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Introduction

In December 2010, a young Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire, apparently in protest at state harassment. His death unleashed shockwaves around the world and contributed to the downfall of the authoritarian regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali a month later. The wave of regional change unleashed by the Tunisian protests, or the ‘Arab Spring’ as it has come to be known, can be seen to form part of the long ‘third wave’ of (sometimes problematic) democratization that began in the 1970s, reflecting what Diamond (2008a: 4–6) calls the ‘democratic spirit’ of the contemporary age. In the global (dis)order of today, characterized by uncertainty, inequality, violence and terror, democratization remains one of the few hopeful and positive trends in contemporary politics. The sustained attempts to subject government to popular control, make states work in ways that favour the broad mass of the people and extend citizenship have sometimes – though not always – made enormous differences to the lives of ordinary people. Indeed, there is little doubt that the past four decades have witnessed, in general terms, the dramatic and stunning spread of democracy in some form or another to almost every corner of the globe. This is undeniably a remarkable development. Yet it is equally clear, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, that democratization is also a difficult and long-term process (or, more accurately, series of processes) which does not always succeed; demands for it can lead to bloodshed, suffering, displacement, exile and human loss without eradicating authoritarianism.

This book sets out to critically analyze, understand and explain contemporary democratization. The first edition of the book, published in 2001, sought to discern how global transformations opened up a new political opportunity for democratization at the end of the twentieth century. This coincided with a degree of critical reflection on the notion that democratization proceeded in ‘waves’, an influential idea which had been proposed by Samuel Huntington (1991) as the Cold War came to an end. At the same time, it also drew attention to the enduring importance of states and citizenship in the unfolding of democratization: or, to put it differently, of the politics of place. In the decade or so since, there have been important developments in both the
theory and practice of democratization, including democratic decay in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa and the reassertion of authoritarianism in some areas of the ex-Soviet Union, as well as the resurgence of an international order shaped by fear and insecurity. This has led some to question the optimism of many third wave scholars who thought democracy would spread unhindered across the globe (see Levitsky and Way 2010). Others have gone even further, and spoken pessimistically of democratic no-go zones, suggesting some states and regions are characterized by enduring authoritarianism (see Brownlee 2007a). As a consequence, as Gilley (2009: 113) describes it, ‘the belief in democracy has begun to crumble inside some of the world’s finest minds and institutions’. More sanguine accounts, though, have concurred that the contemporary context is, on the one hand, certainly more menacing than it was in the 1990s. Yet on the other, popular demands for greater rights and representation in both the Middle East and Asia mean that we could, once again, be on the cusp of a forward wave of democratic change (see Diamond 2012).

The lesson to be drawn, it seems, is that democratization is a dynamic, not a linear, process. We should therefore seek to avoid over-determining outcomes and accepting simple teleologies. Rather, it is important to take a long view of social and political change and explore the significance of human agency within it. Patterns of democratization vary; they move at different paces, conditioned by different factors, and they can often result in processes and outcomes that are not easily or adequately captured by narrow assumptions about what democracy and ‘democratization’ mean.

Consequently, the agenda of this second edition is similar to that of the first. But it is also considerably more extensive: in the first half of the book, we expand further on the theoretical approach elaborated previously; and, in the second half, we explore a wider range of empirical examples than we did before. Nonetheless, we continue to insist on the three core analytical components of democratization: the state, civil society and global political and economic processes. Moreover, in contrast to much of the prevailing literature, for us, none of these three elements is reducible to each other and the character of each in a given context, at a particular time, will impact upon democratization in uniquely diverse and specific ways. As such, we also stress the essential contingency of democratization. Where it is successful, there tends to be a more conducive balance between these different components, such as the emergence of strong, dense and vibrant civil societies that work consistently to democratize politics and to hold the state accountable, the existence of a capable and flexible state, along with a supportive regional ‘neighbourhood’ and location within the globalizing world order. By contrast, less
successful examples tend to be stymied by a mixture of weak – or even non-existent – states on which to build democratic institutions (Møller and Skaaning 2011). They also often suffer from deeply entrenched authoritarian legacies, fragile or anti-democratic civil societies and, crucially, feeble links to other democracies or centres for the diffusion of democratic ideas, or they tend to occupy a marginal location within the global political economy.

It is sometimes mistakenly assumed that there are ‘recipes’ for successful democratization, as if it were somehow possible to choose paths to, or models of, democracy from an off-the-shelf menu of options. In fact, as this book shows, democratization is a slow and painful business. Elite commitment to democracy can weaken and is often contingent on the maintenance of privilege; structural factors frequently impede the deepening of democratization; and globalization can be as much a hindrance as a help. It should be no surprise that the number of genuinely successful democratizations is outweighed numerically by failed, stalled or even bad-faith experiments. The creation of democracy is a radical and challenging affair, during which groups with interests embedded in the maintenance of the non-democratic status quo have to be either defeated or reformed. Neat theories often contrast starkly with the real-world experiences of partial, ambiguous, fuzzy – and frequently disappointing – experiments in democratization.

Democratization today

The third wave of democratization – which began in Southern Europe in the 1970s before sweeping through Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet empire – was generally taken as an indication of the triumph of the West in political, economic, cultural and geopolitical terms. Fukuyama (1992) interpreted these events to signify ‘the end of history’ or the end of competing ideologies. In the economic sense, the system ushered in with the collapse of communism, generally labelled ‘neo-liberal’, remains largely intact, despite repeated financial crisis in the United States and Europe after 2008 as well as in the Global South sporadically between 1994 and 2002, and attempts in Africa and Latin America to revive the state as a motor of development (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012). As Gamble (2009b: 1) contends, ‘capitalism may be teetering ... on the edge of a terminal crisis, but there are no gravediggers in sight’. Nonetheless, politically the world is quite different from that of the 1990s. China is now the second largest economy in the world and has forged close linkages with much of the Global South. Global geopolitics, moreover, are in an exceptional state of
flux. The balance of power in the world has altered in myriad complex and perplexing ways. And of all of this is without considering the massive security-driven changes that followed 9/11.

What does all of this mean for how we understand democratization? We would stress, first and most importantly, that the need to understand history is more important than ever. It is not possible to talk intelligently about contemporary democratization without understanding something of the history of the idea of democracy and the history of capitalism and western power. Second, we continue to argue that democracy remains a popular aspiration globally, though understanding what constitutes democracy may be filtered through the lens of religion, culture and levels of development or shaped by place (Diamond 2008a). Third, the relationship between democracy and democratic aspirations remains linked in complex and still obscure ways to the creation of a global political economy (which may no longer be dominated by the West in the twenty-first century as it was in the nineteenth and twentieth). Yet it is far from clear in our view that there is an unproblematic and simple link between democracy and capitalism: liberalized markets can be as detrimental to democracy as they can be supportive (see Chapters 1, 2 and 3 for more on this unresolved debate).

Four features of the global order in particular have been important for understanding contemporary processes of democratization: the end of the Cold War, the creation of a genuinely global political economy, attempts at developing a system of liberal global governance (and the involvement of global civil society actors within that); and the securitization of global politics after 9/11 (see Zanotti 2011). This context renders democratization profoundly ambiguous. On the one hand, there is no doubt that, since the 1970s, democracy has indeed swept the globe, such that most societies either adhere to, or claim to be trying to adhere to, democratic norms and ideals. It also means that democratization is made up of real struggles to establish ‘a mode of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control’ (Beetham 1992: 40), inspired by examples elsewhere as well as changes within nation-states themselves and their regions. But on the other hand, democratization can also appear as the political arm of an unequal global order or western political and cultural hegemony, legitimizing narrow readings of what democracy means conceptually, and privileging certain institutional forms over others. Demands for locally meaningful expressions of citizenship and accountability can sometimes conflict with notions that democracy can and should be learned with reference to the examples of real-world democracy that exist in the West. Recognizing whether contemporary political transformations and upheavals constitute ‘democratization’, then, is much less easy than it might initially seem.
The meaning of democratization

Studies of democratization in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, when it seemed that new democracies were emerging steadily across Europe, Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia, presumed that the meaning of democratization was self-evident: a shift from single party, personal or dynasty rule to accountable and representative government. These studies adopted principally a process-oriented approach, concentrating on identifying the mechanisms or paths that lead to democratization. An important distinction was made between transition, or the beginning of the building of a democracy, during which politics is fluid and democracy not assured, and consolidation, when democracy becomes ‘the only game in town’ (Linz and Stepan 1996: 5).

Yet as democratization experiments unfolded, it became evident that although some countries successfully made a transition to democracy, others collapsed and many more fell – and remain – in the category of problematic democracies. Numerous countries have even institutionalized and deepened political regimes which simultaneously exhibit democratic and authoritarian elements (Levitsky and Way 2002; 2010). The result has been a shift in academic interest towards identifying those factors that make new democracies endure and those that, conversely, make for fragility or weakness. Consolidation of democracy, therefore, became the principal focus for research in the late 1990s. This represented a concomitant shift in the debate, from a primary interest in structure and agency and their respective roles in causation, towards a focus on how political culture (Diamond 1999), political economy (Haggard and Kaufman 1997) and institutionalism (Remmer 1997) shape outcomes. These theoretical debates are examined in detail in Chapter 3.

Whether the focus was on transition or consolidation, process-oriented scholarship generally failed to engage in any profound fashion with the first-order question of what ‘democratization’ means. This was understandable since many scholars in this period were committed democrats, for whom the interesting question was the practical task of guaranteeing democracy’s success. Often living themselves in long-established democracies, they were generally keen advocates of ‘freedom’, more interested in trying to theorize processes than dwell on debates from political theory. Today, however, even committed democrats need to ask what democracy means and what forms of democracy are possible in a world where ‘new, or seemingly new’ challenges are posing difficult questions about the nature, extent and quality of democracy, including ‘scarcity, market fundamentalism, ultranationalism, the national security state and re-emerging religious messianism’ (Nef and Reiter 2009: 3). Equally, new sources of often unrepresentative or even illegitimate public
and private power, including excessive corporate greed, are challenging or even supplanting the state. As such, the critical debate is no longer simply about ‘how’ to consolidate democracy; but it rather centres on the significance and meaning of democratic development in different places and at different levels of national, regional and global politics. As we explore in Chapter 3, then, democratization is, by definition, an ongoing process. To this end, it is a major oversight of the literature that more attention has not been paid to supposedly ‘consolidated’ democracies in the West, particularly given that many of them exhibit a range of significant democratic flaws.

This takes us directly onto the terrain of meaning: if democracy cannot be simply equated with the ‘actually existing democracies’ of the West, how should we understand it? A glance at the vast literature on democratization reveals that, far from consensus, there are many significantly different ways of understanding the term. Democratization has variously been conceptualized as a discourse, a demand, a set of institutional changes, a form of elite domination, a political system dependent on popular control, an exercise in power politics and a demand for global solidarity – and this is by no means an exhaustive list. It has been analyzed from the perspective of political theory, comparative politics, international relations, sociology, cultural studies and political economy. It has been thought of as a discrete set of sequential changes achieved in a few years, as a series of open-ended struggles and a transformation of deep structures, or as a (by implication) unobtainable utopia. The ‘drivers’ of democratization have been understood variously to be classes (middle or working class); urban groups; certain local or sub-regional elites; excluded groups seeking a restructuring of power and voice; groups and individuals with cosmopolitan mentalities or global connections; business groups; unions; and even key individuals. In short, democratization is as ‘essentially contested’ (Gallie 1964) a concept as democracy itself.

Interest in democratization spans the social sciences. But from the perspective of political studies/international relations especially, democratization has been understood along a continuum from a minimal to a maximalist position, with most commentators positioning themselves at different points in between. The basic minimalist definition sees democratization as the regular holding of clean elections and the introduction of basic norms (e.g. an absence of intimidation, competition from at least two political parties and an inclusive suffrage) that make free elections possible. A slightly more inclusive definition demands the introduction of liberal individual rights (freedom of assembly, religious freedom, a free press, freedom to stand for public office, etc.) or the creation of a ‘polyarchic’ order (see Dahl 1989). Nevertheless this definition still
remains quite limited because it fails to take either the issue of power or the importance of structural obstacles to participation seriously. This book favours a much broader definition, in which democratization is seen to encompass the introduction and extension of citizenship rights and the creation of a democratic state. Another way to think of this is as rights-based or ‘substantive’ democratization, in contrast to ‘formal’ or ‘procedural’ democratization. On this reading, meaningful citizenship is about much more than simply constitutional rights, important as these are, and it requires that rights are actually respected, that people have full access to the law and economic opportunities, that they are able to participate politically and in civil society, that minorities are protected and so on. The litmus-test for democracy, therefore, is not whether rights exist on paper but, rather, whether they have real meaning for people and translate into broad citizenship entitlements. Inevitably, this implies, at least to some degree, the redistribution of power and resources.

A more difficult question is to what extent democratization should go further, to include the elimination of the most extreme – or even all – forms of socio-economic inequality. Democracy is a political, not an economic, order. However, economic entitlements (or the lack of them) affect political entitlements, and much critical scholarship – particularly in the Marxist tradition – has long stressed the relative meaninglessness of political rights when they are not accompanied by reductions in economic inequality. Some radical scholarship in this area has even gone so far as to suggest that liberal democracy is simply a sham which serves to mask continuing class exploitation; consequently, only full democratization of the economic sphere would justify the democratic label (yet what this would mean in practice, not to mention how we might get there, is difficult to imagine). In numerous developing countries, in particular, poverty and social exclusion operate as real barriers to citizenship. For example, in many parts of Latin America, where inequalities are perhaps sharper than anywhere else in the world, land reform has long been seen as a necessary complement to the expansion of political democratization, and goes some way to explaining the rise of populist politics as epitomized by the late Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia (see Chapter 8).

Even in developed countries such as the US and Britain, sharp inequalities and entrenched poverty mean reduced access and influence in the public sphere. In the contemporary US, it is striking that over 40 million people (about 15 per cent of the population) subsist on food stamps, a similar number do not have access to adequate healthcare – or at least they did not until President Obama’s overdue reforms – and roughly a third of African-American males are said to be either incarcerated or at some stage of the judicial/penal process (and consequently unable to vote
in most states). Furthermore, women are everywhere economically dis-
advantaged compared with their male counterparts and consequently
participate less in politics and have less influence over policy-making;
they are also often written out of analyses, with gender either conceptu-
ally marginalized or ignored completely (see Waylen, 2003; 2006; 2007).
The views of those at the extreme of the life cycle, children and old
people, also often count for less or even nothing. In other words, full
democratization cannot take place without a significant degree of socio-
economic reform, cultural and social change, and a transformation of
gender relations.

Even so, democracy is also a continuum and it is often not practical to
use too utopian a definition of democratization. This would mean
excluding established and accepted democracies and limiting the use of
the term to excessively idealized versions of the ‘good society’. Nonethe-
less, inequalities, political and economic, persist in all societies,
and it is important to remember that they inevitably shape the politics of
democracies. Where they are so great as to prevent sections of the popu-
lation, be they women, ethnic groups, or the poor, from exercising mean-
ingful political citizenship, it is difficult to speak of democratization. It is
more accurate to categorize political systems in these cases as limited,
façade, pseudo or illiberal democratizations or to speak of insurgent citi-
zenship, rather than democracy.

Democratization and democracy

The assumption that democracy means liberal or representative democ-

cracy was the normative underpinning of most studies of democratization
until the mid-1990s. This was generally taken to mean the holding of
elections, the existence of a multi-party political system and a set of
procedures for government. But, as Holden (1993) argues, this is to
mistake the necessary conditions for liberal democracy for its defining
characteristics. Neither the creation of political parties nor the holding of
elections, in themselves, guarantee the existence of key democratic free-
doms and rights, such as tolerance, respect for civil liberties and equality
before the law. Moreover, insisting on liberalism as the underpinning of
democracy easily elides into culturally elitist assumptions about the
supposed – and, by implication, enduring – democratic superiority of the
West.

Instead of defining democracy through the trappings of liberalism,
therefore, it is more useful to adopt Beetham’s (1992) pioneering
approach to democracy. As noted earlier, he suggests that the core
meaning of democracy is straightforward and it encompasses ‘a mode
of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control’ (Beetham 1992: 40). Democracy is, in its literal sense, rule by the people. However, confusion arises not over meaning but as a result of normative judgements about how much democracy is appropriate in any given society:

Disputes about the meaning of democracy which purport to be conceptual disagreements are generally disputes about how much democracy is either desirable or practicable; that is about where the trade-off should come between democratic and other values, or at what point along the spectrum a given set of institutional arrangements for realizing the principle of control by equal citizens is in practice sustainable. (Beetham 1992: 40)

The main dispute is not cultural, therefore, but between those who insist on a minimal definition of democracy and those who, by contrast, argue that democracy implies not only procedures for government but also substantive rights. The difference between minimal (or formal/procedural) and substantive democracy is captured neatly by Kaldor and Vejvoda:

Formal democracy is a set of rules, procedures and institutions ... substantive democracy [is] a process that has to be continually reproduced, a way of regulating power relations in such a way as to maximize the opportunities for individuals to influence the conditions in which they live, to participate in and influence debates about the key decisions which affect society. (Kaldor and Vejvoda 1997: 67)

Substantive democracy focuses on the distribution of power and, by implication, understands democratization as power redistribution. But, as Przeworski (1986; 1999; 2009) reminds us, addressing inequalities, especially economic inequalities, can sometimes be a step too far for elites who stand to lose out if redistribution poses too great a threat to accumulated wealth. In practice, therefore, some democratizing elites find that it may be preferable to accept minimalist democracy which, as Przeworski (1999: 44) argues, is an important way of processing conflict peacefully, and is in itself ‘nothing short of miraculous’. Far from being a second-best option, there may be circumstances where minimalist democracy might even be the only democracy possible, due to the constraints of capitalism and elite vetoes. More recently, Benhabib and Przeworski (2006) have suggested that highly developed states actually enjoy greater leeway to redistribute than is often believed, and this capacity increases as they develop further and democracy becomes deeply rooted. However,
the fundamental argument remains that, in less-developed countries where inequality persists and democratic politics are weakly institution-
alized, redistribution may well provoke a capitalist backlash and put an end to even minimal democracy.

This is an extremely important debate that goes to the heart of not just the meaning of democratization, but also of the contingent processes and structural forces that shape eventual outcomes. But capitalist interests – to which Przeworski and others (such as Cerny 2006; 2010) pay particular attention – hardly comprise a homogeneous entity. The implications for democracy, in other words, of particular redistributive policies cannot be expected to play out uniformly. Context is crucial. The meaning of democratization, then, is shaped not only by theoretical debates about democracy itself but by the spatial, temporal and geographical context. Nonetheless, there are some, such as Rodrik (2011), who consider that, as globalization continues apace, the contemporary crisis does point to something of an irreconcilable tension between national sovereignty as underpinned by traditional Westphalian politics, national democracy and economic globalization (see the following section, and Chapter 6 for more on this).

The institutions of government and the state more broadly can only be fully democratic when they enjoy popular legitimacy and represent the political community, meaning that it is difficult to separate democratic government from the concept of citizenship. Citizenship is not something that is simply conferred on subjects by governments but refers to ‘a conflictive practice related to power – that is, to a struggle about who is entitled to say what in the process of defining common problems and deciding how they will be faced’ (Jelin 1996: 104). Citizenship practices, in other words, change over time and space and do not necessarily hold stable. Notions of who is – and who should be – a citizen vary, and ideas about citizenship are shaped not only by local, national and regional cultures but by global discourses too. An important driver of contemporary democratization is undoubtedly the contagion effect of citizenship demands which diffuse in complex ways between the global and local levels. Citizenship figures strongly in many contemporary debates about democratization. But we have to remember that democracy is Janus-faced in this respect. Citizenship, in other words, is linked to the state since it implies obligation and rights. So citizenship approaches to democratization do not imply that the state or government institutions do not matter; they do, very much. States control and dispense many of the resources through which citizenship can be made real, guaranteed and reproduced. It is the state that has the obligation to provide the framework that allows daily lives to be lived out democratically. Increasingly, the democratic state also has to facilitate access to the international realm so that private
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