Democratization studies have traditionally focused on the successes and failures of attempts to democratize, often searching for scientific law-like statements that might allow identification of the general conditions for democracy. Ever more complex models have been built in an attempt to explain the maximum of variance in the success and failure of democratization attempts. In criticism of a deterministic approach looking for contextual causes, a more strategic orientation looked at the ways in which influential actors played the game of democratization. While social movements and protests tended to be dismissed as of little relevance, or even as dangerous for democracy, the literature on democratization has provided important theoretical and empirical contributions to understanding critical interactions between (mainly elite) actors (for a critical assessment, see Bermeo 1997).

Revolution studies were initially focused on social revolutions, which affected also the political and economic regimes, thereby transforming relations between the state and the market. Distinguishing neatly between successful and failed cases, studies on revolutions – social ones, at least – define them as “basic transformation of a society’s state and class structures,” “accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below” (Skocpol 1979, 4–5). Success is usually understood as “coming to power and holding it long enough to initiate a process of deep structural transformation” (Foran 2005, 5). While a deterministic approach initially dominated here as well, a violent break was also considered as a determinant of change. Broadening the field of studies to include a (somewhat stretched) definition of revolution as nonviolent and nonsocial, scholars of revolution also started to address the strategic choices of various actors, including those who claimed to represent the masses. Even if definitional issues are still debated, studies on revolutions contributed to challenge democratization studies through their attention to the conflictual dynamics before, during, and after revolutions, considered as breaking points.

As mentioned, while both fields of study tend to neatly distinguish successes and failures – positive and negative cases – as their explanandum, social movement studies have looked at the effects of mobilization as more ambivalent, complex, and long term. It has long been common to state that the effects of social movements have rarely been addressed in social movement studies, especially given the difficulty in assessing multi-causal and long-lasting processes. In particular, the recognition that social movements have often utopian aims has made it difficult to find measures of the degree of success. This narrative is, however, less and less apt to

describe a field of research in which outcomes appear more and more as relevant objects of investigation. The very interest in social movements as agents of change has in fact focused attention toward those effects, with much reflection on the possible solutions to methodological challenges. While I built upon these assumptions in the search for the consequences of episodes of mobilization, I also tried to innovate on explanatory approaches that I found either too deterministic or too agency oriented, through an analysis of the more dynamic aspects on the path toward democracy.

In this introductory chapter, I aim at building a theoretical framework that might help readers in understanding the effects of social movements in transition on democratic qualities in consolidation. I attempt to do this by bridging social movement studies with the literatures on democratization and on revolutions, which have indeed looked for the causes of the success and failure of efforts to bring about political and social change. These social science fields have rarely been linked to each other and/or with the social movement theory that, I argue, can provide new lenses to explain how movements' characteristics at the time of transition might affect the qualities of the ensuing democracy and therefore the future dynamics of protest itself. At the same time, looking at the effects of social movements in terms of democratization (or, sometimes, revolutions) can help to enrich social movement studies, which have rarely addressed these types of effects, focusing instead on long-lasting democracies. Following the contentious politics approach, rather than emphasizing structural determinants, I concentrate on the mechanisms that mediate between structures and action (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). I attempt in fact to bring into focus the actors' agency, without losing awareness of the environmental constraints on their desires. In particular, I give leverage to the actors' perceptions, focusing on social movement activists, as I believe they influenced the movements' effects as they intervened between the external reality and the action upon it.

What Do We Want to Understand: Institutional Effects of Democratization Paths

My central assumption is that the role of social movements varies in different paths of transition, with consequences for the democratic qualities of the ensuing regimes (della Porta 2014a). In particular, it might be expected that eventful democratization, through social movement participation, enlarges the range of actors that support the new regimes, while

pacted transitions remain more exclusive toward citizens' demands, focusing instead on elite interests.

In order to look at the effects of social movements' participation in transition on the eventual democratic institutions, we must first conceptualize these effects. The social science literature on democratic quality (or, better, qualities in the plural) has made an important contribution in mapping the specific dimensions on which democracies should be assessed. Summarizing various reflections, Leonardo Morlino (2012, 197–8) distinguished procedural and substantial dimensions. Procedurally, quality of democracy implies rules of law, including the following:

1. Individual security and civil order.
2. Independent judiciary and a modern justice system.
3. Institutional and administrative capacity to formulate, implement and enforce the law.
4. Effective fight against corruption, illegality and abuse of power by state agencies.
5. Security forces that are respectful of citizen rights and are under civilian control.

To these procedural dimensions, Morlino added two substantive ones: freedom (as translated into political and civil rights) and equality (as translated especially into social rights). In particular, political rights encompass the right to vote, to compete for electoral support, and to be elected to public office (*ibid.*, 204). Civil rights encompass

personal liberty, the right to legal defense, the right to privacy, the freedom to choose one's place of residence, freedom of movement and residence, the right to expatriate or emigrate, freedom and secrecy of correspondence, freedom of thought and expression, the right to an education, the right to information and a free press, and the freedoms of assembly, association and organization, including political organizations unrelated to trade unions. (*Ibid.*, 206)

Finally, social rights include

rights associated with employment and connected with how the work is carried out, the right to fair pay and time off, and the right to collective bargaining . . . the right to health or to mental and physical well-being; the right to assistance and social security; the right to work; the right to human dignity; the right to strike; the right to study; the right to healthy surroundings, and, more generally, to the environment and to the protection of the environment; and the right to housing. (*Ibid.*, 206)

We can rephrase these dimensions in terms of sets of citizenship rights. In historical sociology, democracy has been linked to the extension of

citizenship rights, typically broken down into categories of civil, political, and social rights. In Marshall's influential account (1992), civic rights were the first to be achieved, followed by political rights and, with them, the possibility to create pressure for social rights as well. However, more recent analyses have stressed the various possible timings in their development, both for specific social groups and for specific countries (della Porta 2013a). In this sense, they are not necessarily moving in the same direction, as in fact an increase in political rights (and formal democracy) can accompany a decline in social rights. As democratic states do show different achievements on all these sets of rights, an analysis of democratic qualities must first assess and then explain those differences. While various indicators (or proxies) have been chosen (and their own quality discussed) in order to measure democracy, qualitative investigations are also important to complete and understand those data.

Without pretending to assess, let alone explain, all dimensions of democratic quality in all the selected countries, in this work I aim instead at identifying some specific effects that the paths of transition have on the development of the civic, political, and social qualities of the emerging regimes. Following leads from studies of social movements, of revolutions, and of democratization, I want to move, in my argumentation, from structures and strategies to relational dynamics. Charles Tilly has suggested categorizing the scholars working on political violence as *idea* people, who look at ideologies; *behavior* people, who stress human genetic heritage; and *relational* people, who “make transactions among persons and groups much more central than do ideas or behavior people” (2004, 5). So, he continues, relational people focus their attention “on interpersonal processes that promote, inhibit, or channel collective violence and connect it with nonviolent politics” (ibid., 20; see also McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 22–4). This also applies, as I will argue in what follows, to research on contentious politics, more generally, which has considered structures and agency and is now moving toward a more relational perspective – a perspective that is not separate from the first two, but can use some of their insights in order to understand the contextual constraints as well as actors' strategies within relations.

How to Explain: Structural Constraints and Outcomes

For some time, research on democratization, revolutions, and social movements has stressed the structural conditions for their development.

Various approaches have searched for causal explanations, citing socio-economic, cultural, and political conditions.

The literature on democratization has looked at regime consolidation, linking democratic qualities to some of the characteristics of the previous regimes, as well as at the dynamics of transition. In general, it has singled out several favorable or unfavorable conditions, in some cases extending the reflection to conditions of nonconsolidation. If economic and social factors were initially emphasized, researchers tended to add more and more explanatory dimensions. In a broad synthesis of the determinants of democratization, Jan Teorell (2010) suggested that, if economic crises, peaceful protests, media proliferation, neighborhood diffusion, and membership in democratic regional organizations contribute to democratization (and foreign interventions work only sometimes), socioeconomic modernization and economic freedom tend to prevent downturns, while volume of trade is negatively linked to democratization. While modernization helps regimes to survive, economic crises trigger democratization processes as they (and, especially, the connected recessionary policies) divide elites, with ensuing private sector defection as well as mass protests on social issues. Failed democratization has been predicted not only by structural conditions of a socioeconomic nature but also by political factors such as the longevity of statehood or the degree of power of the legislative branch, as reversed liberalization is linked to the intervention of a strong executive. The position of the military is especially relevant. Military dictatorships, multiparty autocracies, military regimes, and single-party regimes have different likelihoods and dynamics of democratization (Bratton and van de Walle 1997). External powers are also seen as acting to facilitate or jeopardize democratization (Fish and Wittenberg 2009). Falling dominos have been singled out, as membership in regional organizations as well as diffusion from neighbors promotes democracy, while foreign intervention is only sometimes effective. Military intervention is also of varying influence. More specifically with reference to 1989, reflections addressed the specific difficulties of double or triple transitions, looking at the complications that emerge when a change in political regime overlaps with one at the socio-economic level and, in some cases, also with transformation in the definition of the nation-state (Linz and Stepan 1996; Offe 1996).

Structural conditions have also been a main focus for the literature on revolutions. Even without referring much to each other, scholars in the fields of democratization and revolution have built mirrored images of what facilitates democratization and what instead supports revolutions, which were initially conceptualized as involving broad and abrupt social