

**Elites and  
Democratic  
Consolidation in**

**LATIN  
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SOUTHERN  
EUROPE**

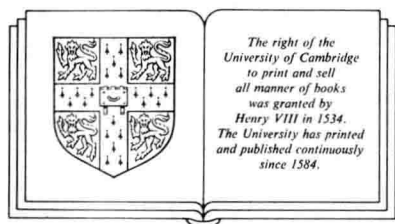
Edited by

**John Higley and Richard Gunther**

# Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe

Edited by

JOHN HIGLEY AND RICHARD GUNTHER



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## Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe

Employing a framework that focuses on the actions and choices of elites in creating consolidated democracies, a distinguished group of scholars examine in this book the recent transitions to democracy and the prospects for democratic stability in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Portugal, Spain, and Uruguay. The role of elites in creating, democratizing, and consolidating the longer-established regimes in Colombia, Costa Rica, Italy, and Venezuela is also assessed, and an analysis of the stable but not very democratic Mexican regime is presented.

Without ignoring the importance of mass publics and institutions, the authors argue that in independent states with long records of political instability and authoritarian rule, democratic consolidation requires consensus on specific democratic institutions and rules of the game, as well as increased integration, among previously hostile elites. Two processes by which this elite configuration can be established are explored in detail: *elite settlements*, in which elites suddenly and deliberately negotiate compromises on their most basic and disruptive disputes, and *elite convergences*, in which a series of tactical decisions by rival elites gradually leads to procedural consensus and increased integration.

This focus on democratic consolidation (rather than on regime transition) and on long-term prospects for stability, as well as the systematic application of a single analytical framework, makes this volume unique in the literature on democratization.

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## Preface

Is another book on democratization really needed? After all, the past five years have seen a flood of writing on the subject, most notably the four volumes edited by Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (1986–7) and the still more comprehensive quartet of volumes put together by Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Democracy in Developing Countries* (1988–91). Drawing on the expertise of more than fifty scholars, containing extensive analyses of at least thirty countries, and totaling more than two thousand pages, these eight volumes – augmented by the overview works of John Herz (1982), Julián Santamaría (1982), Guy Hermet (1983), Martin Needler (1987), James Malloy and Mitchell Seligson (1987), Enrique Baloyra (1987), and Giuseppe Di Palma (1990), not to mention a large number of monographic studies – must surely exhaust the subject for now.

Yes and no. Apart from some updating to cover the most recent events, our factual knowledge cannot be extended significantly by another book dealing with democratic transitions in many of the same countries. Justification for such a volume therefore lies at the theoretical and interpretive level. Here, we believe, there is room for further work.

This book is distinct from the existing literature on democratization, in two ways. First, each of the country studies focuses on factors that contribute to the successful *consolidation* of democratic regimes, rather than the transition to democracy per se. Without this focus, another volume of studies of democratic transitions in Southern Europe and Latin America would indeed be redundant. We already know that transitions to democracy may be triggered by a wide variety of events: popular uprisings (Venezuela), defeat in war (Argentina) or the threat of an impending military catastrophe (Greece), the death of an aging dictator (Spain), coups (Portugal and Paraguay), and even the repercussions of a plebescite gone awry (Chile). We also know that the course of transitions may vary considerably from case to case: protracted negotiations among the relevant elites (Brazil and Spain), elite power struggles in the midst of mass mobilizations and revolutionary turmoil (Portugal), solitary decisions by a prominent individual sud-

denly endowed with emergency powers (Greece), and so forth. And we know that they culminate in regimes that take a variety of institutional forms (see Lijphart, Bruneau, Diamandouros, and Gunther 1988). Unless systematic, cross-national analyses of these transitions are conducted with a specific set of questions in mind, little more can be learned that is of value in building comparative theory.

This volume's second distinctive feature is its single theoretical framework. Each of the case studies applies a common set of concepts dealing with first, the ability of elites to reach agreements that contribute to the consolidation of new democratic regimes and, second, with circumstances that facilitate such agreements. Focusing on the roles played by elites in democratic transitions is, of course, not new. O'Donnell and Schmitter, as well as many of their collaborators, see "elite pacts" as a crucial element in successful transitions from authoritarian rule (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, esp. pp. 37–9). Diamond and Linz write that "the skills, values, strategies, and choices of political leaders figure prominently in our explanation of the enormously varied experiences with democracy in Latin America" (Diamond and Linz 1989, p. 14); and Diamond, separately, writes that "if there is any common thread running through the democratic prospects of all ten of the [Asian] countries we examine . . . it is the crucial importance of effective and democratically committed leadership" (Diamond 1989, p. 49). Moreover, many scholars have contended that a disposition toward compromise, flexibility, tolerance, conciliation, moderation, and restraint among elites is a *sine qua non* of consolidated democracy (Field and Higley 1980; Prewitt and Stone 1973; Putnam 1976). For a democratic system to persist and flourish, elites must engage in "politics-as-bargaining" rather than "politics-as-war" (Sartori 1987, pp. 224–6).

But even though there is broad agreement about this elite precondition for consolidated democracy, there is no similar agreement about how it is created and how it is sustained. The former question goes to the heart of the debate about transitions to democracy; the latter concerns the structure and functioning of elites and their relations with mass publics in consolidated democracies. Do these elite dispositions result from a protodemocratic political culture, from a high level of socioeconomic development, from particular historical experiences, or from particular political and constitutional structures? Do they occur only where ethnic, racial, regional, religious, and other mass cleavages are relatively manageable? Or where mass publics are not divided sharply into antagonistic classes and where inequalities are not excessive? And how are elite dispositions affected by inter-



national forces or by specially gifted and charismatic individual leaders?

This volume grapples with these and related questions in the context of recent Latin American and Southern European politics. We advance and explore distinctive explanations for the occurrence and nonoccurrence of democratic consolidation in these countries. We contend that in independent states with long records of political instability and authoritarian rule, distinctive *elite transformations*, carried out by the elites themselves, constitute the main and possibly the only route to democratic consolidation. For consolidation to occur, we argue, elites that had previously been "disunified" must become "consensually unified" in regard to the basic procedures and norms by which politics will henceforth be played.

Such elite transformations from disunity to consensual unity take place in two principal ways. One is through *elite settlements*, in which previously disunified and warring elites suddenly and deliberately reorganize their relations by negotiating compromises on their most basic disagreements, thereby achieving consensual unity and laying the basis for a stable democratic regime. The Glorious Revolution of 1688–9 in England and the constitutional settlement of 1809 in Sweden are striking historical examples of elite settlements that thoroughly transformed politics, created political stability, and allowed a gradual, peaceful evolution to democracy.

Some of the chapters in this book explore the idea that similar elite settlements occurred in 1929 in Mexico, in 1948 in Costa Rica, in 1957–8 in Colombia and Venezuela, and in 1977–9 in Spain, all of which have since had stable political regimes that have, at varying speeds and under varying circumstances, established or moved toward democracy. Additional chapters examine a number of other countries in which elite settlements have been attempted and in which they may even have succeeded: Uruguay, Portugal, Chile, and the Dominican Republic. Why elites in Argentina, Brazil, and Peru have been unable to engineer settlements and the prospects for such agreements in the future are subjects of still other chapters. Finally, we address the question of whether elite settlements and the elite consensual unity that they produced may today be breaking down in Colombia, Mexico, and several other countries.

The other principal route to the consolidation of democracy in already-independent countries is through *elite convergence*. Less sudden than an elite settlement, this process is a series of deliberate, tactical decisions by rival elites that have the cumulative effect, over perhaps a generation, of creating elite consensual unity, thereby laying the

basis for consolidated democracy. Two fairly distinct steps in an elite convergence can be discerned. In the first step, some of the warring factions in a disunified national elite enter into sustained, peaceful collaboration in order to mobilize a reliable electoral majority, win elections repeatedly, and thereby dominate government executive power. In the second step, the major elite factions opposing this coalition eventually tire of continuous government by their ideological and programmatic opponents; they conclude that there is no way to challenge their rivals' hegemonic position except to beat them at their own game (i.e., by forming an opposition electoral coalition and abandoning their challenge to the political regime itself). Thus, they decide to compete according to the regime's rules of the game, implicitly or explicitly acknowledging the legitimacy of its institutions. Typically, this is accompanied or followed by a reduction of ideological and programmatic polarization in the party system. Once this second step is taken, a unified elite is created and a consolidated democracy rapidly emerges.

France during the Fifth Republic is a good example of an elite convergence, and we survey this process as it evolved between 1960 and 1986 in Chapter 1. Several subsequent chapters consider the possibility that elite convergences have occurred or are real prospects in Latin America and Southern Europe. In Southern Europe, patterns of elite interaction during the past fifteen to twenty years in Italy and Portugal accord with the convergence process, although the possibility that elite settlements have occurred, or at least have been attempted, in those countries is also entertained. In Latin America, there are grounds for thinking that Uruguayan elites have recently converged and that Peruvian elites may be in the early stages of convergence, despite the dire economic circumstances and political violence confronting Peru. The prospects for elite convergences in Argentina and Brazil are also explored.

By elaborating this elite-centered explanation for the origin of consolidated democracies and by seeing how it fits with their presence or absence in a dozen countries, our aim is to give a sharper focus to the broad shift toward "political" variables in the current discussion of democratic consolidation. In the first chapter, we lay out the essentials of our approach, concentrating on definitions, the relationship between elites and democratic regimes, empirical indicators, and the nature of elite settlements and convergences. We also describe the ways in which elite settlements and convergences contribute to the consolidation of new democratic regimes, and we identify historical, organizational, and social-structural factors that facilitate or impede settlements and convergences in countries undergoing dem-

ocratic transitions. Later chapters examine these concepts and processes in light of the relevant historical records and current political situations of the principal Latin American and Southern European countries. The final chapter takes stock of our effort and reviews those factors facilitating democratic consolidation by means of elite transformations.

This volume is based on many independent research projects over the past two decades. Collaboration among the volume's contributors stems most directly from a 1987 article by Michael Burton and John Higley entitled "Elite Settlements." In response to this article, Richard N. Adams, director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, asked Higley to organize a working group to study elite settlements and democracy in Latin America. With funds provided by the institute and by Robert D. King, dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Austin, a series of meetings were convened in Austin between May 1987 and December 1988, at which these concepts were discussed and tentatively applied to democratic transition processes in a variety of settings. A second paper by Higley and Burton, "The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns," published in 1989, further developed the theoretical perspective. Meanwhile, Richard Gunther had developed an analysis of the transition to democracy in Spain along highly similar theoretical lines. As a National Fellow at the Hoover Institution during a sabbatical year, 1986-7, he was attempting to test various aspects of "the Spanish model" in several Southern European and Latin American settings. In response to an invitation to join the Austin group, it was quickly decided to merge the two efforts. From early in 1988, Higley and Gunther worked jointly and equally to lead the project to completion. Grants from the Tinker Foundation and from the Program for Cultural Cooperation Between Spain's Ministry of Culture and U.S. Universities, together with further assistance from the Institute of Latin American Studies, made possible a final meeting of the group at Lake Atitlán in Guatemala during March 1990. The editors wish to thank these individuals and institutions for their generous support.

We also want to thank a number of scholars who attended the group's meetings and made many valuable suggestions: Arturo Arias, John Booth, Paul Cammack, Michael Conroy, Rodolfo de la Garza, Joe Foweraker, Renee Gannon, Luis Javier Garrido, Richard Graham, Jonathan Hartlyn, Kenneth Maxwell, Luis Milliones, Bryan Roberts, Enrique Semo, Sam Stone, and Torcuato Di Tella. Valuable comments and criticisms were also made by Felipe Agüero, Larry Diamond,

Juan Linz, Anthony Mughan, Kevin O'Brien, Bradley Richardson, and Goldie Shabad, for which we are grateful. Shirley Burleson, a staff member of the Institute of Latin American Studies, helped greatly with the organizational nuts and bolts.

This volume is dedicated to two colleagues and friends. The first is Charles Gillespie, who worked heroically to finish his fine contribution to the volume within weeks of his tragic death in early 1991. One of the most promising Latin Americanists to emerge in recent years, Charlie is sorely missed by all. The other colleague and friend is Richard N. Adams, who initiated our project and supported it over a four-year period. The volume coincides with Rick's retirement after many years of distinguished scholarship on Latin America and on the theory of societal evolution. The editors and authors will be pleased if the volume is seen as a salute to the lasting contributions that Charlie Gillespie and Rick Adams have made.

John Higley and Richard Gunther  
July 1991

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## Introduction: elite transformations and democratic regimes

MICHAEL BURTON, RICHARD GUNTHER, AND  
JOHN HIGLEY

For all the meanings that "democracy" has acquired, there is broad scholarly agreement that it can best be defined and applied in terms of the procedural criteria that Robert Dahl (1971) has specified: a political regime characterized by free and open elections, with relatively low barriers to participation, genuine political competition, and wide protection of civil liberties. Elaborating Dahl's definition, Juan Linz writes that a political system can be regarded as democratic

when it allows the free formulation of political preferences, through the use of basic freedoms of association, information, and communication, for the purpose of free competition between leaders to validate at regular intervals by non-violent means their claim to rule, . . . without excluding any effective political office from that competition or prohibiting any members of the political community from expressing their preference. (Linz 1975, pp. 182-3)

This procedural conception of democracy is a demanding "ideal type." All of its criteria must be approximated closely before a regime can be called "democratic." Obviously, no real-world regime fits the ideal type perfectly; indeed, many regimes that hold regular elections fall far short. Some regimes tie voting rights to stringent property qualifications, as in most Western countries during the nineteenth century. Some deny the suffrage to whole ethnic categories, as in South Africa or the American South until quite recently. Some outlaw parties that espouse radical ideologies and programs, as has happened to Communist parties in a number of countries. Others marshal majority support for governing parties through corrupt and coercive practices, as the Mexican regime has done for decades. Some regimes sharply limit the effects of democratic procedures by reserving powerful government posts for individuals or bodies that are neither directly nor indirectly responsible to the electorate (e.g., the Portuguese Council of the Revolution between 1976 and 1982). Thus, conceiving

of democracy in procedural terms does not lead to a simple distinction between democratic and undemocratic regimes. Between these two poles lie a variety of systems that we will refer to as "limited" and "pseudo" democracies. We can distinguish the more fully democratic regimes from these semidemocratic systems insofar as the former effectively recruit governing elites through free and fair competition among all parties that want to participate – in conformity with democratic rules of the game but irrespective of other aspects of their ideologies or programmatic preferences – and through widespread and unhindered mass participation based on universal suffrage.

The principal alternative to procedural conceptions of democracy is a substantive conception that equates democracy with greater equality in the distribution of national wealth and with "social justice." We have rejected this alternative, for several reasons. First, democracy and economic equality are distinct concepts. For example, under the now-defunct Communist regime of the German Democratic Republic, the distribution of national wealth was more equal than in most Western democracies, and the official ideology endorsed social justice as a main goal, yet the GDR was clearly not democratic. Second, the most common reason for rejecting a procedural conception of democracy (particularly among Latin Americanists) is that democracy is too often little more than a facade behind which a privileged economic elite dominates and exploits the popular classes – through intimidation, electoral corruption, the passivity of unmobilized population sectors, or the outright exclusion of certain political options. But our use of a demanding ideal–typical procedural conception of democracy enables us to deal with such undemocratic practices by classifying the regimes that perpetrate them as limited or pseudo-democracies. Finally, more analytic leverage can be gained by keeping separate the concepts of democracy and economic equality, as one may be temporally and perhaps causally prior to the other. Our rejection of a substantive conception of democracy does not in any way mean that we deny the importance of economic and other equalities (particularly in areas like Latin America, where inequalities are often extreme). We simply think that the concepts of democracy and economic equality are best kept analytically distinct.

This volume is concerned with more than the creation of democratic regimes; it is especially concerned with their stability and prospects for long-term survival. Maintaining stability is often a complex and demanding task in democracies, for by their very nature, they involve the open expression of conflict. Democratic stability requires a careful balance between conflict and consensus. The failure of a democracy to achieve or maintain this balance is manifested in at least three ways



(see Gunther and Mughan 1991). The first is a deliberate stifling of democracy through de facto or de jure denial of civil and political rights (preventing significant groups from participating in politics) or through electoral corruption that effectively negates the preferences of a majority of voters, enabling a dominant elite to govern unchecked by electoral accountability. Second, democratic regimes may be unable to keep the expression of conflict within nonviolent bounds. Thus, the occurrence of frequent and widespread political violence is evidence of instability. Finally, efforts to topple the regime itself, through organized coups or mass rebellions, clearly manifest the collapse of democratic stability. Conversely, in stable democracies, civil and political rights are respected; large-scale mass violence does not occur; and coups or other forcible power seizures are essentially unthinkable (Powell 1982; see also Sanders 1981).

During this century, many democratic regimes have come into existence in Latin America, Europe, and elsewhere in which free elections were held, barriers to participation were low, there was meaningful party competition, and civil liberties were not trampled upon. Yet, most of these democratic regimes were either terminated by coups and other violent events, or they gradually gave way to single-party authoritarian regimes. Clearly, a transition to procedural democracy does not guarantee democratic stability. It is necessary to examine both the ways in which democracies are created and the reasons that they do and do not survive.

A key to the stability and survival of democratic regimes is, in our view, the establishment of substantial consensus among elites concerning rules of the democratic political game and the worth of democratic institutions. In Giovanni Sartori's formulation, democratic stability requires that elites perceive politics as "bargaining" rather than "war" and that they see political outcomes as positive- not zero sum (Sartori 1987, pp. 224-6). We regard the establishment of this elite procedural consensus and outlook as the central element in the consolidation of new democratic regimes. By taking the concept of democratic consolidation as our point of departure, we can usefully distinguish several types of democratic regimes.

### Consolidated and other democratic regimes

As we define it, a consolidated democracy is a regime that meets all the procedural criteria of democracy and also in which all politically significant groups accept established political institutions and adhere to democratic rules of the game. This is, of course, another ideal type, because there is no real-world case in which all political groups fully