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Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. xiv + 353, £55.00, £19.99 pb; $85.00, $29.99 pb.

The dramatic evolution of political regimes since the end of World War II has made the study of democracy and dictatorship not only one of the most venerable areas of inquiry within comparative politics, but also one of the most crowded. This makes Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán's path-breaking book, *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*, all the more impressive. Their book makes major, novel contributions not only to the study of political regime transitions in Latin America, but also to general theory on democratisation, democratic breakdown and the quality of democracy, as well as to the study of how international factors impact domestic regime changes. It thus places itself as a landmark in the field and a clear must-read to students of political regimes.

The most innovative aspect of the book, and what sets it apart in the literature, is the construction of a 'mid-range' theory of regime transitions. That is, the analysis, variables, and causal mechanisms are situated between long-term structural factors that impact regime transitions such as modernisation, class structures and political culture (espoused by authors such as Lipset, Moore and Boix) and actor-centric contingent decisions in key moments of uncertainty (which figure prominently in the work of O'Donnell and Schmitter, Linz, Karl and Kuran). This tack enables the construction of a new set of variables, normative preferences about regimes and the radicalism of policy preferences, that take centre stage in the theory as key determinants of regime type along with international actors and influences. Normative preferences and policy radicalism are measured for all of the major political actors in a society, a breathtakingly ambitious exercise.

The next theoretical step is unsurprising: the authors argue that political actors support the coalition that is most likely to satisfy their demands for policy outcomes and their normative preferences regarding political regime type. Political regimes therefore survive when the most powerful actors in a society comprise a coalition that accepts the existing regime. They collapse when enough actors join an opposition bloc capable of overpowering those who defend the existing regime. There are thus three major causes of regime changes. First, new actors may emerge and join the opposing coalition, tipping the balance towards a regime shift. Second, the relative distribution of political resources among existing actors can change in favour of the opposition. Third, political actors can switch sides, casting their lot against the prevailing regime and helping to usher in a new one.

Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán undertake an impressive, comprehensive and largely convincing set of empirical tests of their theory on democratic transitions and breakdowns in all of Latin America from 1945–2005. The theory outperforms a host of common alternative explanations from the literature: modernisation, class structure, resource dependence, regime economic performance and formal institutions such as presidentialism and party system fragmentation.

Yet, as with any contribution this important and ambitious, key theoretical and methodological questions remain. The main actors on which the theory rests are very diverse, comprising everything from presidents, the military, political parties, social movements, guerrilla movements and business associations to churches and powerful individuals. Furthermore, the number of these actors varies over time within any given country. This makes intuitive sense, but what exactly are the theoretical implications if, for instance, there are more supporters for democracy, but more

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heterogeneity among them too? The authors create the radicalism and normative preferences variables at the country-year level by averaging the scores for all actors. That means that having two opposition actors with equal middling scores for radicalism is coded the same as having four opposition actors where two are coded as very radical and two are coded as moderate. Yet distinguishing between these two scenarios seems theoretically important for reasons of collective action, alliance formation within the opposition, and the willingness of an autocratic government to negotiate a transition with the opposition. The measurement of international factors that may influence regime change is more straightforward. Indeed, another big contribution is the authors' careful specification of a range of causal mechanisms that link international factors to regime change.

The empirical findings on actors' normative preferences for democracy are positive and statistically significant across most empirical tests, and together with international factors constitute the authors' main findings. It would be interesting, however, to see normative preferences disaggregated to the government (plus allies) side and the opposition side. The authors do this for radicalism. Is it the case that a normative preference for democracy among the opposition is more likely to yield a democratic transition than a normative preference for democracy on the part of the government? Or are they similar? This would give us a better sense of whether democracy comes from below, from above or via negotiated transitions or pacts among relative equals.

The findings for the effects of actors' preferences for radicalism are less robust than for normative preferences and international influences. The authors argue that this is due to the fact that radicalism not only acts directly on regimes, but also indirectly by influencing actors' normative preferences for democracy. While this may be true, it leads to a strained set of conclusions at times. For instance, radicalism on the opposition side increases the likelihood of democracy by enabling the opposition to weaken an autocratic regime even though it also reduces the opposition's normative preferences for democracy. Radicalism on the government side is not robustly linked to duration or breakdown.

As mentioned previously, the authors' mid-range theory has much to like. Nonetheless, their approach poses several questions worth pondering. First, what is the actual 'trigger' for a democratic transition or a breakdown? Normative preferences and radicalism among the main political actors, or international diffusion, often operate only slowly. Do these factors induce a choice by leaders to push for change at some unforeseen, and perhaps unpredictable, moment? Or is regime switching triggered by a precipitating shock such as an economic crisis? Or do elites at key points in time perhaps lose their fear of democracy, or fear future uncertainty under autocracy, and seek democracy as a sort of low policy-variance insurance policy?

Second, although the authors mount a spirited offensive against the role of structural factors such as modernisation and class structures in regime transitions, do these variables in fact creep back into the analysis through the back door by raising new actors onto the political scene or felling old ones? Or do they condition the likelihood that political actors will espouse radical ideals or hold normative preferences for or against democracy?

These are some of the long-standing questions in the democracy literature, but ones which the authors breathe new life into with their original, path-breaking approach to thinking about regimes. I suspect that many others will now follow in their footsteps, and they would be wise to do so.

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