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# Incorporating social movement insights into democratisation theory: elaboration of a potential framework

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## Abstract

Scholarship which has sought to identify the causes of political democratisation has historically paid little attention to the role of the 'masses' in such processes. Contributors working from a structural perspective have typically identified factors such as socioeconomic modernisation as being responsible for political change, without specifying the intervening mechanisms by which this change occurs. Alternatively, scholarship which asserts the significance of agents has focused almost exclusively on the actions of political elites, without explaining the contextual forces which influence these elites' decisions. In order to properly understand democratisation, one can ignore neither the significance of structural factors in determining context, nor the fact that political elites invariably write constitutions and pass laws. However, it appears that there is a pressing need for theory which explains the mechanisms by which structural variables lead to elite decisions to create democratic institutions.

An increasing quantity of evidence suggests that the actions of the masses may be a significant vehicle for understanding this evolution. As the democratisation literature has interfaced with the masses in only the most limited manner, it seems expedient to look elsewhere for understandings which might aid in the comprehension of their role. One field which appears to bear particular potential is that of social movement scholarship. While this field has largely concerned itself with movements in Western democracies, attempts to adapt social movement concepts to the study of democratisation bear witness to the feasibility of this venture. Despite the appearance of a number of such attempts, social movement scholars have thus far failed to develop convincing, generalised theory of democratisation as it is influenced by the masses. Contributions in this vein have been afflicted by a tendency to draw understandings from a restricted area of social movement research, and by a failure to interface with the rich body of existing democratisation literature.

This work seeks to contribute to the rectification of this situation by providing a theoretical framework for a more comprehensive incorporation of the masses in democratisation theory. In order to do so, it will take seriously the understandings of over half a century of democratisation research, while attempting to adapt the concepts of the social movement literature to suit the authoritarian contexts in which democratisation takes place. This work will thus identify three ideal paths suggested by the social movement literature by which the masses may influence the emergence of democratic politics. It will then examine a wide range of social movement theories in order to discover the most salient insights regarding the likely emergence and trajectories of movements. A research agenda will then be suggested for subsequent research which may shed more light on the exact working of the processes identified here as potentially salient. In doing so, it is hoped that a theoretical platform will be provided upon which future contributions may erect a comprehensive explanation of the role of the masses in democratisation processes. Such a development may well in turn go far in filling the theoretical void which currently exists between long-term structural accounts of the variables influencing eventual democratisation, and the agency-based accounts of the immediate actions of political elites in establishing the relevant institutions.

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# 1 Introduction

Modern accounts of the bases of democracy go back as far as de Tocqueville. Political scientists began to study the subject in earnest, however, in the wake of the Second World War. Lipset (1959) proffered one of the most significant early accounts, in which he argued democratisation to be the result of socioeconomic development. Lipset's seminal work then 'stimulated a flood of further analyses', in Huntington's (1984, p. 198) words, 'that criticized, qualified, and refined his argument'. The relationship between economic development and democracy, despite exceptions including poor democratic India and industrialised authoritarian states in the inter-war period, was fairly clear (Leftwich 1997, p. 521). Argument ensued, however, as to whether socioeconomic progress actually brought about democracy. The arrow of causation might in fact point in the other direction, or a third factor might be producing both democratic government and economic success. One variable suggested as potentially being such a third factor was culture. Thus, contributors such as Almond and Verba (1963) argued that democracy depended on specific cultural values, which were variously seen as entrenched or flexible.

What united virtually all of these theories was not only an interest in identifying structural variables which caused or sustained democracy and a fetish with prerequisites, but also an almost exclusive focus on the transitions to democracy which occurred in large Western countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Munck 2001, pp. 119-20). This situation began to change with the contribution of Rustow (1970), who took Sweden and Turkey as his main subjects of study. Rustow asserted that the requisites for democracy were not to be found in specific structural variables, but in the occurrence of a struggle. The struggle might have varying participants and take different forms, however its occurrence was necessary as democracy was only likely to be achieved as a compromise between parties of similarly strength. Rustow's work heralded the beginning of a phase of theorisation which sought to elevate the role of actors, at the expense of the previously favoured structural variables, in processes of political change. The agency approach arguably reached its

pinnacle at this time with the publication of a four-tome collection by O'Donnell and his colleagues (O'Donnell et al. 1986a, 1986b, 1986c, O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986). This work emerged following a decade which had witnessed the democratisation of Spain, Portugal, Greece and a number of Latin American countries. For contributors who favoured agency over structure, the widely varying levels of socioeconomic development apparent in these transitioning states proved that democratisation depended upon political elites who were able to act with a high degree of autonomy from the polities they ruled.

By the middle of the 1980s, the Southern European and Latin American experiences had shown the limitations of existing structural theories in explaining democratisation, however the following period in turn called into question the agency approach which had become newly dominant. The transitions to democracy which began with that of the Philippines in 1986 and extended throughout East Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, contradicted the assumptions of both many structural approaches, as well as those asserting political elites as the driving force behind transition. The realisation of this fact led a number of commentators to call for more nuanced theory, which would utilise the strengths of both structural and agency-based approaches. Thus di Palma (1990, p. 156) argued, in the midst of an agency-based account, for the need to consider the root causes of actors' decisions, which are likely to be of 'a deeper historical and structural nature'. Munck went further, arguing the need for a comprehensive theoretical framework which would draw equally on structure and agency. According to Munck (1994, p. 371), '[w]hat is needed is a theory of regime transition and formation that incorporates the simple yet theoretically complex notion that actors make choices but not in the circumstances of their choosing'.

The 1990s indeed witnessed the emergence of a number of approaches to explaining democratisation which were arguably more prosaic than those seen in the preceding period. Contributors presented theories which invoked factors ranging from societal classes (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992) to cultural values (Putnam 1993, Weingast 1997). In addition, a number of scholars began to advance the idea that ordinary people often played some role in determining political trajectories (Bratton & van de Walle 1992,

Collier & Mahoney 1997, McFaul 2002). Nonetheless, democratisation scholarship failed to attain a comprehensive theory flexible enough to describe the diverging experiences of political transformation witnessed throughout the multitude of polities which had by this stage democratised.

Thus, despite ongoing calls for and attempts at the development of a theory of democratisation nuanced enough to be able to explain the variety of trajectories experienced by polities in the real world, the achievement of such remains elusive. Given this theoretical shortcoming, it ought not to be surprising that political scientists almost universally failed to predict the recent Arab uprisings. It is far from clear that the end result of these uprisings will be a string of Arab democracies, however these events at the very least represent authoritarian breakdown. Meanwhile, the holding of democratic elections deemed to be reasonably free and fair in Tunisia has sufficed for the influential democracy watchdog Freedom House (2012) to award the country 'one of the largest single-year improvements in the history of the Freedom in the World report'. The failure of extant democratisation theory to predict or describe such events makes the search for better explanations particularly pressing. Here it will be argued that improved understandings can be achieved by seeking to utilise both structural and agency-based accounts, as well as by incorporating acknowledgement of the role of ordinary people in influencing political transformation.

Structural approaches to democratisation have provided significant evidence of the relationship between socioeconomic development and democracy; however, by focusing too heavily on this relationship, other potential factors have arguably been overlooked. Agency theorists ought to be commended for establishing the significance of the role played by actors in bringing about political change, however their geographical and temporal focus has been no less limited than that of the earlier structural accounts which considered only large Western polities. If many structural contributions exaggerated the predictive ability of economic development due to the consideration of democracy as it exists in the wealthy West, agency theorists are vulnerable to the criticism that their work overstates the ability of political elites to act autonomously, due to the limitation



of their focus to re-democratising Southern European and Latin American states.<sup>1</sup>

While the structural and agency-based approaches each have their own limitations in terms of scope, both are guilty of largely overlooking the role of the masses. This omission may also be an artefact of the restricted geographical and temporal scope exhibited by these bodies of research. The first and second wave transitions considered by earlier structural theorists seldom exhibited the immediate involvement of the masses.<sup>2</sup> The masses may have played an important role in generating pressures for reform, however the absence of more obvious evidence of the significance of their actions allowed many structural contributions to ignore them altogether.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the apparent absence of the masses in the Southern European and Latin American transitions considered by the majority of agency theorists meant these contributors were equally free to overlook the role they played.

At the same time as ignoring the role of the masses, many scholars of democratisation have also left significant areas of their theory underspecified. Structural theorists have often leapt from factors such as socioeconomic development to political change, without identifying any intervening mechanisms. As Inglehart and Welzel (2009, p. 42) poignantly assert, democracy 'does not result from some disembodied force that causes democratic institutions to emerge automatically when a country attains a certain level of GDP'. Agency theorists have likewise presented a picture according to which political elites are able to institute change seemingly without regard to the polities they rule. As Remmer (1991, p. 485) suggests, such accounts invoke 'leaders who seem to float above society, manipulating events, resisting change, entering into pacts, or otherwise shaping outcomes, apparently unconnected to their followers and unrestricted in their political

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1 Indeed, Geddes (1999, p. 131) argues that the prevalence in Latin America of military dictatorships, which Geddes asserts to be particularly vulnerable to internal disagreement, led agency theorists to base their understandings of transitions on elite splits.

2 Huntington (1991) argued episodes of democratisation to have occurred in waves, separated by periods of regression to authoritarianism. The first wave thus took place from 1826 to 1926, the second wave followed the Second World War, and the third began with the 1974 Portuguese transition. The validity of this identification has been largely accepted by subsequent contributors, although some debate has ensued as to the exact number of waves and their start and end points. In particular, opinion diverges as to whether the democratic transitions witnessed since 1974 all constitute one long third wave, or whether those prior to 1989 ought to be seen as the third wave, while those which followed would represent a separate, fourth wave. See Doorenspleet (2000) for extended discussion.

3 A significant exception to this can be found in Lipset's seminal work, where he offered an account by which socioeconomic development led to democratisation by way of its effects on societal classes.

options by larger social forces'.

There thus exists a confluence between the absence of the masses from most accounts of democratisation, the underspecification of critical mechanisms in these accounts, and their inability to predict or explain many recent transitions. The existence of this nexus may well be coincidental, however it seems expedient to investigate whether this is in fact the case. Furthermore, it would appear unlikely that the masses had no effect on democratisation processes whatsoever. Any contribution which added to the rather barren existing research on the role of the masses in political change would therefore be welcome.

It will be argued here that by including consideration of the role of the masses, it may be possible to generate a more comprehensive theoretical framework that takes account of both structural and agency-based approaches. Throughout this work, the term 'the masses' will be used to represent the ordinary people, as opposed to political elites, who have typically been left out of descriptions of democratisation processes. It is intended that this grouping will be seen and understood not as a monolithic horde which exhibits defined and determined desires and actions, but as real people with a multitude of diverging constitutions. The inspiration for this approach can be found in the entreaty of Levine (1988, p. 390) to democratisation scholars to consider the role of ordinary people in a meaningful manner:

For analysis to have any hope of accuracy or completeness, it is vital to deal with real people, not simply "the people." To say that analysis must deal with real people affirms neither voluntarism nor some extreme form of methodological individualism. Rather, it underscores the need to address how specific groups continuously renegotiate their ties to dominant institutions, and in the process rework their understanding of what these relations are all about and what, if anything, makes them legitimate.

The lack of existing understandings of the role of the masses on the part of

democratisation theory suggests the value in looking elsewhere for a relevant foundation from which to work. Fortuitously, over half a century of research has been performed on social movements, primarily by academics working from a sociological background. The insights developed by this field are diverse, rich and deep. While some forays have been made by social movement theorists into the terrain of democratisation, scholars of the latter have taken precious little note of the understandings generated by social movement research. This may be partly the result of a certain degree of disciplinary insularity, something potentially easily overcome. However, it may also reflect the fact that most social movement research has focused on movements in the relatively democratic West, whereas the study of democratisation concerns itself predominantly with political development in authoritarian polities. This divide ought not to be insurmountable, however it will require a certain degree of adaptation in terms of the concepts of the social movement field.

Firstly, it will be necessary to establish the ways in which democracy can be achieved. The transition fetish exhibited by much of the democratisation literature has resulted in an unduly heavy emphasis on the immediate period of political transition, and a corresponding disregard for the processes leading up to that transition. This is obviously true of agency-based theory, a central plank of which being the ability of political elites to institute reform without being encumbered by historical or social factors. However, it is also true of many structural accounts, which have similarly accepted the logic of short, sharp transitions as defining democratisation. In contrast, social movement research has paid a significant amount of attention to long-term processes of social and political development. In doing so, social movement scholars have considered a wider range of potential outcomes than the binary transition/no transition measure typical of the democratisation literature. Many social movement commentators have identified the importance of recognising that movement success consists not only of policy change, but that it can also be measured in terms of the acceptance of movements as valid actors. A number of contributors have added the supplementary consideration of the effect of movements on factors such as public discourse as a potential measure of movement success.

The social movement literature's more nuanced understandings of success can be adapted to provide a more sophisticated picture of democratisation, especially that involving some degree of participation by the masses. In order to render this potential clear, this work will present three ideal paths by which mass-influenced democratisation might occur. These paths are intended not to describe the exact courses of political change in any historical or future case. Indeed, it is probable that any given example of democratisation would exhibit at least elements of each path. Rather, the point is to illuminate the varying potential processes which are likely to take place. In doing so, it is hoped that it will become simpler to identify the factors which might be expected to cause a particular polity to proceed down one or more of these paths.

The first path identified is one in which the masses precipitate the kind of rapid transition to democracy generally understood by the democratisation literature. As suggested by social movement scholarship, such transitions may exhibit varying degrees of incumbent pre-emption, where rulers seek to avoid subsequent unpleasantness, and reaction, where their hand is forced. A number of episodes of political change have appeared to adhere significantly to this path, while its similarity to orthodox understandings of the way in which democratisation occurs renders it relatively simple for scholars of such to incorporate into existing theory.

The second ideal path suggested is one according to which the masses provoke gradual but measurable increases in levels of democracy over a period of time. As the existence of democracy itself is the product of a variety of factors, this may occur in a number of ways. Levels of democracy might thus be increased by gradual extension of the portion of the polity allotted a political voice, by incremental expansion of both formal and effective electoral rights, or by the strengthening of rights which are not electoral but are nonetheless constitutive of democratic privileges. The occurrence of political change according to such a path in a number of early European democratisation episodes has resulted in some awareness of this path's potential operation. Nonetheless, much democratisation scholarship explicitly or implicitly rules out such gradual democratisation in the contemporary world. The inclusion of acknowledgement of such political development in understandings of democratisation would thus require a certain

degree of theoretical reconfiguration.

The third path identified here is one by which the masses effect gradual change in the political environment, which change leads to rapid institutional transition at a subsequent date. The assertion on the part of social movement theory of the ability of groups to influence factors such as public discourse and attitudes suggests that publics, to the extent that they are able to make their mark on political development, are likely to be capable of provoking change in this way. While there are clearly numerous historical cases in which such a course of events has taken place, the unwillingness of many democratisation scholars to interface with such slippery variables as discourse and emotions has resulted in the almost complete ignorance of the potential for democratisation according to this path. Incorporating its appreciation into existing democratisation theory is thus likely to be particularly difficult. However, the significance of such processes as identified by much of the social movement literature suggests that their acknowledgement in studies of democratisation would be of great value.

Having identified these three ideal paths, it will remain to consider the factors which are likely to cause their realisation. The social movement literature exhibits a number of general approaches to understanding the likelihood of movements successfully mobilising and achieving positive outcomes. The insights generated by these various approaches will thus be adapted to illuminate the likely interactions that take place when the masses are involved in influencing democratisation. As suggested earlier, the focus of the vast majority of social movement research on collective action in relatively democratic Western settings renders a certain degree of flexibility essential in transferring the concepts established therein to describe events in authoritarian environments. Nonetheless, the depth of social movement understandings suggests that the performance of this task will be particularly worthwhile.

Early academic attitudes towards collective action suggested that such was bound to be irrational, destructive and an impediment to normal political and social life (Oliver et al. 2003, p. 214). As such, little attention was paid to the phenomenon, perhaps in the hope

that ignoring it would make it go away. The first serious attempts at understanding the processes involved in social movements appeared following the Second World War. These early accounts suggested that people rebelled and revolted when they felt deprived of that to which they believed themselves deserving. Significant in such an approach was the suggestion that feelings of deprivation are relative. What constitutes hardship thus varies from individual to individual.

The 1970s saw the development of two additional approaches to social movements. The resource mobilisation school asserted that movement mobilisation depended not upon deprivation, but upon the existence of competent movement leaders who had access to financial, labour and political resources. Movements leaders and participants were rational actors, while deprivation was neither a necessary nor sufficient factor for movement appearance. The political opportunity school presented a diverging case. Social movements arise when changes in the constellation of political opportunities allow them to do so. Deprivation, resources, and potential leaders and participants may already exist, but without the correct alignment of external opportunities, movements will not appear.

A further approach to social movements subsequently coalesced, partly inspired by the appearance of movements making new lifestyle-related demands and exhibiting membership seemingly unaffected by considerations of personal ambition and gain. Social movement scholars began to interface with cognitive factors such as discourse, framing, repertoires of contention, emotions, identity and culture, in an attempt to better describe a wider range of movement trajectories. While the contributions which are taken here to constitute this approach are relatively diverse and less choate than those of the previous three schools, they are nonetheless considered here as adhering to a cognitive approach to social movements.

The insights generated by these four schools of social movement research are manifold and substantial. The adaptation of these insights to the study of mass-influenced democratisation would thus seem to be particularly expedient. The concept of relative deprivation suggests that democratisation scholarship ought to recognise that politics are

unlikely to democratise at identical levels of socioeconomic or attitudinal development. Varying perceptions of desert are likely to result in diverging levels of experienced deprivation, even given the same external circumstances. The political opportunities approach emphasises the importance of considering the constellation of existing opportunities in determining the likelihood of movement mobilisation and success. By broadening the concept of opportunities to include internal factors, it can be argued that variables such as perceptions of feasibility play a particularly important role in the occurrence of mass-influenced democratisation. The resource mobilisation approach makes clear the significance of organisation to social movements. Given that democratising movements by definition act in authoritarian environments, the consequences of the diverging natures and structures of movement organisations assume particular significance. The evidence considered here suggests that informal, loosely-structured organisations may achieve more success in such settings. Finally, cognitive treatments of social movements contain a further group of insights of relevance to understanding the role of the masses in political change. This approach includes consideration of factors such as emotions, culture and discourse. The omission of such from the vast majority of accounts of democratisation suggests that their inclusion may bring a significant reward.

It is thus hoped that the consideration of insights contained in the social movement literature with the potential to inform understandings of democratisation will provide something of a foundation for further inquiry. By taking seriously the diversity of approaches to both democratisation and social movements, it is conceivable that future work will be capable of developing more sophisticated understandings of the processes involved in political change. In doing so, it is likely that such research will satisfactorily incorporate consideration of the masses, while simultaneously improving specification of the mechanisms which act to connect structural change with elite action, which have thus far remained understudied.

## 2 Democratisation theory

The first comprehensive attempts to explain the appearance of democracy in the post-war period focused on structural variables as the root causes. Foremost among such accounts was that of Lipset (1959), who argued that socioeconomic modernisation led to democratisation.<sup>4</sup> According to Lipset (1959, p. 72), socioeconomic modernisation denoted increasing industrialisation, urbanisation, wealth and education, all which favoured the emergence of democracy. Lipset was careful to stress the probabilistic, as opposed to deterministic, basis of his theory, and to make clear that the socioeconomic factors he identified as leading to democracy acted to aid, but were not necessarily crucial, in the achievement of such (1959, pp. 70-2). Nonetheless, Lipset's contribution generated something of a polarisation of subsequent democratisation scholarship. Many scholars have become convinced of the significance of socioeconomic factors, presenting accounts which stretch their explanatory value further than Lipset intended. Meanwhile, contributors who have disagreed with Lipset's findings have often displayed an equal fervour in seeking to disprove his theory, employing exceptions to the general trend identified by Lipset in order to categorically deny the value of his work.<sup>5</sup> The approach taken by many subsequent commentators has thus acted to obscure the significance of Lipset's conclusions, although not to reduce his stature in the field.

A second structural approach to explaining the emergence of democracy was elaborated by Almond and Verba (1963). These contributors became the most prominent of a number of commentators who argued that democracy was the product of particular cultural values. Almond and Verba utilised comparative survey data to argue that democratic participation was dependent upon the existence of a certain civic culture. A rupture soon appeared amongst advocates of cultural values as determinants of

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4 Other early contributors to the structural approach include Cutright (1963) and Neubauer (1967).

5 Lipset (1959, p. 70) presciently outlined the danger of just such an approach: 'the conflicts among political philosophers about the necessary conditions underlying given political systems often lead to a triumphant demonstration that a given situation clearly violates the thesis of one's opponent, much as if the existence of some wealthy socialists, or poor conservatives, demonstrated that economic factors were not an important determinant of political preference'.



democracy, pitting those scholars who understood cultural values to be relatively fixed (Huntington 1968, Putnam 1993) against those who saw them as substantially fluid (Barry 1970, Muller & Seligson 1994, Inglehart & Welzel 2005). Despite this cleavage, the school as a whole became unfashionable throughout the 1970s and 1980s as it was often presumed to depend solely upon a vision of values as being particularly entrenched, and thus seemed to exhibit a high degree of ethnocentrism (Formisano 2001, pp. 400-1).<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to the theories of such contributors as Lipset and Almond and Verba, which sought to identify in structural variables the causes of democratisation, Moore (1966) presented an account which relied on the machinations of societal classes. Moore's theory of the emergence of democracy was arguably complimentary to theories which depend on socioeconomic modernisation, as it was also premised on such development as being the initial factor in eventual political change.<sup>7</sup> Where Moore's argument diverged from existing structural theories, however, was in its assertion of the intervening processes of class politics as pivotal to democracy's development. Industrialisation was necessary to the emergence of democracy, however the latter's achievement was highly dependent upon the development of particular constellations of class alliances. If the bourgeoisie makes common cause with the peasantry and working class, the likely result is democracy. In contrast, economic modernisation accompanied by strong relations between the state and the aristocracy is likely to lead to fascism, while communism is the expected result of a weak bourgeoisie and a strong peasantry.

To the extent that Moore's theory considered industrialisation as necessary to democratisation, it continued to rely to some degree on structural factors. Nonetheless, Moore had introduced a significant degree of agency, in the form of the decisions which the various class groupings make in terms of alliances. This development was soon followed by a further approach, that of Rustow (1970), which made the actions of

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6 Almond (1980) later argued that his and Verba's original theory in fact held that political culture and democracy were mutually reinforcing.

7 Indeed, Lipset (1959, p. 83) also saw socioeconomic modernisation, in addition to its more direct effects, as changing the form of the class struggle, thus rendering democracy more likely. A wealthier lower class, Lipset thought, was more likely to be integrated into society, adopt middle-class values and reject revolution as a means of achieving their goals.

particular agents even more central. Rustow argued the only necessary prerequisite to democratisation to be national unity. Diverging from more deterministic accounts, Rustow asserted that democracy was only likely in cases in which a struggle took place. Democracy would not necessarily be the goal of any particular party to that struggle, but may be agreed upon as a compromise acceptable to, but not considered ideal by, all parties involved. The subject of the struggle is likely to differ from country to country, as might the parties involved. Rustow's contribution is significant not only in its assertion of the importance of agents and mechanisms, but also in that it represented a growing awareness on the part of the literature of the importance of considering countries other than the large Western examples which had previously been the object of study. Rustow not only takes Sweden and Turkey as his 'ideal types', but also refers to the importance of attempting to understand democratisation as it relates to the countries of the developing world (Rustow 1970, p. 340).

The re-democratisation of Portugal, Greece and Spain, followed by that of a multitude of Latin American countries throughout the 1970s and 1980s, heralded the ascendancy of a distinct new school of democratisation scholarship.<sup>8</sup> Convinced that earlier accounts had been mistaken in their search for structural requisites, this emergent school asserted that democracy was established by the actions of political elites. While its antecedents can be seen in the work of Linz and Stepan (1978), the elite agency approach was most forcefully elaborated in the four-volume contribution of O'Donnell et al. (O'Donnell et al. 1986a, 1986b, 1986c, O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986).<sup>9</sup> Here it was argued that transitions from authoritarian rule were episodes of high indeterminacy, where the decisions of individual actors were of far more import than structural factors.

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8 Most confusingly, this school of democratisation scholarship has variously been referred to as the 'transition' approach, the 'process-driven' approach and the 'actor-driven' approach. By way of example, see Potter (1997), Kitschelt (1992), and Doorenspleet (2004) respectively. The 'transition' moniker seems inappropriate, as it risks conflation with those theories which consider democracy to be achieved in short, sharp transitions (of which agency-based theories are typically a subset, but by no means represent the entirety thereof). Similarly, 'process-driven' seems to risk confusion with theories from the likes of Rustow (1970) and Tilly (2004, 2007), which emphasise the role of particular mechanisms in the emergence of democracy. Meanwhile, the term 'actor-driven' fails to make clear that the theories in question focus most certainly on political elites, to the exclusion of other potential actors. The centrality of such other actors to the present work seems to render the term 'elite-agency approach' the most sensible in the description of the theories of O'Donnell et al., Linz and Stepan, and their cohorts.

9 In addition to O'Donnell et al., some of the more prominent contributions from this school include Malloy and Seligson (1987) and di Palma (1990).

The latter might influence the behaviour of certain individuals and groups at particular points in the transition, however the 'short-term political calculations' which form the basis of the authors' understanding of democratisation, 'cannot be “deduced” from or “imputed” to' structural variables (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986, p. 5). Instead, decisions were to be understood as occurring against a backdrop of 'unexpected events (*fortuna*), insufficient information, hurried and audacious choices, confusion about motives and interests, plasticity, and even indefiniteness of political identities, as well as the talents of specific individuals (*virtù*)' (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986, p. 5).

Elite-agency theories were particularly successful in demonstrating the weaknesses apparently inherent in earlier structural accounts of democracy's emergence. By the middle of the 1980s, taking into account the Southern European and Latin American experiences, it would have been difficult to disagree with the assertion that many previous theories were 'inadequately prepared for the intervening role of political actors; inadequately prepared to perceive the extent to which innovative political action can contribute to democratic evolution' (di Palma 1990, p. 8). This seeming deficiency on the part of prior theories enabled the elite-agency approach to claim a certain hegemony in the field of democratisation studies (Collier & Mahoney 1997, p. 285). Indeed, the elite-agency school's dominance of the democratisation field continued for some time, even after a number of Asian and African transitions, as well as the spectacular Eastern European revolutions, seemed to show the severe limitations of an approach which depended solely on unfettered political elites.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.1 Recent theory – variety and convergence

The end of the Cold War was greeted by the emergence of a more prosaic trajectory in democratisation studies. Despite the ongoing hegemony of the elite-agency approach, a

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<sup>10</sup> Contributions dating from as late as the end of the 1990s continue to refer to the elite-agency approach as dominating the field (Weingast 1997, p. 245, Collier 1999, p. 8). Perhaps the pessimism which seems to have reigned throughout much of the 1990s regarding the chances of democracy being consolidated in many of these newly open polities (Lipset et al. 1993, p. 171, Zakaria 1997, 2003) led observers to hesitate before committing themselves by pointing out the obvious weaknesses in the accepted wisdom.

number of commentators throughout the 1990s proffered alternative explanations. Thus, Rueschemeyer et al. (1992) presented an approach which built upon the work of Moore, and saw democratisation as the result of working-class mobilisation. Concurrently, the role of values as a determining factor re-emerged in the work of both Putnam (1993) and Weingast (1997). Putnam sought to demonstrate the role played by seemingly entrenched cultural factors in determining the diverging political development of Northern and Southern Italy. In contrast, Weingast described a model according to which values and political reality were mutually constitutive. In a parallel development, modernisation theory also made a significant comeback. Przeworski and Limongi (1997) may have hoped that their refutation of the role played by socioeconomic variables would be the final nail in the coffin of modernisation approaches, however their work instead spawned a spirited defence of such. A sustained series of works (Remmer 1996, Geddes 1999, Boix & Stokes 2003, Doorenspleet 2004, Epstein et al. 2006, Wucherpfennig & Deutsch 2009) have thus acted to return the understandings of structural theories to the centre of discussions of political development.

The 1990s also bore witness to the emergence of a number of accounts which considered the role of the masses in democratisation processes. Such contributions were no doubt at least partly motivated by a desire to explain the seemingly obvious role of ordinary people in instigating and promoting political change in transitions throughout Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. Bratton and van de Walle (1992, pp. 432) presented an analysis of recent political reform across Africa which identified 'a clear, positive relationship between popular protest and political reform'. Political change occurred where regimes lost legitimacy, were rejected by their citizens, and opposition elites offered more democratic alternatives (Bratton & van de Walle 1992, pp. 429-30).<sup>11</sup> Collier and Mahoney (1997) find similarly in their account of the very Southern European and Latin American transitions which informed the majority of the elite-agency literature. Collier and Mahoney argue that, in the five cases they study, mass actors, including labour movements, either caused the 'forced retreat' of authoritarian incumbents or otherwise helped to redefine and maintain the momentum of derailed

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<sup>11</sup> Strikingly, no reform occurred in any of the countries which featured no protest, while '[i]n all sixteen countries where demonstrators demanded political change, governments responded - without exception - with political reform' (Bratton & van de Walle 1992, p. 432).

transitions (Collier & Mahoney 1997, pp. 286-7). McFaul (2002) offered similar conclusions in his study of post-communist transitions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Compared to earlier Third Wave transitions, 'the degree of cooperation and mobilization within society was more salient', while mass actors were 'instrumental' in achieving successful political change (McFaul 2002, p. 222).

In addition to the continuing diversity of factors asserted as leading to democracy, a number of scholars sought to provide accounts more prosaic in themselves. Evidence of this is to be found in the proposal by several contributors of multiple possible paths to democracy. Karl and Schmitter (1991), for example, asserted the existence of four diverging paths to democracy, while Linz and Stepan (1996, pp. 57-60) suggested at least seven. McFaul (2002), meanwhile, argued the transitions constituting each wave of democratisation to have exhibited a distinct course. The acknowledgement of multiple possible paths to democracy suggested a certain maturity on the part of democratisation scholarship. Contributors seemed to be no longer necessarily fixated on proving the overriding significance of a particular process or causal factor, rather often contenting themselves with pursuing smaller truths.

A further significant intellectual development, arguably greater than the acceptance of multiple potential paths, is suggested by the increasing number of scholars who have called for the combination of analytical approaches in understanding political change (Levine 1988, di Palma 1990, Munck 1994). The search for comprehensive approaches which would incorporate both structural and agency-based insights was no doubt motivated by an appreciation of the indispensability of each. The sheer volume of recent work supporting the role of socioeconomic development in bringing about democratisation has ensured its continued consideration. Despite the influence of Przeworski and Limongi's (1997) findings to the contrary, the link between socioeconomic development and democracy has been again firmly established by a host of contributors (Remmer 1996, Geddes 1999, Boix & Stokes 2003, Doorenspleet 2004, Epstein et al. 2006, Wucherpfennig & Deutsch 2009). Meanwhile, the legacy of the elite-agency school has been the widespread acknowledgement that such actors do play at least some role in democratisation. Some of the elite agency school's more radical

claims might now be rejected, however democratisation theorists can no longer completely ignore the role played by political elites. As Bermeo (1992, p. 276) states it, authoritarian breakdown may be the result of diverging processes, however democratic institutions are necessarily designed by a 'select few'.

A number of recent contributions have heeded this challenge to unite structural and agency-based understandings, however the results have thus far been limited. Those attempts which have been made have failed to properly connect the two fields, instead reflecting an overly simplistic melding of structural and agency-based theories. Huntington (1991), for example, suggests a model whereby structural development places a polity in a transition 'zone', whereupon the achievement of democracy depends on the choices made by relatively disembodied political elites. Huntington fails, however, to explain how changing structural variables might impact upon the decisions of these actors. Likewise, Inglehart and Welzel have sought to demonstrate in a series of contributions the significance of structural factors, while simultaneously acknowledging the role played by political elites. These commentators make a particularly strong case for the effect of socioeconomic modernisation, acting through the intervening variable of 'self-expression values', in leading to democratisation. The connecting mechanism in this case is identified as collective action (Welzel 2007), however both the way in which this action is provoked by value change and the way in which such action affects the decisions of political elites are underspecified.

## **2.2 Limitations of the democratisation literature**

Thus, despite regular calls for theory which would combine the understandings of structural approaches with those of elite-agency theories, little has been established in the way of an overall framework. The key factor in establishing such a framework is likely to be explaining how structural factors are transformed into elite decisions, as Doorenspleet (2004, pp. 310-1) argues. Here it will be argued that the democratisation literature exhibits a number of related weaknesses which have so far acted to limit the development of explanations of such transformations. The majority of democratisation

scholarship has remained committed to a view of democratisation as occurring in rapid transitions. This transition fetish has in turn arguably led to ignorance of longer term processes which are potentially at work in instances of political change. Partly as a result of this, democratisation scholars have largely sidelined the masses, a group whose influence is often, but not exclusively, to be found in such longer term processes.

While Rustow (1970) and Dahl (1971) both identified the existence of gradual routes to democracy, subsequent scholarship has almost exclusively focused on democratic 'transitions', whereby political change occurs very rapidly. Whether desirable or not, this fashion is arguably easily understood on the part of agency-based accounts, which have sought to minimise the importance of longer-term, structural causes whilst emphasising the proximate actions of political actors. However, structural theorists have likewise adopted an approach which treats democratic change as occurring over a short period of time.<sup>12</sup> As Rudbeck & Sigurdsson (1999, p. 5) summarise it, agency theorists have 'emphasized the importance of short-term dynamics' in their study of elite decision-making processes, while structuralists have seen democratisation as 'a package solution delivered if, and only if, the socioeconomic circumstances are right'.

The almost universal recent treatment of democratisation as occurring in rapid transitions, whether caused by longer-term structural variables or the actions of particular agents, has met some criticism. Creed (1998, p. xv, quoted in Paley 2002, p. 478), for example, argues that the term 'transition' itself is 'problematic because its common usage implies a temporary condition and an inevitable result'. That democracy is not simply achieved via a temporary period of democratisation ought to be evident from the abundance of literature which has sought to understand how the established Western democracies might deepen popular control and participation. Meanwhile, a number of recent studies of democratisation have highlighted the precarious state of many third and fourth wave democracies, thus supporting Creed's assertion that democratisation does not in fact produce an inevitable result.<sup>13</sup>

12 Inglehart and Welzel provide a good example of this. For these scholars, democratisation's root causes of socioeconomic and value change are long-term, gradual processes. Nonetheless, the eventually resulting regime change does 'not emerge gradually over many years but emerge[s] within sharply focused periods' (Inglehart & Welzel 2005, p. 214).

13 For an analysis of the various prefixes which have been attached in recent democratisation work to the word 'democracy' in order to describe apparently incomplete democratisations, see Collier and



The potential for the transition fetish to obscure other, arguably more significant processes, is evident in the concern which scholars often show for 'founding' elections. The concept, which refers to the first elections deemed to be democratic following authoritarian rule, has become highly popular in the democratisation field since its coining by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986). An example of the danger of excessive reliance on the concept is found in Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005, p. 39), who consider Senegal's transition to have taken place in the 2000 to 2001 period. These contributors identify this relatively short duration as constituting the country's transition 'point', no less. This period indeed featured the country's first competitive elections, reflected in a subsequent two-point improvement of Freedom House's index of freedom, and the seemingly all-important shift from the 'partly-free' to 'free' category. However, this focus ignores the five-point increase Freedom House found the country to have achieved in the 1972 to 1984 period, which arguably opened the political space to the degree that the opposition could safely field a presidential candidate in the first place.<sup>14</sup>

The focus of democratisation scholars on institutional measures is arguably understandable given the already contentious situation regarding the definition of democracy. Much ink has been spilled over the relative logic of understanding democracy in terms of formal institutions, or alternatively in terms of its efficacy. Behind many of these arguments is a fundamental political divide between contributors who assert the value of freedom and those who stress the significance of equality. Despite this deep divergence, the vast majority of democratisation scholars have adopted measures of democracy which reflect formal, procedural definitions, whether due to ideological reasons or due to considerations of simplicity. The occurrence of

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Levitsky (1997). One of the more compelling and provocative treatments of the supposedly precarious nature of states which have recently experienced democratic transition is that of Zakaria (2003).

<sup>14</sup> Empirical evidence shows that indeed the majority of recent democratisers have achieved significant progress in a short period of time, however a substantial number have featured extended periods of incremental change. (It is possible that indices measuring democracy levels exaggerate the magnitude of political change surrounding democratic transitions due to a potential for observers to be swept up in the euphoria of the moment. Such an effect, were it to exist, would naturally be a cause of excessive emphasis on rapid transitions in the democratisation literature.) Of countries which have reached such a level of democracy as to be termed 'free' by Freedom House since 1975, most have achieved significant shifts in the space of up to five years. Nonetheless, a number of countries which have recently become significantly more democratic have done so gradually, over the course of more than a decade. These include Ghana (1991-2005, nine point change), Senegal (1972-84, five point change), Tanzania (1989-2002, five point change), Lesotho (1988-2002, seven point change), Kuwait (1990-2000, five point change) and Brazil (1973-85, six point change).



elections is easier to observe and quantify than are the nuances of discourse. Whether or not one agrees with the political implications of this approach, it remains understandable, and in fact has come to so dominate empirical democratisation scholarship that alternative approaches seem unlikely to gain traction in the interim.

However, the heavy reliance of democratisation scholars on readily quantifiable, formal data is reflected in a parallel preoccupation with the procedural features of political systems in theoretical democratisation work. This is unfortunate, as such an approach renders more difficult the comprehension of wider factors at work in democratisation processes. That the occurrence of elections is easier to measure than factors such as legitimacy, dignity and the prevalent discourse in a given society does not necessitate ignorance of the latter in understanding political change. The lack of consideration shown by the democratisation literature for such factors results in a parallel underestimation of longer term processes which may bear significant influence on political trajectories. Many of these factors and processes are ones which particularly concern ordinary people. By focusing on the workings of these processes, incorporating variables which are potentially less easily measured, and extending the period considered as constituting an episode of political change, it may be possible to enhance current understandings of democratisation.

### **2.3 Improving democratisation theory**

The failure of political scientists to predict many of the episodes of democratisation which have occurred in the last three decades suggests the need for more comprehensive understandings. By overcoming the aforementioned limitations, it may well be that democratisation scholars could present a better explanation of political change. Here it will be argued that serious consideration of the role of the masses may provide a significant route to challenging these limitations. The empirical work of Bratton and van de Walle (1992), Collier and Mahoney (1997) and McFaul (2002), as well as the more theoretically inclined Welzel (2007), provide an important foundation for such an approach. Nonetheless, the scope of this area of investigation suggests that these

contributions constitute but the first step in what is likely to be a significant academic undertaking. In order to properly interface with the role of the masses in political change, democratisation scholarship requires a substantial theoretical framework within which to work. The field's historical side-lining of the masses has resulted in the complete absence of such a framework within the democratisation literature. This theoretical deficit suggests the potential benefit of importing theory from elsewhere. It thus seems expedient to look to scholarship on collective action and social movements as a potential source of theoretical structure.

Over the past half century, the social movement literature has evolved deep understandings of the role of collective action in political and social life. This literature thus potentially holds significant insights for understanding political change. The inclusion of such insights in understandings of democratisation may answer the challenge ventured more than two decades ago by Levine (1988, pp. 388-9):

Leaders and followers cannot be examined in isolation, but must be grasped through the construction of organized social and political relationship ... much remains to be learned from close inspection of the "social bases" of democratic politics - the organized relations among mass publics, social movements and groups, and elements of leadership, motivation, and legitimacy.

While Levine's statement was essentially a criticism directed at elite-agency scholarship, it is one that could equally be applied to structural accounts of democratisation. Nonetheless, democratisation scholars adhering to both schools have largely failed to satisfy Levine's call to arms.

The democratisation literature has also largely ignored the insights contained in the social movement literature, which is unfortunate as they represent one potential path to answering Levine's challenge. Some exceptions to this rule do exist, however. Hall (2000) has performed a case study on the Romanian transition, in which social movement concepts are at the fore. Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005) and Ulfelder (2005, 2009) have presented comparative works which support the hypothesis that

collective action increases the likelihood of authoritarian breakdown. Democratisation scholars have been most reluctant, however, to attempt the construction of a theoretical framework within which collective action would act to encourage democratisation. The only comprehensive attempt at such has come from Rudbeck and Sigurdsson (1999), who explicitly seek to incorporate the understandings of the social movement literature into existing democratisation theory. While the quantity of contributions from democratisation scholars looking to incorporate social movement concepts has been disappointingly limited, they nonetheless form a potential foundation for further exploration. Attention will now be turned to scholarship working from a social movement perspective which has sought to explain democratisation, before an attempt is made to establish a theoretical space for the extension of this foundation.

### **3 Social movement approaches to democratisation**

While democratisation scholars have paid only the most limited attention to the role of the masses in democratisation processes, a number of social movement scholars have attempted to adapt the understandings of their field to explain political change in authoritarian societies. Such efforts ought to be commended, as they represent a fundamentally new, and arguably much needed, approach to understanding democratisation. Democratisation scholars have thus far failed to take this novel approach seriously, however. This is most unfortunate, as a comprehensive marriage of the understandings of both fields has the potential to be most rewarding. Furthermore, democratisation scholars may be in a position to rectify two deficiencies in existing attempts to explain the object of their study through the prism of social movement theory.

The first of these deficiencies concerns the lack of reference to extant democratisation theory. While the major approaches to explaining political change have been subjected to intense criticism throughout the period since their appearance, it is undeniable that they have nonetheless presented particularly compelling arguments as to their bases. The extent to which structural variables influence eventual democratisation has been one of the most hotly debated subjects in political science, however, given the wealth of evidence to support such a link, it would seem perilous to disregard it altogether. Likewise, while much ink has been spilled over the exact degree to which political elites are able to independently determine political transition, it would also appear grossly negligent to deny that such actors do in fact write constitutions and pass laws and judgements. Nonetheless, those social movement scholars who have attempted to harness the understandings of their field in order to explain democratisation have often been guilty of ignoring both of these conclusions.

Illustrative of this trend are works by such doyens of the social movement literature as

Tilly, Tarrow and McAdam, who are guilty both when working in combination and, in the case of the former, individually. These scholars undoubtedly ought to be rewarded with gratitude for their daring attempts to leave the familiar surroundings of the social movement field, where their reputations are immense, and venture into the relative wilderness of democratisation theory. The fruits of their labours exhibit, as expected, colossal knowledge and understanding of the workings of social movements in general, and of historical episodes of collective action, particularly those that have taken place in European history. Nonetheless, attempts to expand understandings of democratisation, whether or not novel in their approach, ought to situate themselves relative to existing theory. These contributors have foregone such considerations. One finds little reference to the major democratisation theories in the several treatments of the subject from these contributors (Tilly 2004, Tilly 2007, McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001). The two contributions from Tilly make absolutely no mention of such democratisation doyens as Lipset and Rustow, while Moore receives attention on but one page of the earlier publication. Meanwhile, the third work listed here claims to seek an explanation of the theoretical void between structural and agency-based accounts of democratisation (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001, p. 264), however fails categorically to elaborate the connection between the former's socioeconomic variables and the collective action which the authors see as key to democratisation.<sup>15</sup>

A number of less prominent social movement scholars have also attempted to utilise the insights of their field to explain democratisation, often including more reference to the work of existing democratisation theories. Nonetheless, the resulting scholarship has also failed to properly incorporate the rich tradition of democratisation understandings into a comprehensive analytical framework. Schock (2005) arguably presents one of the most interesting of these works, wherein he assembles a significant argument as to the potential for non-violent mass movements to cause political change. However, despite correctly identifying the void between structural and agency-based explanations of democratisation, and the potential for social movement understandings to fill that void, Schock fails to connect his insights with existing theory. Structural approaches to democratisation, for example, are considered in merely three sentences of the book, one

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<sup>15</sup> Ackerman and Rodal's (2008) less widely cited assessment of the historical role played by collective action in achieving democratic change likewise ignores the traditional approaches to democratisation.

of which serves to dismiss their utility (Schock 2005, pp. 24-5). A similar approach is evident in the work of Glenn (2003), who makes an important case for combining social movement understandings of collective action with democratisation's insights regarding political elites, using the Polish and Czechoslovak examples. Unfortunately, Glenn completely ignores the understandings inherent in structural approaches to democratisation, making almost no reference whatsoever to prevailing conditions, economic, social or otherwise.<sup>16</sup> Glenn can thus not explain what might have motivated mass mobilisation. A significant case is made for considering the interaction of collective action and elite bargaining, however it is not at all clear what factors led to that collective action in the first place.

The second deficiency apparent in existing attempts on the part of social movement scholars to explain democratisation is the predilection to draw insights from a limited range of social movement scholarship. While the field of social movement study has experienced a significant degree of intellectual convergence in recent years, those contributors who explicitly tackle democratisation often continue to exhibit a substantial level of favouritism towards a particular approach. The social movement literature exhibits a wide range of theoretical explanations for the emergence and subsequent trajectories of movements. It would seem that efforts to incorporate social movement insights into the democratisation theory would best benefit by taking seriously as many of these approaches as possible. Unfortunately, social movement theorists who have attempted to tackle the subject of democratisation have yet to properly rise to this challenge.<sup>17</sup>

One contribution which exhibits this deficiency, despite its good intentions, is that of Tarrow (1991). Tarrow's assertion of the necessity for democratisation theorists to take

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<sup>16</sup> This despite Glenn arguing that the emphasis of many explanations on elite preferences 'suffers from excessive voluntarism' (Glenn 2003, p. 116). Glenn further quotes Haggard and Kaufmann's criticism of such as being 'disconnected from economic conditions and social forces', and missing 'important determinants of bargaining power as well as substantive concerns that drive parties to seek or oppose democratization in the first place' (Glenn 2003, p. 116, quoting Haggard & Kaufmann 1997, p. 263).

<sup>17</sup> Two exceptions to this trend are the works of Oberschall (2000) and Glenn (2003), both of which draw from a wide range of social movement approaches in seeking to understand the role of mass movements in the recent democratic transitions in Eastern Europe. However, both exhibit the first deficiency elaborated here, namely the failure to locate their contributions in existing democratisation theory. They nonetheless represent a promising model for future efforts to incorporate social movement understandings in explanations of democratisation.

social movements seriously in the wake of the Eastern European transitions of 1989 was a novel and much needed contribution to the field of democratisation studies. Nonetheless, both this work and Tarrow's subsequent analysis of the diverging experiences of social movements in post-World War One Italy and 1970s Spain are limited by their dependence upon a narrow conception of the forces which determine social movement trajectories. In the case of Eastern Europe, Tarrow argues that the resource mobilisation and cognitive approaches to social movements have little explanatory power (Tarrow 1991, p. 14).<sup>18</sup> Here, as in his later treatment of political change in Italy and Spain, Tarrow focuses on what he considers to be the determining role played by political opportunities. Tarrow argues that such opportunities expand at particular intervals, according to a pattern which he had in a prior work christened 'cycles of protest' (Tarrow 1983). Tarrow's highly significant argument as to the value to be gained by considering social movements in anticipating political change is unfortunately thus weakened by the author's predilection for a particular approach and exclusion of other explanatory factors.

The work of Tilly and his associates also exhibits a certain degree of theoretical bias due to its emphasis on longer-term mechanisms as the drivers of democratisation. References to political opportunities are frequent, however Tilly's favouritism towards repertoires of contention is evident in his dismissal of understandings which appeal to individual agency. Thus, the resource mobilisation approach gets short shrift (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001, p. 15), while factors such as framing, identity and emotions are likewise largely overlooked. Democracy's ebbs and flows are generated by large-scale, long-term societal machinations. The possibility that individual actors might be able to influence the process, and that a polity's direction might be up for grabs at particular critical junctures, is thus rejected.

The acceptance of the desirability of interfacing with social movement understandings

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18 While it may be true that the types of organisations understood by traditional, Western-focused resource mobilisation theories would have had a difficult time operating in socialist Eastern Europe, Tarrow arguably displays a lack of imagination by failing to apply resource mobilisation concepts to those movements which did exist. Furthermore, while the Eastern European uprisings may not have resembled the 'life-space' movements considered by orthodox new social movement theory, Tarrow likewise refrains from utilising factors such as emotions and identity which have been asserted by such cognitive theories as significant, and were no doubt present in the Eastern European examples.

on the part of democratisation scholars has the potential to assist in the alleviation of these deficiencies. Contributors with a solid grounding in democratisation theory are likely to be able to invoke the understandings of this field, while simultaneously seeking to identify the role of the masses in political transformation. Furthermore, such scholars are likely to be able to draw insights from the breadth of social movement research, without favouring one approach over another. Of course it could well be argued that democratisation scholars are as likely to favour one particular school from within their field, while keeping an open mind as to social movement explanations. If contributors working from both the democratisation and social movement perspectives were to exert similar efforts in attempting to understand the role of the masses in political change, they may be able to ensure a greater degree of balance than would either group working alone.

As a means of supporting such a project, attention will now be turned to the insights contained in the social movement literature which may be of relevance. Firstly, an attempt will be made to understand how mass-influenced democratisation might unfold, as suggested by social movement scholarship. Thereafter, an appraisal will be made of the factors which that literature implies are likely to lead to the appearance and success of democratising movements. Having done so, a research agenda will be outlined in the hope that subsequent contributions may take this project further.



## 4 Understanding outcomes

A theoretical framework for understanding democratisation, influenced by the masses or otherwise, needs to present a conception of what such political change is likely to entail. Before attempting to understand the factors which are likely to lead to democratisation, it seems worthwhile to consider exactly what should be understood as constituting such change, and by what paths it might be achieved. Fortuitously, social movement scholarship has important insights as to the ways in which movements can effect change. By taking the social movement literature seriously, it becomes clear that successful mass-influenced democratisation is likely to be a nuanced phenomenon, and that it can potentially occur according to three generalised paths.

Having recognised both these nuances and these three paths, it ought to be possible to delve deeper into the processes which are likely to lead to collective action, and thus produce a model better able to predict democratisation. The following discussion will present an analysis of the relevant social movement understandings, before elaborating the three paths thereby suggested. The workings of each of these ideal paths will be considered, before an assessment is made of how they might be incorporated into existing democratisation theory. Once this is achieved, the next section will contemplate the insights available in the social movement literature which may help in understanding the likelihood of a given polity embarking on one or more of these paths. In doing so, it is hoped that a framework will be constructed which may be capable of producing more accurate explanations, and predictions, of political transformation.

Social movement theorists have expended considerable effort attempting to define the possible outcomes of social movements. While scholars of democratisation typically see such as merely constituting progress towards greater institutional democracy, students of social movements have established more nuanced understandings. Social movement scholars suggest that success ought to be measured in broader terms, and have accordingly produced a number of outcome typologies which reflect that belief. Perhaps

the most widely recognised of these typologies is that of Gamson (1990). Gamson proposes that the success of social movements can be understood both in terms of policy gains for the movement's target beneficiaries, and in terms of the acceptance of the movement as a legitimate interlocutor. The possibility of success or failure in each category results in four possible combinations. A full response occurs when the movement gains acceptance and achieves policy gains; pre-emption brings policy gains but not acceptance of the movement; co-optation implies recognition of the movement but no policy gains; and collapse signifies the movement's ending without either acceptance or policy gains. In a later work, Gamson (1998) further embellishes this typology to include the effects of social movements on culture. Here Gamson focuses on the potential of social movements to influence public discourse, particularly through the media.

The understandings of social movement outcomes inherent in Gamson's typology have interesting implications for the study of the effects of contentious action on democratisation processes, in two important ways. Firstly, the outcomes of mass reform-seeking action which can be considered successful are multiple. Gamson's typology shows that outcomes can be considered not only in terms of policy change, but also in terms of alteration of the environment in which politics takes place, both in terms of actor recognition and, in his subsequent iteration, public discourse. By examining their effect on the environment, social movements can be considered to have achieved some measure of success, even without policy change, if they are able to gain acceptance as legitimate interlocutors or to have influenced public attitudes towards their goals.

Secondly, Gamson's typology makes it clear that positive movement outcomes can be the product of varying degrees of pre-emption and reaction on the part of incumbents. In terms of democratisation, Gamson's full response outcome might constitute regime change and the establishment of the challenging party as a legitimate political actor, whereas pre-emptive policy change might be understood as authoritarian incumbents adopting democratic reform before being forced to do so. A comprehensive understanding of mass-influenced democratisation would no doubt recognise that any particular instance of such is likely to feature both processes. Some recognition of this is

present in the democratisation literature. Markoff (1996, p. 24) provides the contrasting examples of South Africa, where transition to democracy followed a 'protracted struggle', and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe, where rulers introduced reform in order to subdue revolutionary pressures. Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005, pp. 4-5) likewise recognise that political change is at times generated by civic pressure, at others times by an alliance of civil actors and reformist political elites, and at others times still by incumbents seeking to avoid pressure from below or outside. Nonetheless, ignorance of the role of the masses in much of the democratisation literature has led to limited consideration of pre-emption as a cause of political change. After all, if authoritarian elites are immune to pressure from below, they are unlikely to pre-emptively reform in order to avert their own subsequent radical action. The following discussion will thus seek in some small way to rectify this lack of attention to pre-emptive reform. In terms of the three ideal paths identified here, pre-emption is likely to feature more in the first two, and is thus considered more deeply in the consideration thereof.<sup>19</sup>

#### **4.1 Three possible mass-influenced paths to democracy**

The broader understandings contained in the social movement literature of the range of possible movement outcomes suggest the need for a more nuanced approach to democratisation. Political change arguably ought not to be seen in terms of a linear progression, but rather in a more holistic way. To this end, three distinct paths are identified here by which social movements may be able to advance democratisation. Firstly, contentious action could cause a rapid transition to democracy, either by way of the authoritarian incumbent's pre-emptively reforming to avert subsequent difficulties, or by the incumbent's complete exit from the political arena. Secondly, contentious action could lead to gradual increases in the level of democracy, again due to pre-emption or forced adoption, whereby democracy is achieved over an extended period of time. Thirdly, mobilisation has the potential to influence discourse and understandings

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<sup>19</sup> Pre-emptive reform in terms of the third path identified here would constitute political reform in response to changes in prevailing attitudes, without the intervening occurrence, real or expected, of mass mobilisation. The possibility of elites thus pre-emptively introducing democratic reform due to their identification of attitudinal shifts seems unlikely given the oft-repeated assertion in the democratisation literature that autocrats only relinquish power when forced to do so. Nonetheless, Gilley (2007, p. 272) suggests that this course of events took place in the case of Taiwan.

of the relative legitimacy of societal actors (including themselves), facilitating democratisation at a later date.

The three paths outlined here are envisaged as ideal paths. It is highly unlikely that any real-world democratisation process would be witnessed as perfectly adhering to any one of these routes. Rather, it is probable that any particular mass-influenced democratisation process would feature elements of each path. At most, it might be expected that a country's experience of political reform resembles one of these paths more closely than the others. The purpose of these paths is thus to stimulate consideration of the diverging processes which are likely to be present in a democratising polity. Their purpose is not to allow the identification of particular democratisation experiences as belonging to one or other of these trajectories. This is reflected by the fact that individual examples of democratisation, such as that of Britain, are utilised in the following discussion in the consideration of more than one path.

Of the three paths identified here, recent democratisation theory is equipped only to deal with the first, and then only with the assistance of some cognitive re-orientation. Rapid transitions are common currency for democratisation scholars, however incorporating the first path into existing theory would still require the inclusion of recognition of the masses. As has been seen, the transition fetish exhibited by the majority of democratisation scholarship means that longer term processes are ignored. That the influence exerted by the masses is often most heavily realised in exactly such longer term processes has resulted in the ignorance of this group in most accounts of political change. The second and third paths, relying as they do upon longer term processes, are therefore likely to prove more problematic for democratisation theory to incorporate.

Consideration of the various outcomes identified in social movements, as well as the factors understood as determining the likelihood of these outcomes, has the potential to broaden understandings of democratisation. By interfacing with the longer term processes suggested by social movement scholarship, as well as acknowledging the role of the masses suggested therein, students of democratisation ought to be able to improve their own understandings. The attention of this work will now turn to a deeper

discussion of the three mass-influenced paths to democracy previously identified as implied by social movement theory. This discussion will be followed by a detailed examination of the factors implied by social movement theory as potentially significant in predicting the development of a particular society along these paths.

## **4.2 Path one: mass pressure causing rapid transition to democracy**

The first path suggested by the social movement literature by which the masses may be able to spur democratisation is one where ordinary people, either by mobilisation or the perceived threat thereof, cause a rapid transition to democracy. This route potentially includes processes ranging from full-blown revolution, through strikes and civil disobedience, to the withdrawal of previously bestowed legitimacy. Transition itself can then be observed as having occurred with varying degrees of pre-emption and reaction. At one end of the spectrum are incumbent autocrats who, unsure of the tenability of their position, introduce reform in order to avoid expected contention. The other end of the scale is represented by situations in which rulers refuse to enact political change, and are subsequently removed by their publics. This path is most reflective of these varying elements of pre-emption and reflection. Dictators seem to be more often motivated to act pre-emptively in order to avoid the potential loss of life and limb sometimes present in rapid transitions than they are by the possibility of factors understood by the other two paths, such as changing discourse and expanding rights and selectorates. While these latter factors no doubt inform the perceptions autocrats have of their position and its tenability, that rapid transitions are more obviously capable of featuring pre-emption renders the treatment of this path as a particularly salient place in which to consider such.

The historical record, and especially the third and fourth waves of democratisation, show that popular demand has led on a number of occasions to rapid transitions to democracy exhibiting varying degrees of incumbent pre-emption and reaction. At one extreme, a number of autocrats have been literally forced from power by mobilised

publics. An example of this is the removal from power in the Philippines in 1986 of Marcos, who attempted to cling to power to the very end, despite mass mobilisation and military mutiny (Schock 2005, pp. 56-90). Occupying the middle of the spectrum are cases where incumbent rulers have chosen to exit the stage at a point where other, potentially less savoury options are still available to the regime. Such a course has often been associated with military dictatorships, where army leaders are seen as often eager to relinquish power at the point where mild repression no longer achieves its goals, leaving harsher tactics or reform as the only possible alternatives (Ulfelder 2005, p. 314). Indicative examples might include the Bangladeshi transition of 1990-91 as well as numerous retreats from power by the Thai military (Karatnycky and Ackerman 2005). In both countries, mass mobilisation has been met by army repression, with the relatively low number of resulting casualties sufficing to convince the military rulers of the preferability of reform.

Nearer the pre-emptive end of the spectrum, a number of autocrats have introduced democratic reform to avoid expected conflict with populations demanding greater openness.<sup>20</sup> Such a process is evident in the case of Hungary, which Munck and Leff (1997, pp. 351-2) consider to be an example of what they term incumbent 'extrication'. Reformist elements in the Hungarian Communist Party recognised the need for reform and sought 'to preempt an anticommunist backlash by gaining credit for their responsiveness to political change'. In a number of cases of pre-emption, incumbents have seemingly expected to maintain power under the newly democratic system, only to find their level of support to be significantly less than what they imagined. In such cases, democratic reforms are often introduced in order to bolster the incumbent's legitimacy, however these reforms subsequently deliver power to the opposition. This course of events took place in Poland, where the Communist Party hoped to maintain power by holding elections under circumstances expected to favour the Party (Glenn 2003, p. 107). The elections, however, showed the Communist Party to be highly unpopular, and returned a resounding victory for the opposition.

To their credit, a number of recent democratisation contributions have considered mass

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<sup>20</sup> Popular demand has also caused military leaders to remove unpopular civilian incumbents, for example in Mali in 1991 (Bratton & van de Walle 1992, p. 440).

action as a possible cause of democratic transitions. As has been seen, many of the third and fourth wave transitions featured significant mass mobilisation. In a number of these cases, significant intellectual creativity would seem to be necessary to explain these episodes without invoking the masses. Moreover, the fact that in these cases various constituencies mobilised in polities exhibiting diverging cultures and levels of development rules out a reliance on simple socioeconomic factors or narrowly defined groups such as 'labour' or the 'middle class'. Thus, several recent works have invoked ordinary people as significant actors in a manner that has little precedent in the democratisation literature. There therefore exists a ready foundation within democratisation scholarship for acknowledging this ideal path of mass-influenced democratisation.

Scholarship which has identified the role of the masses in recent transitions includes that of Tarrow (1991) on the Eastern European revolutions, that of Bratton & van de Walle (1992, 1994) on Africa, and that of Collier & Mahoney (1997) on Latin America.<sup>21</sup> These contributors have described the actions of various collective actors, and the effects these actors have had in driving democratisation. A number of quantitative studies have also been performed, with results unambiguously supporting the significance of mass action in bringing about democratisation in the last four decades. Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005, p. 6) have analysed 67 transitions since the early 1970s, finding civic resistance to be a 'key factor in driving 50' of these cases. These authors conclude that 'the presence of strong and cohesive non-violent civic coalitions is the most important of the factors examined in contributing to freedom' (Karatnycky & Ackerman 2005, p. 7). Ulfelder and Lustik (2005), in a study of the causes of transitions since the early 1970s, likewise find collective action to play a particularly important role. These contributors find that, *ceteris paribus*, the presence of 'any significant non-violent collective action' in the preceding two years approximately triples a country's chances of undergoing a transition to democracy (Ulfelder & Lustik 2005, p. 10).

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21 See also Glenn (2003) for discussion of the role of mass mobilisation in the Eastern Europe experience, and Hall (2000) for a detailed consideration of the same in the case of Romania's transition. In addition, Schock (2005) presents an informative comparative analysis of the success of mass mobilisation in the Philippines in deposing Marcos, as opposed to the failure of pro-democracy activists in achieving regime change in Burma in the late 1980s.

Democratisation scholarship remains, however, significantly limited in its acceptance of the role of the masses in transitions to democracy. While the contributions mentioned here suggest that a path by which the masses spur rapid transition to democracy has been discovered by the democratisation field, the workings and processes involved remain underspecified. Nonetheless, of the three paths of mass-influenced democratisation outlined in this work, this first path is the most easily understood by current democratisation theory. While a limited number of scholars of democratisation take mass action seriously, the field's focus on rapid transitions enables a relatively simple theoretical manoeuvre to suffice in order to incorporate consideration of the role of the masses in such. Compared to the intellectual gymnastics required on the part of current democratisation theory in order to include consideration of the other two mass-influenced paths identified here, greater attention to understandings of rapid transition to democracy driven by the masses thus ought to be relatively simple.

Greater awareness of the action of this first mass-influenced path to democracy can be facilitated by the integration of concepts developed over decades of social movement research. While this field may be of more benefit in explaining the second and third mass-influenced paths to democracy identified here, it nonetheless has important understandings of the role of pre-emption in assessing movement outcomes. Furthermore, social movement theory can potentially supply particularly useful tools for understanding factors which lead to the emergence of movements and the successful achievement of their goals. Such factors will be the focus of consideration following the elaboration of the remaining two ideal paths of mass-influenced democratisation.

### **4.3 Path two: the masses causing gradual increases in democracy over time**

The second path to democracy suggested by the social movement literature is one whereby the masses act in such a way as to cause gradual increases in the measurable level of democracy over a period of time. The social movement literature features a strong emphasis on protracted struggles between collective actors and entrenched



forces, as well as on the accompanying incremental development which is often achieved thereby. By integrating the understandings generated in that field, democratisation theory stands to benefit in terms of its ability to explain the diverging experiences of countries undergoing political change. Recognition of a gradual path on the part of the democratisation literature has typically been limited to the possibility of the incremental enfranchisement of previously excluded constituencies, particularly groups defined by race or class. Munck (1994, p. 355) makes a significant point in arguing that it is no longer possible in today's climate to grant political rights to particular groups while excluding others when potential groups are considered in such terms.<sup>22</sup> However, in-groups can be selected along other, potentially less anachronistic lines, while a number of other potential gradual routes to democracy also suggest themselves.

Firstly, recent work has identified the gradual extension of the 'selectorate' as a continuing feature in some societies.<sup>23</sup> Such extensions become sensible in light of the argument of Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999) that an expanded selectorate can improve a regime's longevity. By granting political influence to an increased proportion of society, an incumbent autocrat might hope to forestall pressures for more comprehensive liberalisation. Co-opting an additional societal grouping might thus represent the kind of 'unpalatable but unavoidable step to salvage political control' which an autocrat might 'calculate [to be] necessary to maintain themselves in power' (Bratton & van de Walle 1992, p. 421).<sup>24</sup> A pertinent example is that of a personalistic autocrat instituting a one-party system, whereby a significantly increased 'selectorate' enjoys some control over political processes. In this case, political power and influence over policy moves from being the exclusive domain of the ruler, and perhaps their close confidants, to being enjoyed by a wider, though limited, segment of society.

Furthermore, that 'the prospects for a democratic process are greater for transitions from

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22 Munck's assertion is, however, in and of itself debatable. The vast number of ethnic Kurds in Syria, ethnic Russians in the Baltic states, and ethnic Turks in Germany who have been for various reasons denied citizenship, and thus the ability to vote, suggest that restricting voting rights along ethnic lines continues to be feasible.

23 The selectorate is that part of society which has 'an institutionally legitimate right to participate in choosing the country's political leadership' (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999, p. 148).

24 See also Chalmers and Robinson (1982, pp. 11-14) for a detailed discussion of the processes surrounding the inclusion of additional groups in the 'political public', as they term it, and how this has been experienced in Latin America.

competitive one-party regimes than from other forms of neopatrimonial regime' suggests that such a shift in regime type may well represent a significant step on an incremental road to democracy (Bratton & van de Walle 1994, p. 484).

Secondly, democracy can be gradually introduced not by increasing the number of participants, but by slowly increasing the electoral rights, both formally and effectively, of all participants. Such a development could consist of the granting to citizens of gradually increasing formal voting rights. Alternatively, the effectiveness of granted electoral rights can be gradually enhanced. One way of achieving this is the strengthening of existing parliaments at the expense of the power of the autocratic ruler. Nominally independent but effectively toothless parliaments exist in the great majority of autocracies, where their empowerment would certainly represent an increase in democracy. Additionally, the introduction of greater competition within one-party systems also reflects an increase in effective political rights. While citizens remain restricted to choosing between party-approved candidates, the introduction of genuine competition between such candidates arguably corresponds to a tangible step towards democracy.

Thirdly, democracy levels can be gradually augmented not by increasing electoral rights, but by enhancing the multitude of non-electoral rights also understood as constitutive of democracy. Freedom of expression and freedom of the media have at times been significantly strengthened despite the absence of democratic elections. Autocratic rulers might calculate that the institution of such changes is unlikely to threaten their rule. Such a course of action may be seen as an effective way of meeting popular demands for reform, without relinquishing political control.

The historical record shows instances of all of these incremental steps towards democracy, more often than not as the result of public pressure or the threat thereof. The gradual path to democracy has been widely and uncontroversially recognised as having been followed in a number of Western European cases of the first wave of democratisation. Dahl (1971, pp. 41-2), for example, identifies such a route in the cases of Britain, Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In these first wave

democratisations, various societal groups gradually organised, made demands for greater political representation, and were subsequently rewarded with such. The classic example of this is perhaps Britain, where the aristocracy was first to assert, and achieve, its political rights, only to be followed by landowners, the entire adult male citizenry, and eventually also women. Regarding Britain's process of democratisation, Rustow (1970, p. 347) notes that 'it may be argued that it began before 1640 and was not accomplished until 1918'. That increasingly larger groups demanded and gained political rights over such a protracted period of time shows very clearly the workings of this process.

While the gradual broadening of the selectorate based on ethnic or socioeconomic lines has indeed been predominantly a feature of earlier, Western European democratisations,<sup>25</sup> a number of modern autocrats have expanded the selectorate in other ways. The establishment by personalistic dictators of one-party systems has occurred in several African cases, including Zambia and Ivory Coast, often due to a leader's desire to have their power 'consolidated and institutionalised' (Bratton & van de Walle 1994, pp. 482-3). The example of China is similar, whereby a party structure already existed, but was arguably so beholden to Mao as to be largely irrelevant. Following Mao's death, however, an end was witnessed to the absolute adherence to his whims, symbolised by the 'two whatevers' principle<sup>26</sup>, as well as the legitimacy his charismatic rule provided (Ng-Quinn 1982, p. 1199). Reformers thus 'attempted to make the state more inclusive and more rational-legal', in the process creating 'a more open, more transparent, more lawful, and more humane government' (McCormick 1990, p. xi). By establishing an effective party, China essentially shifted from being a personalistic dictatorship to a one-party system. Indeed, McCormick (1990, p. xi) argues that this represents 'an important step towards democracy'.

The case of China also provides an example of the incremental enhancement of the

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25 Intermittent attempts by the South African government to co-opt the 'coloured' population by the granting of greater political rights represents a relatively rare modern example. See McAdam et al. (2001, p. 151).

26 The 'two whatevers' principle, which called for cadres to 'firmly uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and ...unswervingly adhere to whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave', held sway until its rescission in 1980, four years after Mao's death (Ng-Quinn 1982, p. 1195).

political rights of all citizens, arguably as a result of pressure from below. While a number of major pro-democracy and anti-corruption protests in recent decades have been met with repression, the country has also witnessed some political opening. Thus, the Communist Party has retained control over the national leadership, but local government has been partially subjected to the vagaries of democratic choice.<sup>27</sup> A number of commentators have asserted that this provision of limited political rights has been generated by a desire to meet popular expectations. Burns (1999, p. 591), for example, states that the introduction of elections at village level has been seen as 'aimed at preserving stability and fighting corruption', while Gilley (2007, p. 264) argues that these reforms were enacted as a response 'to demands for accountable village rule'.

An example of gradual democratisation by way of increasing the effectiveness of electoral rights might be Morocco. Here, Anderson (2001, p. 54) sees the establishment in the late 1990s of contested parliamentary elections as the result of popular demand. While the Moroccan parliament was originally relatively powerless, recent constitutional changes threaten to transform the country into something resembling a constitutional monarchy.<sup>28</sup> Protests calling for greater democracy have been evident in Morocco for some time, however their relatively limited nature, and thus seemingly limited threat to the regime, suggests that recent political reform represents pre-emptive action to ward off future demands as much as a reaction to existing grievances. Further examples can be found elsewhere in Africa, where Bratton and van de Walle (1992, p. 427) have identified a number of states where one-party systems remained such, but were subjected to 'genuine reforms which increased the scope for political competition', again suggesting the strengthening of effective political rights. While the results of these reforms were varied, the fact they were introduced due to 'popular demands for political pluralism' again suggests the potential for mass-influenced gradual democratisation (Bratton and van de Walle 1992, p. 427).

The provision of greater civil liberties without corresponding political reform is perhaps best evidenced by the period of Glasnost in the Soviet Union. Despite an absence of

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<sup>27</sup> This change, along with other factors such as strengthened legal institutions and an improved bureaucracy, have been termed by Gilley (2007, p. 264) as 'contained institutional change'.

<sup>28</sup> For an optimistic account of 2011's constitutional changes, see Achy (2011). For a more cautious assessment, see Ottaway (2011).

revolutionary challenges to Communist Party rule, the decreasing ability of the state to meet popular material expectations led to the introduction of Perestroika and Glasnost. Gorbachev hoped to improve economic efficiency 'by providing workers and lower-level party functionaries the opportunity to supply information about production and corruption', however the effect was also to stimulate the 'airing of cultural and environmental grievances that had deeper political undertones' (Ulfelder 2009, p. 27). Other examples of similar liberalisation can be found in cases such as Tanzania and Taiwan. Tanzania's government liberalised media controls, even allowing 'relatively open debates on the merits of the single-party state' long before political reform ensued (Bratton & van de Walle 1992, p. 427). Likewise, Taiwan saw liberalisation including the removal of the state of emergency and the granting of freedom of assembly and association in 1986, fully ten years before the first free presidential elections (Karatnycky & Ackerman 2005, p. 41). That such reforms, while falling short of the provision of democratic elections, nonetheless represent an increase in democracy is testified to by the inclusion of consideration of civil liberties by all major democracy indices. The subsequent 'transition' to democracy of a number of states which have introduced such changes, regardless of their rulers' initial intentions, suggests the wisdom of this logic. The finding of Ulfelder & Lustik (2005, p. 10) that countries with stronger civil liberties are more likely to democratise adds further support to this argument.

Despite the widespread evidence of polities taking incremental steps towards democracy, this potential route has received limited attention in the democratisation literature. Scholarship which considered this path emerged relatively early, however later contributions largely overlooked it. Prominent among such early accounts of the potential for gradual democratisation was that of Rustow. Although Rustow's theory of gradual democratisation arguably speaks more to the third path identified here, he also considers incrementally increasing levels of democracy as a possible route. Rustow (1970, p. 361) argues that in the case of 'partial democratization of the political structure, a competitive dynamic that completes the process may have been set off... Now this and now that political group may see a chance to steal a march on its opponents by enlarging the electorate or by removing other obstacles to majority control'. Other significant early contributions which recognised the potential of the gradual path to democracy are those of Lipset (1959) and Dahl (1971). Lipset (1959, p.

85) argued gradual political change to be one of the key factors in the establishment of democracy, while Dahl considered the gradual route to be most favourable to the stability of the resulting system (Bermeo 1990, p. 363).

Typical of such earlier democratisation scholars' treatments of the gradual path to democracy is the consideration of gradualism as it related to elite actions, and the identification of early Western European democratisers, and Britain in particular, as exemplars. The subsequent ascension of agency-based theories signalled a period in which the path of gradual increases in democracy became unfashionable. The gradual path came to be seen as uniquely relevant to the first, European wave of democratisation, while modern democratisation occurred in rapid transitions. As has already been seen, this is a view that has been adopted not only by elite agency theorists, but by democratisation theorists across the board. Recognition of modern examples of gradually increasing democracy, which inherently challenge the status quo thinking, has only occurred recently, and then only in a limited number of contributions.<sup>29</sup> The theoretical dominance of understandings based on rapid transitions thus remains.

Democratisation theory has proven its ability to identify the workings of political processes and the constitution of institutions. Nonetheless, an arguably excessive focus on concepts such as founding elections and suffrage has obscured consideration of other measures which have the potential to generate more nuanced appraisals of progress towards democracy. By taking these factors seriously, it ought to be possible to appreciate the protracted nature of many democratisation experiences. The understandings of the social movement literature, which has often focused on extended struggles and incremental changes, have the potential to be of much use in this regard. Adapting current democratisation understandings to include consideration of the broader factors identified here ought not to be an insurmountable challenge.

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29 Those few contributions which consider the possibility of some form of gradual democratisation generally see this in terms of regimes evolving. Karl (1990, p. 16), for example, argues that 'democratization can prove to be an ongoing process of renewal', and that there is no reason to believe that 'electoral authoritarian regimes, for example, can not evolve into conservative or competitive democracies, or corporatist democracies into more competitive ones'. Hadenius and Teorell (2007) offer a similar approach, in which they assert the potential for authoritarian regimes which are first transformed into 'limited multiparty regimes' to be more likely to later democratise.

#### **4.4 Path three: the masses influencing the political environment, leading to later democratisation**

The third path suggested by the social movement literature by which ordinary people might spur democratisation involves mass actors gradually altering the environment in which politics takes place, allowing transition at a later date. Social movement theory has a number of understandings which could be potentially useful in comprehending the potency of such a path to democratisation. Foremost among these is the appreciation of successful outcomes as constituting not only policy change, but also acknowledgement of the movement itself as a legitimate actor. In turn, this appreciation suggests a number of other factors which are relevant to understanding social movement success. The acknowledgement of a particular movement as a legitimate actor infers movement success in terms of controlling the contested space by way of influencing discourse and attitudes.

A number of examples of societies following this path to democracy are provided by history, both distant and recent. While it has been seen that Britain followed the path of incrementally increasing democracy, understood in terms of a gradually expanding selectorate, it also exhibits periods of evolving environmental factors. The franchise was extended in 1832, 1867, 1884, 1919 and 1928, however the years between these measurable institutional changes undoubtedly featured change in mass and elite attitudes. The first of these extensions may well have been enacted in order to avoid revolution by placating the middle classes (Acemoglu & Robinson 2000, p. 1182), however the inclusion of women in the last two rounds of selectorate expansion seems not to have been due to fear of mass armed conflict. This has led to the conclusion that the relevant factor in women gaining the vote in Britain was social change (Acemoglu & Robinson 2000, p. 1186).

The critical nature of suffrage movements in achieving institutional change can not be ignored. The role played by these movements is made clear by the finding that '[p]rior to a threshold point in 1930, no country had adopted women's suffrage without strong pressure from domestic suffrage organizations' (Finnemore & Sikkink 1999, p. 896).

These movements also highlight the significance of social change as the intervening variable. In environments where supporters of the status quo could point to a universal suffrage, albeit limited to white men, '[o]ne of the most important achievements of ... women's movements was their ability to redefine that universe' (Markoff 1996, p. 59). That such processes of societal evolution leading to subsequent institutional change take place over extended periods of time is evidenced by the fact that the British women's suffrage movement began in earnest in the 1860s, while full women's suffrage was not achieved until 1928.<sup>30</sup>

A more recent example of social movement influence on the political environment leading to subsequent democratic change can be found in South Africa. The eventual success of the anti-apartheid campaign in achieving universal suffrage can be clearly seen in terms of the campaign's effect on the political environment, both within South Africa and internationally. Recognition on the part of the African National Congress (ANC) of the efficacy of concentrating on non-violent methods and abandoning terrorism shows that this organisation understood the importance of both domestic and foreign opinion. By defining the campaign as a non-violent quest for freedom, activists were able to gain the support of a much wider constituency within South Africa, while also limiting the ability of the regime to keep foreign partners convinced of its being an indispensable bulwark against dangerous radicals (Zunes 1994, pp. 414-5). Reflective of the order in which the movement achieved its success is the fact that the ANC was already accepted as a legitimate actor and appropriate negotiating partner by the regime in the 1980s, while democratic elections were not held until 1994 (McAdam et al. 2001, pp. 152-3). As with the British women's suffrage movement, the anti-apartheid campaign achieved their goals only after protracted periods of time. Attitudinal shift, and subsequent policy change, occurred over the space not of months, but of more than a decade.

This path to democracy bears particular resemblance to that identified by Rustow (1970). As has been seen, Rustow envisaged a struggle, conducted with the participation of both elites and their followers, as a necessary precursor to eventual elite agreement

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<sup>30</sup> Two recent books, namely Smith (2007) and van Wingerden (1999), cover this movement from 1866 to 1928.



on democracy as the best compromise. While prior contributors recognised the possibility of democracy being achieved following a period of contention, Rustow (1970, p. 355) saw the struggle as a necessary competition between relatively equal competing forces. This struggle, understood as 'a complex process stretching over many decades' (Rustow 1970, p. 355), is essential in creating the 'background and preparatory conditions' which do not automatically determine 'the choice of democracy', but which are nonetheless necessary preconditions (Rustow 1970, p. 356). The parties to the struggle might vary between cases, but it is clear that it is protracted contestation of the social and political space that establishes the environment in which the political elite identifies democracy as the most expedient way forward.

Subsequent agency theorists within the democratisation field built on Rustow's identification of elite settlement, and the following period of habituation to democracy, however they failed to take the preceding struggle seriously (Potter 1997, p. 15). Likewise, recent attempts to re-establish the significance of structural variables have typically leapt from the achievement of particular levels of development to the appearance of democracy, without acknowledging the contestation in the social and political spheres which has often preceded transition. Levine (1988) represents one prominent exception to this trend. His call for democratisation theory to acknowledge the depth and complexity of the relationships between elites and their constituents, and their significance to political change, has unfortunately been largely ignored. While several contributors have assessed the role of mass actors in spurring democratisation, little effort has been expended by democratisation scholars to systematically utilise the rich theoretical understandings of the social movement literature in order to better comprehend the appearance of democracy by this route.<sup>31</sup>

Of the three mass-influenced paths identified here, this is likely to be the most difficult for contemporary democratisation theory to acknowledge. Existing theories which consider the actions of particular agents to be key to democratisation generally see the significant actions as being those proximate to the 'transition'. Conversely, approaches

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31 A compelling but largely overlooked exception is to be found in the work of Rudbeck & Sigurdson (1999). These contributors present a broad and serious effort which seeks to adapt the multitude of understandings accrued by decades of social movement research to help explain mass-influenced democratisation.

which have emphasised structural development as central to democratisation have tended to base their models on variables which are more easily measured than factors such as attitudes and discourse. Incorporating an approach which sees action as at times significantly preceding change, and considering less easily quantified environmental factors, would require a substantial shift in thinking. As Amenta et al. (2010, p. 295) argue, the failure of many scholars to recognise the influence of social movements can often be explained by the extreme difficulty of collecting relevant data. Understanding factors such as legitimacy is not nearly as simple as identifying the actors and structures involved in the political process (Markoff 1996, p. 17). However, by taking both Rustow's account as well as the social movement literature seriously, it ought to be possible to construct a comprehensive framework which includes this gradual path to democratisation.

The sheer number of cases of democratisation, not least in the third and fourth waves, where the masses played a significant role, shows the clear need for more thorough attempts to utilise the social movement field's understandings to improve those of democratisation theory. Having delineated three ideal paths by which the masses can spur democratisation, it now remains to consider the factors which are likely to play a role in determining the success or failure of mass-influenced democratisation processes. Fortuitously, the social movement literature has a number of understandings which seem particularly pertinent to this task.

## 5 Explaining outcomes

As has been discussed, recent years have seen structural theorists of democratisation continue to supply compelling evidence as to the influence of factors such as socioeconomic modernisation, while the broad assertions of agency theorists as to the significance of the actions of political elites have retained their salience. In addition, a number of contributions to the democratisation literature over the past two decades have shown the importance of considering the masses in accounts of political change. However, despite some efforts to identify causal mechanisms, the democratisation literature continues to exhibit a deficit of explanations as to how structural factors are transformed into elite action, with or without the help of the masses as intervening actors.

In the previous section, three ideal paths by which the masses might spur democratic change have been identified, as suggested by the social movement literature. The recognition of these three paths implies no understanding, however, of the reasons mass groupings might choose to act so as to cause such a turn of events. Neither does the identification of these paths provide any tools for predicting the likelihood of the occurrence nor success of such actions. Nonetheless, just as the social movement literature has been seen to contain significant insights as to the possible paths a polity might take towards democracy, this field also has important understandings as to the factors which are likely to determine the appearance and subsequent success of mass-based democratisation movements. By integrating these understandings into existing democratisation theory, it ought to be possible to generate more accurate models of democratic change. This section will thus present an analysis of the various approaches constituting social movement scholarship, and the insights they each contain which may aid in understanding the role of the masses in democratisation.

Before proceeding with an examination of the social movement literature, it is worth stipulating here two caveats. Firstly, while the democratisation literature has largely

concerned itself with the occurrence of successful episodes of political change, social movement scholarship has generally paid far more attention to the factors causing movement appearance, rather than those which might lead to movements achieving their goals. At times, social movement scholars have to some degree conflated these two distinct events, with the result that factors which are asserted to result in collective action are implied to also aid in its success. Probably there is a certain degree of merit in such an approach, as it seems logical to presume that if a given ingredient leads people to protest, it is also likely to influence the likelihood of such protest achieving its desired result. Nonetheless, as Amenta et al. (2010, p. 295) point out, it would be dangerous to accept this assumption as a universal truth. It may well be that particular factors work to encourage collective action, but to hinder the chances of such action's success.

A second caveat concerns the geographical focus of social movement research. Historically, the vast majority of such scholarship has taken North America and Western Europe as its foci. In doing so, such scholarship has largely limited itself to considering social movements as they exist in relatively democratic environments (Oliver et al. 2003, pp. 215-6).<sup>32</sup> There is no guarantee that the insights developed by such investigation can be applied without alteration to movements in authoritarian settings. However, those few social movement scholars who have diverged from the orthodoxy and have sought to apply the understandings of this field to movements in non-democratic environments have typically found very similar processes to be acting.<sup>33</sup> Having enunciated these two cautions, it remains to assess the insights available within social movement scholarship which may aid in better understanding democratisation.

The social movement literature has often been characterised as consisting of a number of theoretical schools which contradict and conflict with each other (Oliver et al. 2003, p. 214). Indeed, there has been a significant degree of disagreement as to which factors

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32 Oliver et al. (2003) note, however, that Latin American universities have produced a significant quantity of research which considers social movements in that region, as well contrasting it with North American and European work.

33 See for example Schock (1999, 2005). While Schock argues the varying degree of freedom enjoyed by the media in democracies and non-democracies to constitute a significant difference (Schock 1999, pp. 369-70, Schock 2005, p. 28), he nonetheless finds the dynamics of collective action in both environments to be very similar.

determine the appearance and subsequent success or failure of a given movement. Early accounts stressed the importance of relative deprivation, understood as the degree to which potential movement participants felt that they were being unfairly deprived of that which they deserved. Later accounts challenged this finding, instead asserting that the appearance and viability of movements depended upon the structure of political opportunities. Thus, movements would appear where openings were available, while even in cases of extreme deprivation, a lack of opportunity would prevent action. A third school of thought has questioned both of these approaches, arguing that the crucial factor is the ability of movement entrepreneurs to mobilise resources. Grievances and opportunities are presumed always to exist, while the mobilisation of funds and other resources will determine the appearance and success of a given movement. A fourth approach can be discerned in the work of a variety of scholars who have sought to incorporate factors such as culture, emotions and identity into the study of social movements. While arguably less theoretically coherent than the three previous schools, contributors working in this vein can nonetheless be connected by virtue of their interest in cognitive factors, thus they will be referred to here as adhering to a cognitive approach to social movements.

The processes identified by the four approaches to social movements considered here are likely to take place in polities adhering to any of the three ideal paths identified in the previous section. Thus, the recognition of relative deprivation and political opportunities, the appearance of movement entrepreneurs, and challenges to the prevailing system all take place in situations where mass groupings spur rapid transition or incremental increases in levels of democracy, as much as in cases where they alter the political environment allowing later democratisation. Nonetheless, this sequence of events is likely to occur in different cases at varying velocities. These processes may have run their course within the space of weeks or months in the case of rapid transitions such as that which occurred in East Germany, or over a period of many years, such as in the achievement of women's suffrage in Britain. Nonetheless, many of these processes can be identified regardless of the time frame. One potential exception to this general rule consists of cases, as considered in the previous section, where political elites respond to expected contention by pre-emptively enacting reform. In

such instances, the processes identified here may not have the chance to fully run their course. Sensing the potential for challenges to the status quo, the decision of an incumbent autocrat to introduce democratic reform may come before the appearance of contentious action, and perhaps even before that of movement entrepreneurs or an alteration in the prevalent discourse. Nonetheless, it is arguable in many cases that the mere likelihood of the processes outlined here taking place is the deciding factor in motivating such pre-emptive reform.

The four major approaches to social movements will be assessed here sequentially, however this should not be assumed to suggest their inherent incompatibility. The seemingly clear delineation of the relative deprivation, political opportunities, resource mobilisation and cognitive schools (perhaps in combination with a certain amount of intellectual competition) has resulted in these approaches often being seen as necessarily conflicting. However, it is arguable that the extent to which these theoretical approaches diverge has been exaggerated. As Oliver et al. (2003, p. 226) argue, '[d]ifferent intellectual traditions and political sensibilities have led to oppositions formed around false dichotomies: politics versus social psychology, rationality versus emotion, social structure versus social construction, resources versus culture, interests versus frames'.

Indeed, it may be that the concepts developed by the diverging schools are better utilised together rather than being set in opposition to each other. A number of recent contributions have taken this cue, and have attempted to produce understandings that are arguably more nuanced than that which any single approach could achieve alone. As Finnemore and Sikkink (2001, p. 409) note, contributors have thus begun a process of 'integrating propositions from various models to determine not which model is superior, but rather which concepts are useful for understanding particular aspects and stages of social movements'.<sup>34</sup> The following analysis will thus attempt to mimic the 'modern social movement scholar', who Finnemore and Sikkink (2001, p. 409) argue 'tends to be theoretically eclectic'. In doing so, use will be made of the insights generated by each of

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<sup>34</sup> Indicative of this trend is an introductory chapter by McAdam et al. (1996), the title of which is 'Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes – Toward a Synthetic, Comparative Perspective on Social Movements'.

the four aforementioned approaches in suggesting a research agenda for the further incorporation of social movement understandings in explaining democratisation.

## 5.1 Relative deprivation theory

A number of early contributions to the social movement literature asserted that the appearance and motivation of movement was determined by deprivation. The foremost contributor to this approach has been Gurr, who argued that violent civil conflict is caused by relative deprivation, which he defined as 'actors' perception of discrepancy between their *value expectations* and their environment's apparent *value capabilities*' (Gurr 1968a, pp. 252-3, emphasis original). These two factors, Gurr explains, relate respectively to the things to which people believe they are entitled, and the factors which inform their perceptions of what they will in reality receive. While the state may not always be held responsible by its citizens for the environment's apparent value capabilities (Gurr 1968a, p. 271), the majority of Gurr's examples suggest as much. Thus, political violence occurred in post-independence Africa due to the '[f]ailure to realize the promises of independence', while the French Revolution was brought on by 'the declining responsiveness of the state and by economic deprivations inherent in stumbling state efforts to control trade and raise taxes' (Gurr 1968a, p. 258). Thus, governments risk losing legitimacy, and spurring collective action, when they fail to meet the expectations of their citizens. While the relative deprivation approach has long since lost its prominence in accounts of social movements, related concepts such as attitudes and perceptions of justice remain a compelling factor in the field's understandings.

The democratisation literature features some recognition of the concepts, such as attitudes and legitimacy, which relative deprivation theory suggests. A key part of Lipset's modernisation thesis, for example, considered the divergences between the values represented by existing power structures and those new ones generated by socioeconomic development. According to Lipset (1959, p. 87), '[f]eudal societies, before the advent of industrialism, undoubtedly enjoyed the basic loyalty of most of

their members'. However, the advent of mass communication technology, combined with increasing societal cleavages, was leading groups 'to organize around different values than those previously considered to be the only legitimate ones for the total society' (Lipset 1959, p. 87).

Rustow likewise saw the recognition of divergence between personal values and institutional outcomes as fundamental to democratisation. He places particular emphasis on the concept of 'tangible evils', which he borrows from Bryce. Rustow (1970, p. 353, quoting Bryce 1921, vol. 2, p. 602) quotes Bryce as stating that '[o]ne road only has in the past led into democracy, viz., the wish to be rid of tangible evils'. Tangible evils can here be easily understood as representing structures which are seen as causing the relative deprivation which Gurr argued to be so crucial. As Gurr understood the sources of feelings of deprivation as being potentially diverse, Rustow likewise recognises the variable nature of tangible evils. Asserting that 'the tangible evils which befall humans societies are legion', Rustow (1970, pp. 353-4) concludes that the struggle he sees as essential to the achievement of democracy is thus likely to be fought in different instances by different groups over different issues.

Despite these early acknowledgements of the importance of grievances and feelings of deprivation, and their potentially variable nature, much of the subsequent democratisation literature has largely ignored such issues. This failure to take legitimacy, grievances and deprivation seriously is arguably due to an understanding of these concepts that is too simplistic. Deprivation is often presumed to only consist of economic hardship, while bald assumptions have often been made about mass attitudes towards political and economic governance. Democratisation theorists have often presumed that the masses will always want democracy (Welzel & Inglehart 2009, p. 131). Similarly, it has often been presumed that the poorer citizens of autocracies would, given democratic rights, seek to impose stifling redistribution programmes in order to achieve greater equality (Wintrobe 1997, p. 125).<sup>35</sup>

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35 This approach led a number of contributors to assert the difficulty, if not impossibility, of enacting political and economic liberalisation simultaneously, particularly with regard to former socialist countries in the early 1990s. The successful liberalisation in both senses of the majority of Eastern European states has been accompanied by a rather sudden disappearance of this pessimistic view from the democratisation field.



Such assumptions have been shown to be quite misguided, however. Ordinary people do not always prefer democracy, as the legitimacy enjoyed by a range of autocratic regimes has made clear (Burnell 2006, p. 552). The inaccuracy of generalisations about economic preferences is likewise made clear in the stinging criticism of Warren (1980, pp. 210-1), who argues that '[a]n aspiration to keep up with the Joneses, or even to avoid starvation, logically implies neither a desire for an egalitarian economic policy, nor support for equality for those worse off than oneself'. Support for this critique is given by both Skocpol and Olson. Skocpol (1979, pp. 126-7) notes that despite its agrarian nature, very little land was confiscated by peasants during the French Revolution, while Olson (1993, pp. 570-1) elaborates a compelling argument as to the likelihood of democracies actually effecting less redistribution than autocracies, due to the general public's interest in not just total tax revenues, but also in the health of the economy.

That misunderstandings of political and economic attitudes feed off each other is illustrated by the tendency of democratisation scholars to understand mass demands for democracy as being the result of economic inequality, and that given the latter, the former will inevitably appear (Wucherpfennig & Deutsch 2009, p. 9, Alemán & Yang 2011, p. 1133). Despite such assumptions, studies which have looked at absolute deprivation have found little connection to the emergence and success of social movements. Ekiert and Kubik (1998, pp. 568-9), for example, find no relationship between levels of absolute deprivation and the occurrence of protest in four Eastern European countries in the 1990s. Likewise, many investigations of democratic transitions which have measured similar factors, such as poverty and repression, have been inconclusive.<sup>36</sup>

By developing a more nuanced approach to deprivation which reflects the fact that its significance lies in its existence relative to expectations, democratisation theory stands to improve its ability to explain political change. Similar gains ought to be achieved by

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<sup>36</sup> A number of contributors have considered the possibility that economic conditions, and particularly crises, might spur democratisation. The suggestion implicit in such work is that publics might blame incumbents for poor performance, resulting in the termination of their leadership, however the results of such research have been inconclusive. Gasiorowski (1995) finds inflationary crises to have mixed results on democratisation, while recessions had no effect. Haggard and Kaufman (1997) find a number of transitions to democracy to have occurred as the result of economic crises, however as many took place during periods of good economic performance.

relinquishing the assumptions that the masses always want democracy, and that demands for such are simply generated by disaffection with economic conditions and levels of economic distribution. As Linz and Stepan (1996, p. 77) have argued, 'economic trends in themselves are less important than is the perception of alternatives, system blame, and the legitimacy beliefs of significant segments of the population or major institutional actors'. Democratisation theory stands to gain significantly by taking Linz and Stepan seriously. A more nuanced concept of mass attitudes would thus acknowledge the importance of legitimacy and its relativity, the variety of possible grievances, the importance of beliefs about alternative systems of government, and the role potentially played by particular segments of society, as these contributors suggest. It is to these subjects that attention will now be turned.

By utilising the concept of legitimacy, democratisation theory has the potential to develop a relative, as opposed to absolute, understanding of deprivation. The expediency of interfacing with the concept of legitimacy is that it, together with grievances, can be seen as two sides of the same coin. To the extent that rulers, no matter of what ilk, can successfully determine their citizens' beliefs regarding legitimacy, they can likewise avert feelings of deprivation. Conversely, as popular expectations of the appropriate action of rulers diverge from that witnessed, societies withdraw legitimacy previously bestowed upon their leaders. Congruence theory makes this particularly clear. A regime will be considered legitimate as long as it conforms to understandings of the appropriate organisation of power (Eckstein 1966). Nonetheless, as has been seen, democratisation scholars have generally taken mass desires to be uniform while understanding grievances as being directly relative to prevailing conditions. Scholars of legitimacy, however, reveal that the subject of their study is a 'complex mix of habit, belief, and expedience' (Zelditsch 2001, p. 6). This approach bears a far stronger resemblance to the relative deprivation identified by Gurr and others as salient in the appearance of social movements.

The importance of relative deprivation and legitimacy to democratisation is underscored by the sensitivity of autocratic regimes to the way they are assessed by their citizenry. A pertinent example of this is to be found in the form of the Chinese Communist Party. In

the early 1990s, the Party shifted its source of legitimacy from its capacity to effect socialist redistribution to its ability to secure economic development by way of overseeing liberalised markets whilst maintaining political and social order (Gilley 2007, p. 274). That there exists a wide variety of potentially effective bases for claims to legitimacy is highlighted by the diverging paths taken by post-Soviet leaders in Central Asia. Here, five different authoritarian leaders have staked claims to legitimacy on five different foundations, and all but one have successfully maintained power, whilst almost completely stifling dissent (Schatz, 2006).<sup>37</sup> Democratisation scholars have largely failed to interface with such legitimacy claims, however, and thus forego a significant tool in understanding the potential for autocratic failure (Burnell 2006, p. 552).

Recognition of the relative nature of deprivation, and the salience of legitimacy, inevitably leads to an appreciation of grievances as potentially being highly various. Democratisation theory likewise stands to benefit from the incorporation of this understanding. Social movement theorists working in Western democracies have identified a multitude of issues as being focal points for contentious action, stimulating groups ranging from anti-nuclear movements (Kitschelt 1986), through temperance movements (Szymanski 2003) and the Ku Klux Klan (McVeigh 2009), to prison riots (Goldstone & Useem 1999). Research on social movements in authoritarian polities has been limited, however it is likely that a similar variety of grievances exists in such environments also. Some evidence of this can be found in the recent uprising in Egypt. Contention in this case was originally the result of frustration on the part of well-educated, technologically-savvy youth, largely drawn from the middle class. However, as the uprising proceeded, several additional groups emerged with diverging claims, including left-wing activists seeking greater economic redistribution and conservative Muslims demanding religious freedom.<sup>38</sup> What united these various groups was certainly not a single ideology, but what seems to have been a shared belief that the

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37 Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev has thus founded his legitimacy claim on international recognition and cooperation, Tajikistan's Rahmon on ensuring stability following a civil war in that country, Uzbekistan's Karimov has invoked ethnic identity and anti-Islamism, and Turkmenistan's two post-Soviet dictators have built personalistic authority regimes. Kyrgyzstan's rulers, who made the only serious claims to having introduced democracy in the region, have twice been replaced by revolution.

38 For the central role played by educated youth in the Egyptian Revolution, see Bayat (2011). See Bizri (2011) for the delayed arrival of the Muslim Brotherhood on the revolutionary scene in Egypt, and for its subsequent relationship with the political environment.

political system was failing to provide them with that to which they felt entitled.

Democratisation scholarship may well benefit from paying more attention to mass attitudes towards political systems. As has been seen, relative deprivation theory holds that the existence of grievances will be relative to individuals' expectations. An important element in determining these expectations, especially as levels of education and communication grow, is likely to be beliefs about the attributes of alternative systems of government. Thus, individuals are likely to feel more aggrieved with the status quo when they believe that a different system would better provide for their needs and desires. There is some allusion to this understanding in the democratisation literature. Przeworski (1986, p. 51) has argued that the stability of a regime depends on the existence or otherwise of a feasible alternative.<sup>39</sup> Bermeo (1990, p. 368) agrees, arguing that 'an authoritarian regime is always evaluated in reference to some other system of rule'.

By following this logic, it becomes clear that an individual's desire to challenge the status quo system depends on a calculation of the relative abilities of the incumbent regime and its likely alternatives to provide those things which the individual values. Democratisation theory could benefit by seeking to better incorporate such understandings, as well as acknowledging that beliefs about differing political systems vary. As Burnell (2006, p. 552) states, the widely-held view 'that all right-thinking people want to give [democracy] priority, with the only exceptions being megalomaniacs and their cynically self-interested acolytes, is too simplistic'. Different nations have had differing experiences with various political systems, thus attitudes can not be taken for granted. Properly investigating local beliefs in authoritarian states could lead to an improved ability to anticipate democratising collective action.

The aforementioned recognition by Linz and Stepan of 'significant segments of the

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39 Bratton and van de Walle (1994, pp. 460-1) suggest, however, that a feasible alternative is not in fact a necessary prerequisite for autocratic breakdown in their treatment of neo-patrimonial regimes in Africa. These contributors argue that 'regimes built on personal loyalty rather than bureaucratic authority are susceptible to institutional collapse when patronage resources run out. In these cases, a crisis of legitimacy may be a sufficient condition to undermine or topple a regime, and there need not yet be an organized opposition offering a programmatic alternative.'

population' as being of particular importance is a further nuance which has been underestimated by democratisation theory. While this field has often identified particular groups such as the working and middle classes as worthy of special attention, surveys of attitudes and orientations have typically canvassed entire populations. The possibility that particular segments of the population might be more significant than others seems to have been lost on the authors of such studies. This possibility has not gone unnoticed, however, by a number of autocratic rulers, who have successfully divided and ruled by keeping one segment content while allowing others to suffer.<sup>40</sup> A limited number of democratisation scholars have also taken note. In their analysis of what they term neopatrimonial regimes in a number of African states, Bratton and van de Walle (1992, 1994) identify the tendency of such regimes to rely on the loyalty of favoured constituencies.<sup>41</sup> The significance of economic crises in such situations, according to Haggard and Kaufman (1997, pp. 266-7), is to render the regime incapable of maintaining the support of such constituencies. The failure to uphold the 'authoritarian bargain' exposes the incumbent autocrat to defection and ultimately 'protest "from below"'.<sup>42</sup> By taking account of the fact that certain segments of the population enjoy disproportionate influence over political trajectories, it may be possible for scholars to better understand the role of the masses in determining political change.

It has thus been seen that the relative deprivation approach, while it has enjoyed less exposure in recent decades of social movement research, has nonetheless established important concepts for understanding mass attitudes. This school's identification of the salience of deprivation as being in its relationship to expectations and beliefs regarding

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40 Such an approach is evident in a number of autocratic societies. Incumbent regimes are wont to maintain the goodwill of groups such as the citizens of the capital, where benefits are disbursed. Inhabitants of other areas are often kept in relatively poor situations. This divide is sometimes maintained by preventing migration to the capital or other large cities, by way of strict household registration rules as well as physical checkpoints. The continued use of the former in China, has been the subject of some debate in recent years. For discussion of the Chinese household registration system, see Wong et al. (2007).

41 Hanson (2010) likewise considers the processes involved in such clientelism, finding they have a significant effect on economic inequality.

42 Aside from circumstances of economic crisis, the fact that autocrats are able to maintain power by retaining the support of a relatively limited constituency may be able to be understood by recourse to the social movement theories of resource mobilisation and political opportunities. These theories, which will be considered subsequently, would suggest that the unfavoured masses in such systems are simply unable, despite potentially abhorring the regime, to challenge the status quo.

entitlement has important implications for democratisation theory. Whereas scholars of democratisation have often anticipated a linear relationship between deprivation, especially in its economic form, and grievances, relative deprivation theory makes clear the variable nature of the latter. Scholars have found little evidence to support a relationship between absolute deprivation and either social movement emergence or democratisation. However, by considering the level of deprivation relative to expectations, which may correspond to economic, social or other factors, it might be possible to achieve better results. Democratisation theory likewise stands to benefit from acknowledging the possible mediating roles played by particular sections of society, as well as beliefs regarding alternative systems of government.

## **5.2 Political opportunities**

Social movement theories which saw relative deprivation as the most useful predictor of the appearance of movements began to be challenged in the 1970s by a school which considered political opportunities to be more significant. This approach was pioneered by Eisinger (1973) in a study of protests in American cities, but has since been used to explain a wide range of instances of contentious action in differing settings. The central understanding of this school remains predicated on the assertion made by de Tocqueville, the school's theoretical forebear, of revolt as occurring not according to levels of deprivation, but following the expansion of political opportunities. The possible causes of an expansion in political opportunities are held to be several. In an influential assessment, Tarrow (1991, pp. 14-5) identifies four processes which are argued in the social movement literature to have such an effect:

1. when levels of access to institutional participation have begun to open up;
2. when political alignments are in disarray and new re-alignments have not yet been formed;
3. when there are major conflicts within the political elite that challengers can take advantage of;

4. when challengers are offered the help of influential allies from within, or outside the system.

Opportunity structures have gained some recognition within the democratisation literature. In line with orthodox approaches to the field, those democratisation scholars who have considered political opportunities have typically characterised such as being influenced either by structural change or by political elites. A prominent example of the former is Huntington's (1991) model of structural development placing a polity in a transition zone, within which elites decide whether or not to implement political reform. A further assertion of structural development altering political opportunities can be seen in arguments for the significance to political trajectories of the rise of modern technology, and its enabling of cross-border communication and the diffusion of ideas (Elkink 2009, pp. 80-4).

Arguably the most widely discussed case in the democratisation literature of elite action affecting opportunity structures, and thence the likelihood of democratic change, has been that of Gorbachev's vow in the late 1980s not to interfere in the internal politics of Eastern European states.<sup>43</sup> For most commentators, this altered external environment affected domestic political trajectories through the intervening factor of local political actors. Thus, Collins (1995, pp. 1569-70) argues that Gorbachev's statement influenced Eastern European elite decisions, while di Palma (1991, p. 75) sees it as leading to the self-delegitimation of local incumbents. The possibility that such a change in the external environment might have had a direct influence on domestic publics, thus precipitating mass-influenced democratisation, has been largely overlooked.<sup>44</sup>

There is thus some precedent on the part of the democratisation literature for interfacing with political opportunities, however this literature could potentially benefit by the

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43 The end of the Cold War has similarly been asserted by democratisation scholars as having influenced the likelihood of political change for a variety of reasons (Lipset et al. 1993, p. 170, Inglehart & Welzel 2005, p. 215).

44 A significant exception to this is Hall (2000, p. 1073), who argues that the removal of the threat of Soviet invasion led to transition in much of Eastern Europe not due to any resulting domestic political changes, but rather by playing a fundamental role in directly allowing the eventually decisive mobilisation.

inclusion of consideration of two factors suggested by social movement scholarship. Firstly, the political opportunity school envisages movements which, while strongly influenced by opportunity structures, nonetheless remain active players capable of generating their own actions. By contrast, democratisation scholarship has generally understood mass movements as almost entirely determined by outside forces. Movements appear when allowed to do so by external circumstances, and fail when the appropriate constellation of external factors is not present. This is perhaps not surprising, given the top-down approach of most democratisation scholarship. Nonetheless, this approach results in an understanding by which movements are seen to have little ability to influence political change.

The belief on the part of democratisation scholars in the irrelevance of social movements has no doubt been reinforced by the failure of a number of pro-democracy movements in the face of severe repression. The democratisation literature's apparent search for a golden rule to predict democratic transition has seemingly caused the masses to be overlooked as a possible explanatory factor, due to the fact that mass pro-democracy movements are sometimes not immediately successful. Examples such as the Burmese and Chinese uprisings in the 1980s have acted to confirm suspicions that mobilised masses are a product of political change, not a driver thereof. The experiences of a growing number of movements in influencing, and at times seemingly ensuring, democratic transition suggest the need for a more nuanced understanding of their role. Movements ought to be understood as dynamic and significant players which interact with opportunities, rather than as more or less inevitable by-products of more significant structural or elite-generated processes. A more nuanced approach would seek to understand the reasons for movements' variable success in achieving outcomes in terms of, among other factors, political opportunity structures.

The longer term approach of the social movement literature bears important implications for understanding movements as significant and durable actors. Democratisation scholarship could benefit by moving beyond the strictly understood period of transition, and considering the potential for movements, while unsuccessful in achieving immediate democratic change, to alter the political environment in such a



way as to render subsequent change more likely. By applying such an approach to the 1989 protests in China it might be acknowledged that while they were eventually extinguished by force, they nonetheless significantly altered the relationship between the Chinese people and their government, potentially reconfiguring political opportunities for subsequent movements.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, such immediately unsuccessful protests may nevertheless affect social norms and values, which themselves may in turn impact political opportunities. While there has been some recognition within the political opportunity school of social movement research of the ability of movements to affect opportunity structures, the most convincing accounts of such, as well as work on the role of norms and values, are to be found in scholarship adhering to a more cognitive approach. The potential for such insights to benefit understandings of democratisation will thus be considered in the section concerning cognitive approaches to social movements, later in this work.

A second significant way in which democratisation scholarship stands to benefit from a greater grasp of political opportunities is by broadening its consideration of the factors understood to constitute opportunities. Similarly to democratisation scholars, orthodox social movement contributions typically view opportunities as being external to movements. Tarrow's aforementioned categorisation of the four processes by which opportunities expand makes it clear that the key factors are external actors and institutions.<sup>46</sup> Further proof that this is indeed the received wisdom is available in Giugni's (1998, p. 381) observation that 'two aspects appear to be crucial for the understanding of the relation between social movements and their political environment: the system of alliances and oppositions and the structure of the state'.

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45 The expediency of such an approach would seem to be confirmed by the fact that the Chinese Communist Party executed a major shift in its claim to legitimacy just three years later (Gilley 2007, p. 274).

46 Social movement scholarship occasionally exhibits statements which seem to diverge from the trend to see opportunities as only existing externally. McAdam et al. (1996, p. 8), for example, assert that 'no matter how momentous a change appears...it only becomes an 'opportunity' when defined as such by a group of actors sufficiently well organized to act on this shared definition of the situation'. The logical implication of this is that there is also an internal aspect to opportunities, consisting of individuals' interpretation of the external opportunity structure. Indeed, McAdam et al. (1996, p. 8) continue this line of logic by arguing that the aforementioned example of Gorbachev's disavowal of the use of force in Eastern Europe had an effect not only on 'power relations', but also 'by heightening people's subjective awareness of the system's illegitimacy and vulnerability'.

The importance of external political opportunities to both the experience of social movements and processes of political transformation would be difficult to deny. Nonetheless, in authoritarian environments there seems to exist a need to consider not only external, macro-political conditions, but also the role played by opportunities at the level of individuals who may or may not participate in democratisation-influencing mass movements. Such an approach might build on Tarrow's (1994, p. 85, emphasis added) subsequent definition of a political opportunity structure as containing the 'dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their *expectations* of success or failure'. Thus, rather than merely contemplating the geo-strategic ramifications of an event such as Gorbachev's disavowal of the use of force, it is possible to consider the micro-level effects of such developments in terms of individual decision-making. Despite the emphasis of social movement theorists on external opportunities, the concept of opportunity structures and their effects on movement mobilisation provides a useful framework from which to approach opportunities at the individual level. It is to that task that this work will now turn.

The emphasis of understandings of political opportunities on the external environment, as opposed to individual beliefs and perceptions, is perhaps understandable given the social movement field's predominant focus on movements in the West (Schock 1999, p. 356). In such settings, information flows relatively freely, thus perceptions of feasibility are likely to be largely accurate. The average individual's appraisal of the prevailing opportunity structure ought not to diverge significantly from reality. Taking stock of macro-political opportunities thus ought to render a fairly informative picture of the possibilities for collective action. By contrast, autocracies are often characterised by a lack of exactly the kind of information which might be used to make accurate judgements about political opportunities. This information deficit means that actual opportunities and perceptions thereof are much more likely to diverge than they might in a democratic environment, making a focus on perceptions particularly important. If people mobilise only once they perceive an opportunity to press their demands, then the perception of opportunity is what needs to be examined in order to predict mobilisation, not the actual existence of an opportunity. Feasibility perceptions can thus be

understood as representing a significant opportunity structure in themselves.

The previously considered example of Gorbachev's disavowal of the use of force, and the subsequent democratic transitions throughout Eastern Europe, fails to make clear the potential for divergence between macro-level political opportunities and perceptions thereof. Following Gorbachev's statement, the probability of force being used dropped dramatically.<sup>47</sup> Given the very public nature of the statement, mass perceptions are likely to have reacted more or less simultaneously. Approaches which consider only external, macro-political opportunities should still have been able to predict a greater likelihood of change in this case. In fact, the failure of virtually all Western experts and academics to foresee the events of 1989 may have been in large part due to their overlooking the role of the masses in general, rather than a lack of attention to the internal workings of potential social movements.<sup>48</sup>

The recent uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East stand in contrast to the Eastern European experience in terms of the relationship between perceptions and external opportunity structures, and thus contribute valuable material for understanding the significance thereof. The Arab experience exhibits a seemingly radical change in perceptions of feasibility, accompanied by minimal change in external opportunities.<sup>49</sup> Little can be identified in the way of changes in the external environment, whether measured in terms of international pressures or domestic institutional structures and political alliances. What arguably had the greatest effect was a significant shift in *perceptions* of prevailing political opportunities. Thus, following the eruption of protests in Tunisia, no change is evident in the constellation of macro-political opportunities in Egypt. Nonetheless, the Egyptian people rapidly became aware from the Tunisian

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47 It might be argued that by the 1980s, the Soviet Union was no longer in a position to embark upon another venture similar to the crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 or the Prague Spring in 1968, due to its lack of resources and involvement in the Afghanistan quagmire. Przeworski (1991b, p. 22) suggests as much when he asks 'Could the Soviet Union have invaded Poland in 1981?'. This argument could be contentious, however, as the Soviet Union may well have been able to call on fellow Warsaw Pact states for the bulk of any invasion force, especially in the case of only one Eastern European state attempting unsavoury reforms.

48 Huntington (1984, p. 217), for example, saw the prospects for democratic change in Eastern Europe as being 'virtually nil'. Even without the threat of Soviet action, local Communists would be 'likely to ensure that economic development neither achieves a level nor assumes a form that will be conducive to democracy' (Huntington 1984, p. 218).

49 By external, it is meant external to those movements which mobilised, rather than external to each country.

example that it was in fact possible to challenge the political status quo.<sup>50</sup> As Rabbani (2011) states, '[t]he success of the Tunisian uprising inspired and helped spark the Egyptian revolt rather than produced the conditions for it'. The necessary conditions already existed, however the people had simply not been aware of it. This pattern of stable macro-level opportunities combined with fundamental shifts in feasibility perceptions is arguably evident in all the major 2011 Arab uprisings.<sup>51</sup>

The sheer depth of work on the role of opportunity structures in social movement research carries important implications for understanding collective action in democratisation processes. Nonetheless, the lack of examination of factors internal to movements as potential opportunities represents a limitation when considering collective action in authoritarian environments. It therefore seems expedient to look within the democratisation literature for inspiration. The democratisation literature exhibits no comprehensive account of the importance of feasibility perceptions per se, however several scholars have made significant contributions which could serve as a basis for such. One potential starting point is the credence given in some quarters to the importance of beliefs and attitudes in influencing political change. An example of this is to be found in the recognition by many commentators of the fact that democracy was not widely perceived to be a feasible option anywhere until the late 18th Century. Attitudes only began to change following the French Revolution, which played a pivotal role in changing perceptions of what was possible. As Arblaster (1994, p. 36) states, '[a]t a stroke, we might say, political ideas which had only been aspirations or dreams in the minds of philosophes or popular radicals, were placed on the agenda of real politics, not only in France, or even Europe, but globally'. Implicit in such accounts is the importance of a political system being accepted as both feasible and desirable as

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50 An interesting potential explanation for the relatively low level of democratisation in the Arab world could revolve around low feasibility perceptions on the part of Arab publics due to decades of being told they were not capable of maintaining democratic institutions. Hirschman (1970) has criticised in some depth the tendency of scholars of Latin American politics, both foreign and native to the region, to provide analyses of the region's prospects limited to doom and gloom. Hirschman (1970, p. 337) argues that such constantly negative analyses have led to a 'failure complex' on the part of Latin Americans, whereby political and economic success is no longer conceived of as possible. A very similar point is made by Amrani (2011) with regard to the Arab world. Amrani argues that a 'soft bigotry of lowered expectations in the West and among Arab elites' has become a self-fulfilling prophecy as Arab autocrats have used the supposed 'immaturity' of their populations to legitimise their rule, while Arab publics have not dared to expect anything else.

51 These are taken to include Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and Syria.

requisites for its adoption.

Whitehead (2009) makes this argument regarding the role of attitudes towards political systems more explicit in his work on 'pivotal' transitions. Mirroring Arblaster's account of the psychological effects of the French Revolution, Whitehead defines a transition as being pivotal if it radically alters understandings, on the part of both academics and publics, of what is possible. Thus, the South African transition to democracy can be seen as pivotal because it redefined the feasibility perceptions not only of South Africans, but also of citizens of similar and neighbouring states, thus affecting the likelihood of subsequent political change in those places (Whitehead 2009, p. 217).<sup>52</sup> A further contribution which recognises the significance of beliefs about feasibility is that of Bermeo, who takes as her starting point Przeworski's argument that 'what matters for the stability of any regime is not the legitimacy of this particular system of domination but the presence or absence of preferable alternatives' (Bermeo 1990, pp. 367-8, quoting Przeworski 1986, p. 52). Bermeo then extrapolates this, arguing that the emergence of democracy depends on whether the opposition is successful in 'choosing and presenting democracy as a "preferable" alternative model of rule' (Bermeo 1990, p. 368). While both these contributions have taken an important step in considering the role of ideas in democratisation, neither explains how such ideas might act to influence or precipitate such change.

This line of argument is taken a step further by Inglehart and Welzel, who evoke collective action as the intervening mechanism which leads to political change. These contributors begin with Klandermans's (1984) application of expectancy-value theory to social movements. Klandermans argued that individuals choose whether to participate in collective action based on their own assessment of the value of the action's success, and the likelihood of such success. Inglehart and Welzel (2005, p. 216) apply this logic to movements in authoritarian settings, arguing that '[f]or people to take part in a prodemocracy movement, they must expect that their actions have a reasonable chance of attaining a democratic regime'. Whereas the aforementioned contributions of Collins

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<sup>52</sup> In fact, Whitehead (2009, p. 217) goes so far as to explicitly state that the impact of such pivotal transitions serves to reconfigure political opportunities. Whitehead thus provides a particularly rare reference from within a work on democratisation to the understandings of the social movement literature.

and di Palma interpreted Gorbachev's disavowal of force through the prism of domestic elites, Inglehart and Welzel argue that this signal operated directly on Eastern European publics who had hitherto refrained from expressing their true desires for democratic government. As long as the preceding Brezhnev doctrine was in place, 'mass expectations that their protests would succeed against Soviet tanks were close to zero', however 'mass aspirations for democracy ... became effective immediately after the threat of Soviet military intervention was withdrawn' (Inglehart & Welzel 2005, p. 216).

In contrast to these broader, more theoretical works, Hall's (2000) analysis of the 1989 Romanian transition from authoritarianism provides a more intricate account of the role of attitudes and expectations in democratisation. Hall (2000, p. 1074) argues that it was not Gorbachev's disavowal of the use of force which affected the political opportunity structure in Romania, but the 'raised hopes and expectations' which resulted from the preceding transitions elsewhere in Eastern Europe. The pivotal moment in Romania's transition came when a government-organised mass rally was transformed into an anti-regime protest on live television. That 'an entire national audience had seen that the emperor had no clothes' led to a dramatic escalation in both 'the number of demonstrators and their boldness', as it became clear that 'for the first time, the Ceaucescu regime was vulnerable and change might be possible' (Hall 2000, pp. 1080-1). For Hall (2000, p. 1085), the Romanian experience shows that 'capacities to effect change and commitment to a cause don't tell the whole story. The prospects of success also play a role'. The appearance of anti-regime protests was crucial in altering concepts of what was possible, which in turn determined the course of events, as the majority 'are unlikely to be willing to act' unless there are 'some prospects of success' (Hall 2000, p. 1085).

The work of Bermeo, Whitehead, Inglehart and Welzel, and Hall provides a potential platform for further investigation of the internal workings of mass movements as they influence democratisation processes. Bermeo, Whitehead and Inglehart and Welzel have made important contributions to the theoretical development of democratisation theory by establishing the significance of the role of attitudes. Concurrently, Hall's detailed analysis of the psychological side of the Romanian transition represents a significant

precedent in terms of seeking to understand how those attitudes are transformed, and how they affect political trajectories. By further building on these efforts, it ought to be possible to move beyond the democratisation literature's traditional view of the masses as a predictable, monolithic block whose actions are determined by greater forces. In doing so, it may well be possible to significantly reduce uncertainty in predicting the appearance of democracy. It would appear that a potentially rewarding path to follow in this regard would thus be to take seriously the concept of opportunity structures, and to seek to rationalise feasibility perceptions as a vital component thereof.

In addition to these precedents for asserting the significance of feasibility perceptions, a number of insights can be found in the democratisation literature which could be utilised to better understand their workings. One group of such insights suggests the potential for perceptions to change rapidly in autocratic environments. As Chalmers and Robinson (1982, p. 20) state, authoritarian regimes often use coercion and force to create fear and uncertainty. In such circumstances, feasibility perceptions are likely to be low, but nonetheless particularly sensitive to stimulation. In his analysis of the diverging outcomes of democratisation movements in Burma and the Philippines, Schock (1999, p. 370) notes that '[a] freely operating press and the free flow of information are important mechanisms by which grievances become translated into collective action'. The general absence of such in non-democratic systems hinders the development of anti-regime protest, but also results in highly volatile feasibility perceptions. When a regime blocks other information channels, mass protests have more potential for impact as they send important signals about the incumbent's lack of legitimacy (Lohmann 1994, p. 88). As in the Romanian case, as long as protests are rare, the prospects for change remain unlikely. However, the appearance of a significant challenge to the status quo can have a fundamental effect on perceptions, and thus initiate an unstoppable cycle of mobilisation.

An important strand of democratisation scholarship which has sought to rationalise some of these understandings is that which considers preference falsification.<sup>53</sup> The concept that an autocratic regime can survive not on real legitimacy, but on feigned

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<sup>53</sup> The foremost contributor to this approach is Kuran (1989, 1991, 1995). A divergent, but related, contribution is made by Lohmann (1994).



legitimacy, dates to Weber. As Weber ([1918] 1968, p. 214) notes, '[I]oyalty may be hypocritically simulated by individuals or by whole groups on purely opportunistic grounds, or carried out in practice for reasons of material self-interest'. Consideration of the implications of such feigned legitimacy led Kuran (1989) to develop a theory according to which seemingly stable regimes spontaneously collapse due to a sudden withdrawal of public support. The series of democratic transitions which occurred in the months following the publication of Kuran's original work allowed him to further develop this theory to include description of these events (Kuran 1991, 1995).

Central to Kuran's understanding is the concept that individuals living in autocratic states possess private and public preferences, which may well diverge. Private preferences represent authentic beliefs, but public preferences are often determined by considerations of personal benefit or safety. By measuring public preferences, an incumbent ruler may seem to enjoy solid support.<sup>54</sup> Any 'suitable shock', however, can initiate a process by which private preferences become increasingly obvious, eventually leading to a total collapse of regime legitimacy, and therefore control (Kuran 1989, p. 42). Thus, relatively small protests demonstrate the possibility of challenging the status quo, while growing opposition reduces the costs of defying the regime, and the revelation of previously hidden private preferences increases exponentially.

Here it has been argued that democratisation theory stands to gain significantly by incorporating the understandings of political opportunities expressed in the social movement literature. By broadening these understandings to include consideration of feasibility perceptions, the rewards can be further improved. As Kuran (1995, p. 1548) suggests, structural approaches to democratisation represent valuable predictive tools, but they 'need to be complemented by recognition of varying individual political choices'. Kuran (1995, p. 1548) asserts that preference falsification renders the prediction of revolution impossible. This may be overstated, but Kuran's stance

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54 This concurs with Zelditsch's (2001, p. 6) assertion that '[a]cceptance of valid authority ... is "instrumental" as well as normative. Even among those who do not believe in its propriety, its validity exists as a cognitive object of orientation. They know that it observably governs the behavior of others, that others act as if they believe in it and will act to support it. If a norm, value, belief, practice, or procedure is valid, it becomes, by virtue of the fact that it is "binding," embedded in a system of social controls. Others can be expected to support it if it is violated'.



nonetheless issues a serious challenge to democratisation scholars. Avoiding consideration of political opportunities, including feasibility perceptions, is unlikely to provide a complete picture of democratisation.

### **5.3 Resource mobilisation**

The emergence of understandings of social movements based on political opportunities was paralleled by the concurrent appearance of a school of thought which focused on resource mobilisation as the key to such movements (Oberschall 1973, Gamson 1975, McCarthy & Zald 1977). Similarly critical of the resource deprivation approach, this third theoretical school asserted that it was the ability of movement leaders to secure and organise resources that determined the likelihood of a movement's success.

Grievances always exist in society at a sufficient level, however their mobilisation requires effective organisation and the securing of adequate resources (McCarthy & Zald 1977, p. 1215). The resource mobilisation school has been credited with bringing the study of social movements into the mainstream (Caniglia & Carmin 2005, p. 202). While they may not have done this exclusively, resource mobilisation theorists have nonetheless certainly transformed attitudes towards social movements. Whereas many previous contributions had seen social movements as chaotic disruptions to politics as usual, the resource mobilisation approach understood movements as valid actors in the political system.

A central concern to resource mobilisation theory is the issue of free-riding inherent in social movements. Collective action potentially entails collective benefit, and an individual may choose to forego the risk of participation while still expecting to reap the rewards of movement success (Olson 1965). Resource mobilisation theory has asserted the potential of social movement organisations (SMOs) to alleviate this problem by distributing incentives and successfully mobilising populations. Successful movements thus came to be seen as anchored by such SMOs which, along with their leaders, were seen as rational actors that utilise 'the best available strategies given limited cognitive and material resources' (Kitschelt 1986, p. 59). These resources are to be largely

understood as money, labour and political power. That this approach sees the actions of SMOs as similar to those of private business is made clear by the emphasis on rational action, finances, incentives and costs, as well the frequent labelling of social movement leaders as entrepreneurs and reference to the social movement 'industry'.

The consensus on the part of resource mobilisation theorists that grievances always exist in a society translates to a heavy emphasis on the agency of movement entrepreneurs in explaining collective action. In contrast to the relative deprivation and political opportunities approaches, the appearance of social movements is not determined by structural variables, but arises as a result of the choices of specific actors. Some scholars have taken this agency particularly far, arguing that movement entrepreneurs can in fact produce a movement, and even grievances, where there was previously none. McCarthy and Zald (1977, p. 1215), for example, assert that in some circumstances 'grievances and discontent may be defined, created, and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs and organizations'. While a belief in the ability of movement entrepreneurs to create grievances is not shared by all theorists working from this approach, the emphasis on entrepreneur agency is found throughout resource mobilisation scholarship.

The resource mobilisation approach to social movements is arguably that most amenable to connection with democratisation theory. The appearance of resource mobilisation theory heralded a shift from assessing the macro-sociological environment to examining the micro-psychological level of SMOs and the individuals of which they are comprised. The focus on the actions of agents, particularly movement leaders, has strong parallels in democratisation theory. As has been seen, democratisation scholars have in the last decades largely coalesced around an understanding of democratic transition as being enacted, regardless of the level of compulsion exerted by environmental factors, by political elites. Those agency-based accounts which have considered mobilised publics as significant actors have restricted that role to determining the strength of reformist elites in their struggle with conservative elements of the ruling class.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, approaches which have invoked structural change in

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<sup>55</sup> See, for example, O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986, pp. 18-20) discussion of the role of mobilised publics in determining the relative positions of political elites in a number of Southern European and Latin American cases.

society as the key factor in democratisation have treated mass actors as relatively uniform bodies, organised in their action from above.<sup>56</sup> The concepts of grievance and opportunity structures, understood respectively by the relative deprivation and political opportunities approaches, have in contrast enjoyed little attention in the democratisation literature.

The existence of accounts of democratisation which bear parallels to the understandings of the resource mobilisation approach to social movements signifies that there is some precedent for the further utilisation of resource mobilisation concepts in the study of democratisation. In fact, it might be argued that the resource mobilisation approach is therefore that with the least to offer democratisation theory. However, the depth of research within the social movement field on the role of SMOs and movement entrepreneurs far exceeds that in the democratisation tradition. Thus, as the relative deprivation and political opportunities approaches contain important concepts for understanding the environmental aspects of movement mobilisation and outcomes, the insights developed within the resource mobilisation approach may help democratisation theorists better understand the processes within movements themselves. One subject of much debate within resource mobilisation scholarship bears particular potential to enhance understandings of democratisation, namely whether formal, centralised organisations are more likely to achieve success. While there exists a certain degree of support for this notion, a significant quantity of evidence has been presented to suggest the opposite, especially in autocratic environments.

The focus of resource mobilisation theory on the organisations involved in social movements has spurred significant attention to the varying structures of these organisations, and to the consequences these have on movement outcomes. Mirroring understandings of commercial operations, the orthodox approach charges that well-

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<sup>56</sup> Rueschemeyer et al. (1992, p. 5), for example, see the relevant actors as classes, whose interests are complex, but which are nonetheless expected 'to exhibit definite central political tendencies'. The success classes have in organising is crucial to the achievement of their goals (p. 59). Rueschemeyer et al. make it clear that class leaders are responsible not only for negotiating the inter-class alliances which are 'crucial for the advance of democracy' (p. 59), but also for 'articulating class interests that otherwise would remain inchoate or completely dormant' (p. 55). Meanwhile, Collier and Mahoney's (1997) account of Latin American transitions displays similar understandings, relying heavily on unions as the drivers of democratising mass action.

organised, centralised and bureaucratised groups are more likely to achieve their goals (Caniglia & Carmin 2005, p. 202). McCarthy and Zald (1977, pp. 1228-30) assert that centralised organisations enjoy more stable resource flows and incur fewer costs in maintaining the support of their constituents. The ability of centralised organisations to effectively make decisions has also been espoused as a reason for their apparent success. For Gamson et al. (1982, p. 20), leadership hierarchy is essential to enabling coordinated action. Empirical evidence has also been presented to support these arguments.<sup>57</sup> Typical is Gamson (1990), whose analysis of 53 American movements between 1800 and 1945 suggests that groups which are formal and centralised and which avoid factionalism have enjoyed more success in achieving their goals.

The assertion of a formal, centralised organisation as being necessary to social movement success has met with significant criticism. A number of contributors have emphasised the potential for organisations, with the passage of time, to shift from focusing on their original political goals to maintaining their existence (Caniglia & Carmin 2005, p. 203). Often basing their argument on Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy ([1908] 1949), such scholars assert that movement leaders, enjoying a certain degree of independence from movement followers, gradually steer their energies towards the institutional interests of the organisation and its leadership. Empirical evidence to support this view has been provided by Goldstone (1980), whose work found that loosely organised movements achieved their goals more rapidly than did formal, centralised groups.

As has been noted, resource mobilisation scholars have often asserted the ability of SMOs to overcome the free-rider problem due to their ability to distribute incentives and motivate potential participants. However, in a further challenge to resource mobilisation orthodoxy, a number of factors have been argued to potentially preclude the necessity of SMOs in this regard. One example is found in Piven and Cloward's (1992) treatment of riots, themselves the focus of one field of social movement research, which suggests that SMOs are superfluous. These contributors argue that 'riots require little more by way of organization than numbers, propinquity, and some

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<sup>57</sup> For a summary, see Giugni (1998, pp. 375-6).

communication. Most patterns of human settlement . . . supply these structural requirements' (Piven & Cloward 1992, p. 310). The type of relatively spontaneous protests that often lead to rapid democratic transition are likely to mirror the riots featured in Piven and Cloward's analysis. Whether or not they feature the violence and destruction typical of riots, anti-regime protests may well be made possible by the same factors these contributors identified as requisites of riots. That the majority of societies exhibit these traits, as the authors contend, suggests that regime-challenging mobilisation is likewise virtually universally possible.

Several further approaches claim that mutual assurance, which acts to encourage participation in otherwise potentially risk-averse individuals, can be achieved through means other than that understood by traditional resource mobilisation theory. One possibility which has been proposed is the capacity of factors such as civil society, interpersonal relationships and social capital to evince mutual assurance. Thus, 'informal neighborhood groups, occupational or workplace groups, or friendship networks' may take the place of formal organisation in encouraging individuals to take part in collective action (Goldstone & Useem 1999, p. 997). Shared culture has been identified as a further potential basis for participation. A common understanding of traditions, in combination with what are termed repertoires of contention,<sup>58</sup> are argued to have the potential to unite otherwise unorganised groups. 'In a time of political tensions, without planning, huge crowds gather in historic squares in their capital on anniversaries of momentous events and chant the same slogans and display the same national symbols and demand leadership or regime change' (Oberschall 2010, p. 188).

The seeming strength of arguments both for the advantages and disadvantages of social movements being backed by formal, centralised organisations suggests that both approaches have a certain amount of validity. As Goldstone and Useem (1999, p. 998) suggest, 'the current state of the evidence argues for a more nuanced view of the relationship of organization to protest or revolution - such organization may be a facilitating factor, but it seems neither necessary nor sufficient for protest or revolution, or for their success'. These contributors are not alone in suggesting the need for a more

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<sup>58</sup> Repertoires of contention will be given significant attention in the following section on cognitive approaches to understanding social movement emergence and outcomes.

prosaic approach. Caniglia and Carmin (2005, p. 203) likewise argue that as '[t]he degree of formality that is adopted ... can facilitate as well as impede goal attainment ... often the internal challenge for an SMO is finding the proper balance between the extremes of formal organization and autonomy'. As the search for such a balance is likely to depend to some degree on the environment in which an organisation finds itself, a more nuanced approach might well be one that also takes this into account.

The majority of social movement scholarship has focused on movements operating in the Western world. In such an environment, the relative strength of rights to free expression and assembly and the relative reluctance of leaders to resort to repression mean that social movement organisations are generally able to work fairly freely and without great fear of retribution. The argument that these circumstances often favour centralised organisations seems to have significant merit. However, it is not clear that such an analysis can be simply transferred to autocratic environments. In fact, a number of theoretical arguments have been advanced which suggest the opposite. Firstly, focusing on visible, centralised movements risks under-specifying the highly significant role potentially played in authoritarian circumstances by less visible contentious action. Secondly, strong arguments exist in favour of the supposition that loosely organised movements in fact achieve more success in such environments, due to their ability to organise more dynamically and to better withstand repression.

The tendency of the resource mobilisation approach to focus on visible organisations at the expense of less obvious social movement artefacts could be intellectually fatal in understanding situations where open dissent incurs significant danger. As Tarrow (1991, p. 14) argues, '[b]y focusing on organizations rather than on collective action in general, there is the danger of mistaking the highly visible part for the less easily analyzed whole'.<sup>59</sup> A number of contributions have asserted the significance of acts of rebellion which are highly subtle, and thus pass under the radar of both autocrats and most academics. Studying the inhabitants of the state of Kedah in Malaysia, Scott (1985) found such actions as slowdowns, sabotage and petty theft to be widely utilised by a

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<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Tarrow (1991, p. 14) asserts that research on socialist Eastern Europe largely ignored the understandings of the resource mobilisation approach because the repressive nature of regimes in that region would make it difficult to assert the importance of organisations and their ability to summon resources.

weak peasantry against the dominant land-owning class. Applying the term 'weapons of the weak' to such actions, Scott subsequently expanded his analysis, arguing such 'everyday forms of resistance' to be used not only by peasants, but in general by groups facing a stronger opponent (Scott 1989, 1990). Such scholarship established the foundation for a number of subsequent contributions, including Schock's (2005) influential work on unarmed insurrections and Bayat's (2010a) insightful exposé on the sometimes subversive actions of ordinary people in the Middle East.

A number of factors suggest that loosely organised, decentralised movements may experience more success in authoritarian settings. Powell (1990, pp. 303-4) argues that non-hierarchical organisations tend to be 'lighter on their feet'. For Caniglia and Carmin (2005, p. 203), this suggests that less centralised organisations may be better able 'to mobilize quickly and adapt to emerging situations'. In addition, such organisations benefit from experiencing 'fewer barriers preventing them from engaging in disruptive action' (Caniglia & Carmin 2005, p. 203), a factor that may be crucial in the uncertainty that often surrounds democratic transition. Furthermore, the non-hierarchical nature of such networks suggests to Burrowes (1996, pp. 192-4) an enhanced ability to overcome the vagaries of operating in authoritarian environments, as the removal of a movement's leaders is likely to be less catastrophic to its continued operation. Burrowes argues that such decentralised structures incur the added benefit of instilling a sense of responsibility and initiative in movement participants. This in turn is likely to increase their chances of withstanding repression, which Burrowes sees as crucial to achieving success.

Given that repression is a common occurrence in episodes of collective action in autocratic settings, it is not surprising that its action has become the object of significant academic scrutiny. A number of commentators have progressed past assessing the ability of movements to endure repression, and have argued that the nature of repression itself can be crucial in deciding outcomes. By using untargeted repression, the authorities are likely to both increase support for the opposition movement and consolidate calls within that movement for the removal of the regime, as opposed to less drastic changes (Goldstone 1998, p. 130). Thus, the indiscriminate use of repression often causes the

kind of 'backfire' against the regime which subsequently ensures the opposition's success (Stephan & Chenoweth 2008, p. 11). In movements organised as networks, the lack of a centralised organisation makes it significantly more difficult for regimes to target specific individuals for repression. The action of this mechanism is thus thought to serve as a particularly significant advantage to decentralised, loosely-organised movements.

Empirical evidence of democratisation movements provides support for both sides of this argument. A number of successful democratic transitions have indeed featured highly formal, centralised opposition movements. The ANC in South Africa and Solidarność in Poland are prime examples of visible, centralised organisations which challenged incumbent autocrats and eventually achieved their goals. In order to do so, both of these organisations refrained from abandoning political goals in favour of the organisation's longevity, thus avoiding the fate predicted by pessimistic accounts of SMO development. Furthermore, the ANC and Solidarność, despite providing clear targets for government repression, managed to survive this repression and convert it into widespread public support.

In contrast to the experiences of the ANC and Solidarność, however, arguably the majority of mass-influenced democratisations have witnessed less formal, more loosely structured opposition movements. The examples of the 1989 transitions in Czechoslovakia and East Germany are indicative. Key to the success of collective action in both Czechoslovakia and neighbouring East Germany was not a strong, centralised organisation, but 'informal communication among neighborhood and friendship networks' (Goldstone & Useem 1999, p. 997). In the case of East Germany, Lohmann (1994, p. 89) states that the pivotal 'Leipzig Monday demonstrations were dominated by unorganized individuals and small groups who made their participation decisions in a decentralized way'. Noting an inverse relationship between the level of organisation and the success of a series of East German protests, Lohmann (1994, p. 89) argues that, in this case at least, '[t]heories that emphasize the role of political leadership and organization in enhancing the prospects for and the effectiveness of collective action fare badly'. Similarly, Saxonberg (1999, p. 25) describes both the Czech Civic



Forum and the Slovak Public Against Violence in 1980s Czechoslovakia as 'loosely-knit organisations, without any clear goals or strategies, and without even clear membership'. Nonetheless, these two organisations were able to mould and direct public discontent with the incumbent regime successfully enough over a period of years to achieve democratic change.

The recent Arab uprisings have exhibited similar development to that seen in Eastern Europe. In both regions, significant levels of dissent existed for extended periods of time. Repression has arguably acted to keep this dissent from boiling over, both by intimidating potential movement entrepreneurs and participants, and by preventing widespread knowledge of the true level of dissatisfaction with the regime. In the case of the Middle East, that dissent has existed for some time is made clear in Bayat's (2010a, 2010b) treatment of the everyday forms of resistance utilised by populaces throughout the region. As Bayat demonstrates, without feeling able to directly challenge incumbents, and without institutionalised methods for having their voice heard, Arabs have been forced to turn to such forms of resistance. Anti-regime activity has thus been characterised by disparate actions and loosely-organised networks of dissidents, as opposed to the centralised, bureaucratic organisations often witnessed in episodes of collective action in Western Europe and North America. This pattern has continued with the recent uprisings in the region. Rabbani (2011, p. 13) argues participating protesters to have been '[o]rganized, even disciplined, but not constituted through traditional party or movement structures ... [they] appear to be led by coalitions of networks, more often than not informal ones'.

At the point that dissent has erupted into significant anti-regime protests, incumbents have faced significant difficulty in identifying dissidents due to the low visibility of opposition activists and the lack of an officially condoned but representative opposition. As Rabbani (2011, p. 13) states, 'Arab regimes have been so successful in eradicating and marginalizing traditional opposition that their opponents today lack the kind of leaders who exercise meaningful control over a critical mass of followers, and whose removal or co-optation can therefore have a meaningful impact at ground level'.<sup>60</sup> The

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<sup>60</sup> Rabbani continues by noting the irony present in the Egyptian case: 'in his desperate last days the only party leaders Mubarak found to negotiate with represented little more than themselves'.

lack of identifiable opposition leaders has led to untargeted repression, resulting in a public backlash which has forced incumbents to surrender to opposition demands. This has been witnessed most clearly in those countries where opposition to the government has cut across ethnic, class, religious and geographical lines. Thus, the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings were no doubt aided in their rapid achievement of regime change by their broad societal bases.<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere, however, the predominance of certain groups in opposition movements has allowed regimes to more carefully target those groups, without causing the kind of collateral damage to nominally pro-regime sections of the population which might provoke a more significant backlash.<sup>62</sup>

The course followed by the recent Arab uprisings is also informative in terms of the relatively limited importance of the resources understood by orthodox resource mobilisation theory. The Arab movements have seemingly featured not only loosely structured organisation, but also relative independence from especially financial resources. What labour has been utilised seems largely to have consisted of individuals or small groups encouraging mobilisation without clear incentives or the expectation of future reward. Mobilisation has been effected not by the deployment of large marketing campaigns run by professional movement entrepreneurs seeking positions of power in a potentially reformed system, but by scattered activists spreading messages by word of mouth, often utilising social networks. The suggestion that the Arab uprisings might have been the result of pre-planned, well-financed operations (an allegation levelled on several occasions with little merit at the post-Soviet 'colour revolutions') seems untenable. Those figures who have had an effect on these movements have been ones not easily understood by resource mobilisation orthodoxy, while the significance of their actions have been witnessed less in terms of resources and elite alliances, and more in

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61 See Mabrouk (2011) for discussion of the course of the Tunisian revolution, including the statement that the initial protests 'managed to attract more and wider social strata that already carried with them varying and sometimes even contradictory experiences, expectations and expressions.'

62 Protesters in Bahrain were largely drawn from the Shia community, allowing the authorities to selectively repress members of that sect, while maintaining sufficient support from the Sunni population. Meanwhile, the loyalty of particular tribes and geographical regions in Libya enabled Muammar Gaddafi to continue in power for several months while prosecuting a civil war against rebelling regions. Similarly, in Syria the relative strength of support for the regime amongst religious minorities and the business class, concentrated especially in the country's two largest cities, has allowed the authorities to maintain relative calm in those areas while severely repressing dissent elsewhere. For discussion of the role of the sectarian divide, and its exploitation by the Bahrainian authorities, see Abdulla (2011). For a treatment of the tribal divisions in Gaddafi's Libya, see Gheblawi (2011). For discussion of the varying religious and ethnic divides in Syria, see Salih (2011).

terms of influencing mobilisation by bolstering movement legitimacy and morale.<sup>63</sup>

It has been seen that resource mobilisation theory has brought significant consideration of agents, particularly SMOs and their leaders, into social movement scholarship.

Whereas the relative deprivation and political opportunities approaches have focused almost entirely on factors external to movements, the resource mobilisation school has shifted attention to internal processes. As this approach suggests, money, the labour of movement entrepreneurs of varying degrees of professionalism, and access to actors in possession of political power may all help at times to lubricate movements making political claims. Nonetheless, in authoritarian settings, grievances and opportunities seem to be of more consequence, while clearly identifiable, centralised opposition organisations may prove more vulnerable to targeted repression than loosely structured, less formal movements. Movement entrepreneurs no doubt played some role in both the Eastern European revolutions which took place two decades ago, and in the recent Arab uprisings. However, this role has not necessarily been one well understood by resource mobilisation orthodoxy. Whereas resource mobilisation theorists have tended to focus on financial and political resources, prominent actors in these episodes have seemingly had a greater effect on discourse and movement legitimacy and morale.

Democratisation scholarship may gain by closely examining the actual influence of movement entrepreneurs in such situations. By focusing especially on the consequences of the structure of opposition movements in autocratic settings, students of democratisation may be able to produce more accurate explanations of political transformations. Ironically, despite the resource mobilisation approach's identification of the importance of agents, its focus on movement organisation and the securing of resources has arguably obscured the role of movement entrepreneurs in determining discourse, setting agendas and framing grievances. This failure has contributed to the appearance of a fourth approach to understanding the emergence and likelihood of success of social movements. While this fourth approach includes a variety of different

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63 Thus, thirty-year-old Google employee Wael Ghonim's appearance in Egypt's Tahrir Square has been seen as critical in revitalising the waning anti-regime protests (Ez-Eldin 2011, p. 63). Likewise, more established political actors such as Mohammed El-Baradei and Amr Moussa were seemingly unable to bring any traditional resources to bear, nor to successfully liaise with the incumbent regime, but rather had their greatest impact by increasing movement morale.

theories, and thus may not be as easily categorised as its predecessors, these theories can be understood together as representing a cognitive approach to social movements. It is to this approach that attention will now be turned.

## **5.4 Cognitive approaches**

The resource mobilisation approach's heavy emphasis on rational choice, as welcome an antidote as it may have been to assertions of protest as irrational and obstructive to politics as usual, nonetheless came to be criticised for neglecting emotions and values. The resource mobilisation school had firmly established the importance of considering SMOs and movement entrepreneurs in the mobilisation of movements, but the implication that individuals must be motivated to participate by the use of incentives and suggestions of personal benefit appeared not to fully explain the experience of social movements. The rise of what became known as new social movements, which included women's, environmental and peace movements among others, rendered this shortcoming particularly clear. Mass participation in such movements, where the assertion of expectations of personal gain often seemed futile, suggested that existing theories needed to be complemented by understandings which included consideration of the role of factors such as culture, values and emotions in explaining movement mobilisation and success (Caniglia & Carmin 2005, p. 205). The explanatory value of these understandings has not been limited to such new social movements, however. On the contrary, scholars have utilised such approaches to explain an exceptionally broad spectrum of movements in widely diverging environments.

A variety of approaches have sought to provide a treatment of social movements which would incorporate emotions and values, citing the importance of such factors as framing, repertoires of contention, discourse, ideology and culture. Perhaps because of the diversity of these theories, various labels have been given to them. Caniglia and Carmin (2005, p. 205), for example, use the term 'cultural and cognitive theories', while Oliver et al. (2003, p. 225) refer to 'social constructionist theories'. The influence of the concept of framing has been such that the other factors listed here have often been either

overlooked, or alternatively subsumed within consideration of the former.<sup>64</sup> Certainly, the framing concept is particularly potent, and arguably the most significant of the cognitive factors identified as influencing social movements. Consideration here will thus be given firstly to framing, before attention is turned to repertoires of contention, and the role of identities, emotions and diffusion. The relatively limited acknowledgement of cognitive factors on the part of the democratisation literature will then be discussed. Finally, the case will be made for the potential of a number of understandings generated by cognitive approaches to social movements in aiding the explication of mass-influenced democratisation.

Social movement scholarship identifying the salience of framing draws its inspiration from the work of Goffman (1974), where frames of reference were argued to condition the way people interpret their environment. Goffman (1974, p. 21) held that individuals utilise particular frames of reference in order to 'locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences'. Applying this understanding to social movements, Snow and Benford (1988, p. 198) argued that such frames of reference can be utilised by movement entrepreneurs 'to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists'. People are thus understood as appraising the legitimacy and worthiness of movements and their goals according to the frames of reference through which they interpret their environment. These frames are composed of a variety of factors, stipulated by Benford and Snow (2000, p. 629) to include 'meanings, beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths, narratives, and the like'. The degree to which movements achieve mobilisation and attain successful outcomes is determined by their ability to align themselves with these frames.

A second powerful cognitive factor consists of the concept of repertoires of contention. Essentially working from a resource mobilisation perspective, Tilly (1978) first proposed that contentious action takes place according to established traditions which determine both what is acceptable and what is likely to be successful. Thus, when

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<sup>64</sup> Thus, McAdam et al. (1996), in a widely cited work, divide the field of social movement research into approaches which consider political opportunities, mobilising structures, and cultural framing. This subsumption reflects a certain intellectual creep, whereby the term framing has come to be used to describe virtually any process whereby culture affects social movements.

French farmers prevent thoroughfare by parking their vehicles on the nation's highways in order to press their claims, they are but mimicking their ancestors of centuries past who likewise blocked transport arteries for political reasons. What might have begun as an investigation of the methods to which movement entrepreneurs resort in order to mobilise adherents has since transformed into a significant area of research in its own right. The search for more detailed understandings of repertoires of contention has led to deep exploration of the cultural phenomena seen as interacting therewith. Meanwhile, the frequent incorporation of treatments of repertoires of contention within discussion of framing can be seen as reflective of the fact that movement entrepreneurs are often understood to seek legitimacy by recourse to forms of action which resonate with local traditions.

In addition to framing and repertoires of contention, a number of additional cognitive factors, including identity, emotions and diffusion, have been explored as potential influences on social movement mobilisation and success. That these variables are often discussed within examinations of framing and repertoires of contention is again testament to the interconnectedness of all these factors. A number of new social movement theorists have asserted that participation in social movements is an act of identity establishment rather than a manifestation of a desire for political change (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001, p. 409). The supposed 'contradictions of advanced capitalism' led to 'the formation of new collective identities', the search for which was more significant than either 'individual motivations' or 'organizational strategies' (Tarrow 1988, p. 424). Several contributors have likewise asserted the need for understandings which take account of emotions in social movement development. Arguing that earlier theories had relied on accounts of agents as rational and emotionless, such scholars have suggested that '[e]motions are pervasive in social movements and play an important role in different points of a movement's life course' (Oliver et al. 2003, p. 233). The ability of various aspects of social movements to diffuse geographically has also been identified as having a significant influence on movement trajectories. Not only does collective action apparently tend to occur in cycles within national boundaries (Tarrow 1994), but the effects can also be felt internationally. Early movers thereby initiate 'complex diffusion processes by which the

ideational, tactical, and organizational 'lessons' of the early risers are made available to subsequent challengers' (McAdam 1995, p. 226).

The democratisation literature has displayed a deep ignorance of cognitive factors. Whether searching for the structural determinants of democratisation, or asserting the supremacy of elite agency, virtually all democratisation theorists have overlooked the role of cognitive variables. By treating the masses as determined and predictable in their actions, both structuralists and agency theorists have failed to consider the role of factors such as frames of references, emotions and identities.<sup>65</sup> Those contributors who have come the closest to appreciating such, namely those structuralists who have asserted the importance of cultural values in the emergence of democracy, have nonetheless largely treated such values as either entrenched or otherwise predictably determined by socioeconomic development.

One important exception to this rule can be seen in the work of di Palma, whose analysis of the Eastern European revolutions interfaces significantly with cognitive factors. di Palma (1991, p. 76) argues that protest in an authoritarian setting is a process of reclaiming dignity:

As people bear witness against the regime - which they did most dramatically in the squares of Eastern Europe - most of them strive for catharsis: by rejecting the regime, they cleanse themselves. Thus, utilitarian free riding is not a factor. Instead, individual participation, previously banned, becomes the necessary step - its own reward, even - to recover one's public self.

Significantly, di Palma is asserting the ability of the reward of psychological cleansing to overcome the free-rider problem, thus suggesting a potential mobilising force seldom considered elsewhere.

Some further precedent for the acknowledgement of cognitive factors exists in the

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<sup>65</sup> Even agency theorists, in their assertion of the preponderance of elite agency in determining democratisation, generally rely on an understanding of political leaders as determined by particularly simplistic, selfish desires.

democratisation literature in the form of the inclusion by a minority of contributors of the significance of legitimacy. The concept of legitimacy itself implies not merely a simple mathematical calculation, but rather suggests a complex process which includes cultural, emotional and identity components (Zelditsch 2001, p. 6) Thus, democratisation theorists who have invoked the role of legitimacy are at the same time incorporating consideration of cognitive variables into their work. Indeed, some contributors make this link more explicit, by acknowledging the importance of factors such as discourse and ideology. Gilley's (2007) treatment of institutional change in China, for example, pays particularly attention to the Chinese Communist Party's various approaches to maintaining legitimacy, including the evolution of its legitimacy claims and attempts to alter societal values. It is clear from such an approach that legitimacy is not a one-dimensional good that can be bought, but rather something particularly supple, subjective and dependent on a variety of factors, many of which may be difficult to measure.

There thus exists some precedent within the democratisation field for the consideration of cognitive factors. Nonetheless, this precedent remains severely limited, especially when compared to the wealth of possibilities suggested by work on social movements. The democratisation field therefore arguably stands to profit handsomely from the incorporation of a number of understandings generated by cognitive approaches to social movements. The latter field contains not only insights in terms of the importance of factors such as framing and repertoires of contention, as already considered, but also with regards to the interactivity of the multitude of variables which affect movements, as well as the mutability of movements themselves. Attention will now turn to a consideration of the significance of these issues.

The maturity of the social movement field, by the time of the appearance of framing theory, perhaps contributed to the fact that most scholarship which emphasises the significance of framing nonetheless refrains from discarding the understandings generated by previous approaches to social movements, particularly those of the resource mobilisation and political opportunities schools. Whereas contributors adhering to these intellectual predecessors exhibited some tendency to distance



themselves from prior theories, much work advocating the significance of cognitive factors has attempted to incorporate existing concepts into new understandings. A significant effect of this process has been the assertion of interactivity between mobilising structures, political opportunities, and the cognitive factors examined here.

One way in which there is seen to be interactivity is between cultural frames and the movement entrepreneurs understood by the resource mobilisation approach. It is clear from the above discussion that frames of reference have the ability to determine the success of movement entrepreneurs' attempts at mobilisation. However, individuals can also be motivated to act, and potentially become entrepreneurs themselves, by the perceived injustice or inappropriateness of existing frames. This is particularly clear in the case of new social movements, which 'often do not focus on political change, but strive to achieve social, cultural, and economic transformation' (Caniglia & Carmin 2005, p. 205). Such movements thus seek not only to align themselves with cultural frames so as to induce participation, but seek also to 'promote transitions in prevailing societal norms' (Caniglia & Carmin 2005, p. 205).

Cognitive factors are also seen as interacting with political opportunities. To the extent that cultural frames and repertoires of contention can be seen to determine the boundaries of social movement actions, these factors have been argued to represent an opportunity structure themselves. As Benford and Snow (2000, p. 629) assert, '[j]ust as the political opportunity structure constrains and facilitates movement frames and framing activities, so too does the cultural context in which movement activity is embedded'. However, social movements are often simultaneously involved in a constant process of challenging existing norms and values. As Tarrow (1992, p. 189) states, social movements are 'both consumers of existing cultural meanings and producers of new meanings'. By successfully challenging societal norms, movements can thus rearrange the opportunity structures by which they themselves are bound. As Rudbeck and Sigurdsson (1999, p. 12) assert, a movement can 'create rising or contracting opportunities for itself and others by way of its own actions'.

Social movements have similarly been argued to be capable of altering accepted

repertoires of contention. Tarrow (1988, p. 435), for example, asserts the potential for collective action, occurring as he sees it according to cycles of protest, to affect cultural perceptions of the relevance of particular repertoires of contention:

Cycles of protest may be the crucibles within which new forms of collective action are sparked, hammered out, welded together, and eventually hardened. In the process, many are discarded, as they either fail to capture people's imagination, do not impress antagonists, or succeed in bringing down repression on their inventors' heads. The residue at the end of the cycle is its permanent contribution to the repertoire of contention.

Ukraine's Orange Revolution might be a good case in point. The success of this movement, where thousands of protesters camped on the capital Kyiv's main thoroughfare for a period of weeks, has seemingly significantly and durably affected the understandings of Ukrainians as to how collective action ought to be prosecuted. Since this event, the slightest hint of political conflict is often accompanied by the spontaneous erection of tents.<sup>66</sup> By redefining what are understood as valid forms of collective action, social movements again display the interactivity of cognitive factors and political opportunities.

The recognition on the part of cognitive approaches of the interactivity of the various factors involved in movement mobilisation and success is paralleled by an appreciation of the mutability of movements, and the environments in which they find themselves. Various scholars adhering to prior traditions likewise recognised the mutability of factors endogenous, and especially exogenous, to social movements. Thus, relative deprivation theories have seen levels of deprivation as determined by a combination of expectations and external material factors, both of which are constantly changing. The political opportunity school likewise sees opportunity structures as in constant flux, dependent as they are on the prevailing patchwork of policies and political alliances. Meanwhile, the acknowledgement on the part of resource mobilisation theory of the importance of the rise of movement entrepreneurs, as well as the appearance of willing and able allies, similarly suggests the mutability of both the external environment and

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66 For examples, see Economist (2006), Itar-Tass (2011) and Reuters (2011).

movements themselves. Nonetheless, contributors working from a cognitive perspective have made this assumption more central. By paying particular attention to the mutability of movements, scholars displaying a cognitive approach have arguably generated more nuanced understandings of the courses which social movements take, and the outcomes which they achieve.

Evidence of the significance of movement mutability in cognitive approaches is easily found. One example is constituted by the interactivity asserted between the actions of social movements on the one hand, and cognitive factors such as cultural frames and repertoires of contention on the other. Social movements and the cultural environment in which they exist are thus understood as mutually constitutive. As Oliver et al. (2003, p. 229) assert, 'culture is not a set of independent variables that affect certain dependent variables'. Rather, cultures shape movements, which in turn influence those cultures. Scholarship dealing with the use of framing and attempts by social movements to direct public discourse is also particularly suggestive of movement mutability. Movements and their leaders are thereby seen as constantly acting and reacting to changes in the external environment. Often this entails a struggle for control of public discourse between the movement and the established authorities. By continually tweaking movement strategies, leaders can hope to best take advantage of the prevailing atmosphere.

As movements alter their strategies and choice of frames, however, they are also changing their identity. While prior approaches to social movements have often overlooked this phenomenon, contributors working from a cognitive approach have been more willing to interface with it. Thus, movement identities have been the subject of research to establish 'the ways they are formed through discursive practices and in ongoing political interaction with other groups and movements' (Oliver et al. 2003, p. 231). A movement's dynamic choice of strategy determines its identity, both by way of its use of discourse and by its actions (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001, p. 409). Identity is significant in both social movements in general, and within individual SMOs. That SMO identities are not permanent, but rather constantly open to development, is reflected by the fact that they are 'negotiated, extended, and recreated' (Carmin & Caniglia 2005, p. 206). The selection of these particular verbs might seem to suggest

that movement transformation is the result of conscious intentions. However, that movements very often exist for long periods before achieving significant success means that transformation is also likely to occur without such conscious intent (Giugni 1998, p. 385).<sup>67</sup>

An area of investigation within social movement theory which implies particularly significant movement mutability is that which concerns the effects of repression on movements. Paralleling the effects of the struggle for control of discourse, the use of repression by the authorities, and the attempts made by movements to deal with such, are widely understood as having a large impact on movement trajectories. Orthodox thinking among political opportunity scholars held that repression would have an adverse affect on movement mobilisation, and thus success (Schock 1999, p. 361). In many cases this has indeed happened, however examples where movements grew larger and achieved their goals suggested to a number of scholars the possibility that repression might in fact aid social movements. A significant field of research thus materialised attempting to explain what has come to be known as the repression-protest paradox, whereby repression at times reduces protest, and at others incites more of it.

A variety of often diametrically opposed theories have been proffered to explain the repression-protest paradox. As Zimmerman (1980) notes, 'there are theoretical arguments for all conceivable basic relations between governmental coercion and group protest and rebellion except for no relationship'. Brockett (1993, p. 458) identifies the existence of linear and curvilinear models, with the level of repression being both negatively and positively related to subsequent protest. In addition to simple relationships, several commentators have proposed that certain intervening factors determine the ensuing result of repression. Thus, Brockett (1993) himself argues that the stage at which repression occurs in a protest cycle is the key to predicting its likely effect. Mason and Krane (1989) assert that the way in which repression is targeted determines the result. If movement leaders are singled out, non-elites are less likely to engage in action, whereas if repression is indiscriminate, they have nothing to lose by

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<sup>67</sup> This is of course something alluded to by the aforementioned contributions which assert the propensity of overly bureaucratic, centralised organisations to gradually shift from emphasising their original goals to focusing on organisational survival.

supporting collective action. Opp and Roehl (1990) argue that the result of repression depends on whether it is seen as justified, and whether potential protesters are organised into networks which encourage collective action. Schock (1999, p. 367) suggests that the effects of repression are determined by 'the presence or absence of other dimensions of opportunity', particularly the degree to which establishment elites are divided. In a later work, however, Shock argues that factors internal to movements are as important as the constellation of external opportunities. There, Schock (2005, p. 33) identifies the salient factors as a movement's choice to employ violence, variety of protest methods, choice of protest targets and organisational structure.

There remains considerable disagreement upon the effects of repression on social movements, and the reasons for which these effects may differ from case to case. Nonetheless, the virtually universal acceptance of the premise that repression does in fact affect movements is an important testament to the latter's mutability. In addition, a significant quantity of research has investigated the reverse side of this relationship, namely the effects of protest on the use of repression (Carey 2006). While this body of work remains largely separate from that considering the consequences of repression on protest, the synthesis of these two approaches suggests a relationship that is very much interactive. Thus, the employment of repression, the form it takes, and the degree to which it is targeted at particular actors seem to have ramifications for the development of social movements, while the organisational structure and tactical choices of these movements in turn affect the likelihood and nature of resulting repression.

The recent Arab uprisings render each of the understandings considered here particularly salient in terms of explaining mass-influenced democratisation. Arguably one of the most important lessons able to be learned concerns the importance of interfacing with local culture and values, especially as these interact with the issues of framing and repertoires of contention. Whereas democratisation theory has generally presumed the masses to be relatively uniform, the Arab uprisings demonstrate that frames of reference and repertoires of contention are very much relative. These uprisings have arguably borne witness to the consolidation of a unique Middle Eastern

blend of repertoires.<sup>68</sup> This is most easily seen in the methods used by protesters to challenge incumbent regimes. Perhaps the most obvious of these has been the occupation of main squares, which has been a central facet of all the major Arab uprisings. However, the use of technology, and especially online social networks, in order to mobilise has now become accepted as a key tool of Arab anti-regime actors.<sup>69</sup> The use of non-violent methods has also seemed to gather significant currency on the part of anti-regime protesters, with the partial exception of Libya. Some of these forms of contention appear to be new to the Middle East, however as Bayat (2011) points out, many can also be traced through successive episodes of collective action dating back to anti-colonial movements. Bayat (2011, p. 51) asserts that the first Palestinian intifada, for example, 'remains a role model and inspiration to today's protesters'. The commonality enjoyed by these distinct episodes is evident in the continued utilisation of repertoires such as the politicisation of funerals.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, it seems ironic that protest utilising such repertoires, so keenly supported by a number of Middle Eastern leaders when directed at foreign targets, has now come to bring political change at home.

Culture has been arguably even more significant in the use of framing throughout the Arab uprisings. In order not to alienate significant sections of the population, anti-regime movement entrepreneurs have been very careful not to allow protests to be seen as inspired or dominated by Islamism. Simultaneously, so as to gain the support of more conservative religious elements of the polity, protest leaders have likewise refrained from adhering too closely to 'Western' political and social values. Meanwhile, in order to maintain public support and thus power, incumbents have variously relied on myths of patriotism and military prestige (e.g. Mubarak in Egypt), or alternatively the potent threat of sectarian chaos and bloodshed (e.g. Assad in Syria).<sup>71</sup> Anti-regime movement leaders have thus had to tread such a fine line to garner widespread public support,

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68 See Atassi (2011) for discussion of the use of many of these repertoires of contention in the Arab uprisings. This statement is not intended to assert that repertoires are identical across the Middle Eastern polities involved, but merely to suggest that the general collection of repertoires witnessed in this region differs somewhat from those utilised elsewhere.

69 See for example Alexander (2011) for the role of the internet in the Egyptian uprising.

70 See Allen (2006) for an intricate treatment of the role of funerals and martyrdom in the Palestinian context.

71 For a detailed discussion of the role of discourse in the Egyptian Revolution, see Ez-Eldin (2011). For a treatment of the role of Syria's diverse religious and ethnic mix in political calculations, see Salih (2011).

while seeking to minimise the efficacy of government attempts to influence discourse. The unique confluence of factors in these Arab settings demonstrates vividly the importance of considering the potential for local culture to both aid and inhibit the chances for political change.

The potential for movement diffusion has been another prominent feature of the recent Arab uprisings. Not only have protests diffused within individual countries, but they have also transferred across borders. As predicted by diffusion theory (Elkink 2009), following the eruption of unrest in Tunisia in December 2010, protests have seemingly spread most easily to areas which are geographically proximate, and which share a common language and culture. Nonetheless, the sensitivity of the Chinese government to the possibility for the Arab example to be followed by that country's citizens implies that the workings of diffusion may well not be limited to territories featuring geographical, cultural and linguistic similarities.<sup>72</sup>

The significance of disaffection in the Arab uprisings is a further point of particular note. Cognitive approaches inform us that the appearance of social movements can not be explained solely in terms of expected personal gain, but rather that consideration must be given to factors such as emotions and identity (Oliver et al. 2003, p. 231). Frustration at arbitrary justice and at high (especially youth) unemployment, the seeming lack of opportunities, and disgust at official corruption have been identified as significant factors across the Arab states affected by unrest (Rabbani 2011). These factors form a much better fit with an understanding which sees the search for dignity as a key factor in stimulating anti-regime protests.<sup>73</sup> As di Palma (1991, p. 76) has argued the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 to constitute the reclamation of dignity, so

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<sup>72</sup> Official Chinese fears of unrest in the Middle East spreading to the Middle Kingdom are perhaps most dramatically evident in not only the censorship of the word 'jasmine', following Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, in the media and online, but also the apparent banning of sales of the jasmine plant itself. See Jacobs and Ansfield (2011).

<sup>73</sup> Bayat (2011) identifies the role of dignity as a significant factor driving middle Eastern movements from the first Palestinian intifada through to the current Arab uprisings. Beydoun (2011, p. 26) concurs in his analysis of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, asserting that the twin demands for freedom and dignity 'formed the backbone of both revolutions'. Amrani (2011) makes a similar point: 'Like the protests elsewhere in the region, the peaceful demonstrations that have taken place in eight [Moroccan] cities are about dignity. Moroccans, like other Arabs, are tired of being subjects: they want to be citizens.' Elsewhere, Tucker (2007, p. 537) also recognises the importance of dignity in his treatment of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution.

Atassi (2011) asserts the centrality to the Arab uprisings of ordinary people reclaiming individual and collective dignity.

The courses which the various Arab uprisings have taken also speak of the significance of movement mutability, as suggested by many cognitive approaches to social movements. The incident widely seen as sparking the original Tunisian protests was the self-immolation of a young Tunisian street vendor. While official abuse has been identified as a factor in his demise, the vendor's quarrel can fairly be seen as having an economic basis, namely the inability to provide for himself and his family within the Tunisian system (Sghiri 2011, p. 202). Nonetheless, what began as largely an economic gripe rapidly transformed into very political protests. A significant number of Tunisians may have sympathised with the plight of the street vendor, however the multitude of protesters who eventually brought about President Ben Ali's removal seem to have been motivated by a combination of factors. While early protests demanded 'work and the right to equitable wealth distribution that would provide opportunities for success in life, improvement in living conditions, and the right to dignity', the movement soon transformed into one whose slogan had become '[t]he people demand the downfall of the regime' (Sghiri 2011, pp. 203, 205). The dramatic expansion of protests was a reaction to the security forces' brutal response to initial demonstrations, as well as the state media's silence, which together disgusted a large portion of Tunisian society.

Taken together, the Arab uprisings have also clearly shown the diverging potential outcomes of official repression, as predicted by much of the social movement literature. The course of events in Egypt mirrored that in Tunisia, where regime-supported violence spurred greater mobilisation, and relatively rapid incumbent exit. Yemen's president took significantly longer to vacate office, while the Bahrainian authorities have largely managed to quell protests by the use of force. The Syrian regime has also managed to maintain power so far, although its use of force has certainly not ended anti-regime demonstrations. Meanwhile, official repression in Libya rapidly led to erstwhile peaceful protesters taking up arms, resulting in a civil war which removed the incumbent from power.



It has been seen that cognitive approaches have made significant progress in reincorporating emotions into the study of social movements, argued to have been missing from the political opportunities and resource mobilisation schools. In doing so, cognitive theories represent in some ways a return to the understandings of the relative deprivation school, in terms of the focus on the individual movement member. The most influential cognitive approaches have been those describing framing and repertoires of contention, however important work has also been performed on the role of factors such as identity, emotions and diffusion in determining movement mobilisation and outcomes. Such approaches have led to two further significant understandings. Firstly, it has been widely asserted that cognitive factors interact with the variables considered by earlier social movement theory. Secondly, cognitive approaches have rendered the mutability of movements particularly clear. That democratisation scholarship has interfaced very little with the factors understood by these cognitive approaches suggests that the latter has much to offer in aiding the explication of political change. The salience of this implication is only increased by the example of the recent Arab uprisings, which have arguably exhibited all of the main cognitive processes considered here.

## 6 A research agenda

Each of the four approaches to social movements contains important insights that may be put to use in better understanding democratisation, and particularly the role of the masses therein. Existing understandings of democratisation focusing on the role of structural factors and elite action seem to explain significant parts of the processes of political change. However, democratisation scholarship has had little success in demonstrating how structural changes in society lead to elite decisions to engage in political reform. That the democratisation literature also fails to explain the role of the masses in such processes may be coincidental. It may well be, however, that by rectifying the under-specification of the part played by ordinary people, scholars may be able to better explain democratisation. In order to do so, it seems expedient to take heed of the implications suggested by the social movement literature. The most relevant concepts of each of the four approaches to social movements will now be considered, as will the implications these concepts have for the study of democratisation. Where appropriate, suggestion will also be made of avenues of research which may have the potential to further understandings.

That part of the social movement which has focused on relative deprivation as the main determinant of movement appearance suggests a number of possible novel approaches to tackling the role of the masses in democratisation processes. Arguably the most relevant point promoted by contributors from this school concerns the variable nature of deprivation and grievances. While a number of studies of democratisation have attempted to measure the effect of factors such as poor economic performance, and particularly economic crises, these have tended to rely on absolute definitions. By adapting such approaches to consider the subjective effect of external conditions on ordinary people, it may be possible to better explain their subsequent actions. There is no doubt a need for more empirical work measuring feelings of grievance, and relating these to episodes of political change.

Research which put ordinary people at the centre of political change by seeking to understand their attitudes to prevailing circumstances would necessarily also interface with legitimacy. As an adjunct to research on the effects of grievances on mass attitudes towards politics and subsequent political trajectories, more effort could be expended to establish the relationship between legitimacy and democratisation. Such examinations would also do well to consider the possibility that certain sections of a polity have more influence over political outcomes than others. Work which measures overall attitudes and grievances may obscure the role played by the same factors as they pertain to the inhabitants of capital cities or other societal groups with particular political power.

The political opportunities approach to social movements, with its focus on structures of opportunities, renders clear the importance of acknowledging the environment in which political change takes place. While adherents of the political opportunities approach have perhaps often over-emphasised the role of institutions and political alliances, the approach nonetheless contains significant lessons for democratisation theorists. By considering the part that opportunities play, especially when such are broadened to include factors not necessarily contained in the orthodox political opportunities approach, scholars of democratisation may be able to improve upon existing models of political change.

While structural theories have made important progress in predicting the likelihood of democratic transition and stability, their ability to accurately describe the real world has always been limited by factors beyond their grasp. The recent Arab uprisings have shown the limitations of such structural theories particularly clearly. By including consideration of the role of opportunities, especially that of feasibility perceptions, structural theories of democratisation may well stand to improve their predictive power significantly. Work on preference falsification and informational cascades suggests that feasibility perceptions can change rapidly. The evidence of both the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 and the recent Arab uprisings suggests that feasibility perceptions may represent something of a missing link between the socioeconomic variables traditionally understood by structural approaches to democratisation, and the mass action which has often brought about political change. By combining consideration of

this missing link with factors such as socioeconomic development, it may be possible to generate a model better capable of predicting democratic transition.

Exploring the exact role of factors such as feasibility perceptions is likely to be difficult. Preference falsification is likely to occur in authoritarian settings because individuals fear the repercussions of showing their true affiliation. In the same way, it is improbable that survey respondents would consistently make clear their thinking regarding the prevailing potential for regime change. One possible approach to measuring the effects of feasibility perceptions is to enquire as to their historical status following democratic transition. Subjects are arguably more likely to respond accurately when the threat of reprisals no longer exists, although there is naturally no guarantee that individuals will lose their fear immediately. Furthermore, such an approach risks the occurrence of the process by which 'the ephemera of popular politics disappears into people's attics and selective memories', as insightfully described by Tarrow (1991, p. 17).

A second approach may be to analyse the discourse of regime opponents, in an attempt to discern possible transformations in attitudes. A number of mass-influenced democratic transitions have featured initially limited demands, followed by later calls for complete regime change and even the prosecution of the incumbent autocratic authorities. This method risks, however, confusing the evolution of feasibility perceptions with changes in demands caused by factors such as regime repression. If it were possible to separate the effects of these two divergent processes, this approach could hold particular potential. Given the role of online social networks in the recent Arab unrest, the analysis of information generated therein could bring a high reward. By considering the transformation of language used on platforms such as Twitter, deep insights might be developed into the evolution of feasibility perceptions and their role in collective action and democratisation.<sup>74</sup>

The debate inspired by the resource mobilisation approach as to the effect of centralised organisation on social movement outcomes has important implications for the study of the role of mass movements in achieving democratic change. While there have been

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74 I am indebted to my supervisor, Russell Prince, for this important suggestion.

notable exceptions, the majority of recent examples suggest that informal, loosely organised networks may have more success in achieving change in autocratic environments. Such networks seem to reduce the ability of regimes to clearly target repression. That untargeted repression often produces a large public backlash suggests that these networks enjoy a particularly good chance of success compared to clearly identifiable, centrally organised opposition movements. Democratisation scholars may thus benefit more by considering 'mobilising structures', defined by McAdam et al. (2001, p. 14) as consisting of 'both formal movement organizations and the social networks of everyday life'. In doing so, it would be possible to interface with a wider array of networks than merely those, led by movement entrepreneurs, which are recognised by resource mobilisation orthodoxy.

An approach which examined mobilising structures may prove more salient in understanding democratising mass movements.<sup>75</sup> As has been seen, the failure of a number of more obvious mass democratisation movements to achieve immediate change, such as those in Burma and China in the late 1980s, has caused many commentators to abandon consideration of the masses as the source of political change. Similarly, the role of the masses in successful democratic transitions has often been ignored due to the apparent lack of a centralised, formal movement to which responsibility could be attributed. By considering the impact of less formal networks, it may well be seen that the public at large is a potent player in many more transitions than has been previously accepted. The relatively scant existing empirical work in this direction suggests that their impact is likely to be widespread and influential. Any further studies which reinforce such findings may then act to convince the wider audience of democratisation scholars of the necessity of considering the masses in accounts of political change.

One avenue for broadening understandings of the role of the masses in democratisation could therefore be the investigation of the significance of such less formally organised

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<sup>75</sup> A number of studies of democratic consolidation have considered concepts such as social capital, similar to the concepts in the broader term 'mobilising structures'. Social capital has often been stipulated as a requirement, or at least a significant aid, in the maintenance of democracy. However, little work has been done on the role of such capital in achieving democracy, by way of contentious action or otherwise.

networks. Empirical work could also seek to more definitively measure the incidence of mass movements, both formally and informally organised, in successful democratic transitions. The contributions of Scott (1985, 1989, 1990), Schock (1999, 2005) and Bayat (2010a, 2010b) show the need to account for not only highly visible, large scale collective action, but also relatively simple and subtle acts of defiance. In hindsight, much mention has been made of the role played in establishing the groundwork for the recent Arab Uprisings by activists and participants in previously overlooked movements. Groups such as the online 'We are all Khaled Said' community, commemorating and protesting the June 2010 death of a young Egyptian at the hands of Mubarak's security forces, have been seen as having been vital to the launching of the subsequent revolution (Preston 2011). If the significance of such movements, poorly understood by both democratisation theory and orthodox resource mobilisation theory, had been better comprehended at the time, there may have been more chance of predicting the ensuing events.

By properly measuring the incidence of low-level acts of resistance, it may be possible to paint a more accurate picture of the effects of the actions of ordinary people on political trajectories. Naturally, measuring the incidence of acts specifically designed to be subtle and difficult to detect can be expected to present some difficulties. In light of this, it may well be that case studies utilising qualitative methods provide more relevant results. Scholars requiring quantitative evidence, certainly more readily compared and correlated with measures of political change, might still be able to develop applicable constructs. If a detailed examination of a particular society were to establish that the wearing of jeans was an act of resistance, as Bayat (2010b, p. 31) suggests in the case of Middle Eastern youth, quantitative studies should have no particular problem in representing their incidence. It is even possible to imagine a system whereby country experts constructed quantitative data representing local levels of dissatisfaction and defiance, much as Transparency International does with levels of perceived corruption. This data could then be compared internationally and correlated with political trajectories.

Cognitive approaches to social movements arguably suggest the insights with the

greatest potential to aid understandings of democratisation. The focus of cognitive approaches on the importance of interfacing with local culture, as it determines the coherence of frames of references and repertoires of contention, holds important lessons for democratisation scholars. Merely transplanting existing democratic models or democratisation support programmes into a new environment is most unlikely to be successful, not least evidenced by the example of American intervention in Iraq.<sup>76</sup> Predictive models and historical empirical analyses which seek to determine the success of democracy movements therefore ought to take into account the role played by culture in determining movement outcomes. Including the case of Iraq and that of a relatively home-grown transition such as that of South Africa in the same analysis is likely to produce confusing results. A model which predicts the appearance of democracy as depending upon the mere existence of an opposition to the incumbent autocrats is likewise bound to result in failure. Cognitive approaches to social movements make clear that mobilisation and subsequent successful outcomes are determined by the frames of reference and repertoires of contention which are contained in a polity's genetic constitution. Democratisation scholars would do well to consider the failure not only of transplanted democracy in Iraq, but also of a multitude of oppositions in exile to inspire democratic uprisings, compared to the efficacy of local movements such as that of Solidarność in Poland or the ANC in South Africa. In doing so, models might be generated with greater abilities to predict democratic transition, by inclusion of consideration of the role of movement entrepreneurs employing culturally relevant discourse and forms of contention.

Democratisation scholarship also potentially stands to benefit significantly by considering the ways in which cultural features, and particularly attitudes towards politics, evolve over time. Structural approaches to democratisation, such as that of Inglehart and Welzel (2005), make a strong case for the role of economic development in producing value change, leading to more positive attitudes towards democratic government. However, frames of reference, repertoires of contention and general political attitudes are likely to be affected not only by endogenous evolution but also by processes of diffusion. The recent Arab uprisings have clearly shown the potential for

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<sup>76</sup> For analysis of the failure of the democratic transplant in Iraq, see Whitehead (2009).

protesters to adopt forms of contentious action from movements operating elsewhere. Less visible cultural artefacts are also likely to diffuse, however. If repertoires of action are borrowed across national borders, attitudes towards political systems also have the potential to travel. It seems democratisation theory would do well to seek to understand exactly how such cultural values and understandings diffuse. If an observed adversity to the term 'democracy' amongst the populace of a country such as Russia is understood as spreading to neighbouring countries with historical, linguistic and migrational links, then the latter might also be expected to be relatively immune to the enticements of democratic government. By exploring the paths by which political attitudes and other relevant cultural artefacts travel, democratisation scholars may be better able to predict the likelihood of publics supporting democratic transition.

Cognitive approaches to social movements also hold important lessons for democratisation theorists in terms of the role of identity and emotions. Such approaches suggest that individuals support movements not necessarily because of an expectation of personal benefit, but often due to emotional reasons and as a way of affirming their identity. Orthodox structural approaches to democratisation, however, have largely preferred to interface with more easily measured variables. Unfortunately, such approaches would find it especially difficult to explain the political change seen in those Arab states where incumbents have recently been removed from power. Whether measuring economic development, educational attainment or the proliferation of telephone lines, orthodox structural theories would be unable to explain the fall of regimes in countries exhibiting such varying levels of socioeconomic development. Instead, by considering factors such as dignity, democratisation theorists may be able to better understand such movements. This approach would concur with that of di Palma, who argues for the role of dignity in the Eastern European revolutions of 1989. Based on observation of these revolutions, di Palma argues anti-regime mobilisation in a dictatorship to be 'the personal recovery of public dignity and space', a process in which participants 'cleanse themselves' (di Palma 1991, p. 76). The long, slow loss of dignity caused by dictatorship is thus expunged by the cathartic act of protest, in which 'the rebounding is inevitable, magnified, and targeted against the dictatorship' (di Palma



1991, p. 76).<sup>77</sup> By taking seriously the role of emotions, identity and dignity, democratisation theory stands to benefit from the insights developed by cognitive approaches to social movements.

A further implication derived from cognitive approaches to social movements which holds particular import for democratisation theory concerns the mutability of movements. Orthodox democratisation theory has understood publics as being relatively stable, monolithic creatures. Cognitive approaches to social movements, in contrast, suggest that movements feature constant evolution and change. This has been particularly evident in the Arab uprisings, where grievances have seemingly begun as economically based, before transforming into more political demands. What started in Tunisia as a protest against an apparently unfair economic system has resulted so far in the removal of three Arab autocrats. Much democratisation scholarship has ignored the possibility that democracy might appear as the result of calls for seemingly more mundane, especially economic, privileges. The few works which have sought to identify the role of the masses in achieving democracy have thus considered only situations in which movements explicitly called for democratic reform. Instead of considering only mass movements which explicitly call for democracy, scholars may gain by examining the role of various movements in achieving political change, regardless of their initial claims.

An approach such as this would arguably interface well with the assertion of Rustow of democracy as often being a 'fortuitous byproduct'. As Rustow (1970, p. 353) noted, democracy must not necessarily be achieved due to the conscious will of the parties involved, but may be the byproduct of a struggle for something else entirely.<sup>78</sup> The significance of this approach may be further enhanced when movement mutability is considered in tandem with other cognitive factors. In cases such as that of Tunisia, it may well be that the simple, quotidian nature of the initial grievance is what made it so potent. The vegetable vendor's predicament was easily understood by a widespread

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<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, di Palma also argues for the ability of the desire for cleansing to overcome the problem of free-riding in collective action, of such concern to resource mobilisation theorists. Thus, 'utilitarian free riding is not a factor. Instead, individual participation, previously banned, becomes the necessary step - its own reward, even - to recover one's public self' (di Palma 1991, p. 76).

<sup>78</sup> Waterbury (1997) makes this assertion the object of study of an entire article.

section of the Tunisian population because it connected with their frames of reference. Support for such thinking comes from di Palma (1991, p. 70), who argues that there was an important unity among Eastern Europeans due to a shared struggle for survival, which helped to enable the revolutions there two decades ago. Likewise, the simplicity of the demands made in the early stages of the recent Arab protests arguably encouraged the protests' rapid diffusion. In contrast, a number of Arab activists have pressed claims for political change for some years, while failing to gain traction. This might easily be argued to be the result of a focus on more abstract issues such as human rights, which have not resonated particularly successfully. To examine the role in democratisation processes of only movements such as these, which make more explicitly political demands, and to ignore movements with other grievances, would be a great mistake. The recent Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan mass movements have brought about huge political change, regardless of their initial stances. Recognising the propensity for movements to change throughout their lifespans ought thus to be an important step towards a more nuanced view of the role of the masses in democratisation.

The aforementioned activists who have used frames with little potential for resonance, while seemingly having failed to produce the levels of mobilisation which have proved decisive in the recent Arab unrest, ought nonetheless not to be entirely ignored. Firstly, such activists may have had an important effect in terms of creating networks of politically-interested individuals (Alexander 2011). Such a result can be understood both in terms of its logistical potential for enabling mobilisation, but also in terms of its psychological effect. Individuals with grievances are more likely to protest when they believe that others will also do so, thus exposure to such a network is likely to increase confidence and perceptions of feasibility. Secondly, such activists may have played an important role in shaping public discourse. By influencing prevailing frames of reference, these dissidents may well have altered the political environment in such a way as to greatly enhance the effectiveness of the subsequent uprisings.

## 7 Conclusion

Democratisation scholarship has long represented an intellectual battleground between approaches which rely on structural variables, and those which invoke the actions of political elites. The sheer depth of work which contends that socioeconomic development increases a polity's chances of adopting democracy requires the scholar of political change to interface with these findings. Meanwhile, the highly visible role played by political elites in making deals, writing constitutions and influencing political trajectories suggests that the actions of these agents can also not be ignored. However, despite a number of calls for theoretical convergence, little progress has been made in terms of establishing comprehensive explanations which would properly include both structural and agency-based understandings.

Just as theoretical convergence has been reticent in its appearance, orthodox democratisation theory has spectacularly failed to predict or explain a series of instances of political change. The democratisation of a variety of polities featuring varying levels of socioeconomic development and diverging constellations of political actors over the last three decades suggests that existing theory has significant shortcomings. One way in which this extant theory has shown particular limitations is in its inability to explain the role of ordinary people in such processes. Here it has been argued that by incorporating serious acknowledgement of the masses, it may be possible to improve upon current explanations of political change.

The lack of a substantial foundation for examining the role of the masses in existing democratisation scholarship has necessitated the search for such a foundation elsewhere. Fortuitously, over half a century of research on social movements has produced a wide and deep appreciation of the ways in which mass movements influence social and political trajectories. The traditional focus of such scholarship on movements in the relatively democratic West means, however, that the findings therein may require some adaption to explain political processes in authoritarian environments. Nonetheless, the

social movement literature suggests a number of paths according to which the masses might cause or catalyse political change in autocratic polities.

Three ideal paths have been outlined here which are intended to illustrate these various potential trajectories. Attention has then turned to the specific factors which might act to push a polity along one or more of these paths. In doing so, the understandings of four diverging intellectual approaches to social movements have been considered. Each of these approaches contains significant insights which may be of assistance in contemplating the role of the masses in democratisation. Relative deprivation theories have highlighted the potential relativity of grievances, while the political opportunities approach has demonstrated the importance of considering opportunity structures in determining movement appearance. Resource mobilisation scholarship has brought discussion of the role played by movement entrepreneurs, and more broadly mobilising structures, to the fore. Subsequently, contributions adhering to a more cognitive approach have stressed the importance of factors including framing, repertoires of contention, emotions and identity.

That the processes and variables identified by the social movement literature seem to have played such an important role in the recent Arab uprisings, as well as in previous periods of political change, suggests the distinct need for their consideration in studies of democratisation. Structural theories which focus on socioeconomic factors may help to explain the background to the Arab uprisings and other mass-influenced incidences of political change. However, factors such as emotions, identity and dignity, in combination with the action of mobilising structures and the processes surrounding feasibility perceptions and preference falsification, arguably describe such events much more accurately. The incorporation of these factors may aid democratisation scholars seeking to understand the processes which lead political elites to take the decisions and write the constitutions for which they have been widely recognised as responsible.

A research agenda has thus been proposed for deepening understandings of the role of the masses in democratisation. By outlining three ideal paths by which the masses might realise political change, and suggesting a range of processes and variables which may

determine the appearance of democratising movements, this work seeks to aid subsequent research in this direction. It is hoped that future contributions may be able to shed more light on the exact workings of these factors, as well as any others identified, which act to determine political trajectories.

Adapting models of the appearance of democracy to interface with the factors considered here is unlikely to be simple. The rich quantity of insights available in the social movement literature with which to improve understandings of the role of the masses in democratisation is at once both appealing and daunting. Appealing because of their apparent potential, but daunting due to the distance to be covered by existing democratisation theory. Despite the difficulty that may be involved, however, deeper incorporation on the part of democratisation scholars of social movement concepts seems to be a necessity.

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