Conclusion

Contributions and Implications

This study represents the first comprehensive analysis of the origins of democracy in South America, the region of the world that for much of the twentieth century had the largest number of democracies after Europe. The central theoretical contribution of this book is to provide an original explanation for why democracy arose in some South American countries and not others during the early twentieth century. In so doing, the book also explains why some South American countries developed strong militaries and parties during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

The book shows that three main developments – the professionalization of the military, the rise of strong opposition parties, and ruling party splits – contributed to the emergence of democracy in the region. Military professionalization boosted the *incentives* for the opposition to abandon the armed struggle and focus on the electoral path to power. The rise of strong parties enhanced the *capacity* of the opposition to enact, implement, and enforce democratic reforms. And ruling party splits created the *opportunity* for the opposition and ruling party dissidents to enact democratic reforms that leveled the electoral playing field.

During the nineteenth century, the relative weakness of the armed forces in South America encouraged opposition forces to seek to overthrow governments by force, especially since they had little chance of prevailing in elections. These revolts undermined the rule of law and led governments to clamp down on the opposition, which deepened authoritarian rule. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, South American governments began to use their growing export revenues to strengthen and professionalize their militaries, which gave them a monopoly on violence for the first time. As a result, the opposition abandoned the armed struggle in most countries in the region during the early twentieth century and increasingly focused on elections.

The rise of strong opposition parties also played a central role in the emergence of democracy in the region. Opposition parties supported democratic

reform to improve their chances of winning elections, but they were more likely to be able to enact reforms if they had powerful organizations and deep roots in the electorate. Strong opposition parties typically held more seats in the legislature, which could provide the votes to enact reforms. They could also put more pressure on the government to support reform. In addition, strong opposition parties could contest electoral abuses in a systematic manner and mount sustained electoral challenges to the ruling party despite continued government electoral manipulation. Where opposition parties were weak, the opposition was more likely to abstain from elections, to seek power through armed uprisings, or to call on the military to intervene, all of which had negative implications for democracy in the region.

Strong opposition parties tended to arise in countries where religious or territorial cleavages were intense and relatively balanced. If conservative supporters of the Catholic Church and liberal critics of it were relatively similar in terms of their size and the amount of resources they controlled, strong parties based on this cleavage were more likely to emerge and endure. Strong parties could also arise if the population was closely divided between the center and periphery. Where one side of a cleavage dominated the other, however, competition tended to take place within the cleavage, which contributed to personalism and undermined party development. In addition, strong parties were more likely to arise in countries where the population was geographically concentrated, which made it easier for politicians to campaign throughout the country and for parties to develop nationwide organizations and electorates. By contrast, it was extremely difficult to build strong national parties in geographically fragmented countries owing to regional divides and the lack of communication and transportation infrastructure in the nineteenth century.

Even strong opposition parties could not typically enact democratic reforms on their own, given that they almost never held a majority in the legislature during this period. Splits within the ruling party, however, provided the opportunity to enact the reforms. These splits occurred frequently in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and were typically caused by internal leadership struggles and/or policy differences. In the wake of splits, ruling party dissidents sometimes forged alliances with the opposition to push through democratic reforms to undermine the ruling party's ability to control elections. Ruling party dissidents often supported democratic reforms for the same reason opposition party legislators did – that is, to level the electoral playing field and increase their chances of winning elections and holding office.

Chile and Uruguay had the strongest democracies in the early twentieth century in part because they developed strong parties and professional militaries that enjoyed a monopoly on the use of force. The existence of two or more strong parties was conducive to electoral competition and meant there was always at least one strong party in the opposition that was committed to the electoral path to power and could promote democracy. Weaker democracies arose where there was only one strong party (Argentina) or where the

military was not powerful enough to establish a monopoly on violence nationwide (Colombia). Once the strong party took power in Argentina, the country lacked a powerful opposition party, which undermined electoral competition and democratic stability in the long run. In Colombia, the professionalization of the military in the early twentieth century led the opposition to abandon the armed struggle, but the continuing weakness of the armed forces generated periodic outbreaks of regional violence, which destabilized the country's democracy.

Relatively stable authoritarian regimes arose in those countries, namely Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela, that developed strong militaries but continued to have weak parties in the early twentieth century. In these countries, the strength of the military was typically sufficient to deter opposition revolts. Opposition parties in these countries, however, were too weak to push through democratic reforms or to compete in elections on an uneven playing field. Instead, the opposition often abstained from presidential elections or presented only token opposition. In some cases, opposition leaders even called on the military to intervene, which led to occasional coup attempts in these countries, such as those that occurred in Peru in 1914 and 1919.

By contrast, those countries that continued to have weak militaries in the early twentieth century remained unstable authoritarian regimes, regardless of the strength of their parties. These countries, specifically Bolivia, Ecuador, and Paraguay, continued to be plagued by revolts and some of these rebellions even overthrew their leaders. Given government control of elections, opposition leaders in these countries viewed armed rebellion as their most effective means of taking power and so they frequently resorted to it. Indeed, as Chapter 3 showed, the number of outsider revolts and executive overthrows in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Paraguay substantially exceeded those in the other South American countries during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-1929 POLITICS

The emergence of democracy in South America during the early twentieth century had important consequences for politics in the region in subsequent decades. Many of the democratic reforms adopted in the early twentieth century proved to be sticky. Countries that adopted the secret ballot prior to 1930 generally maintained it in later years, and efforts were frequently made to better enforce it, such as by requiring the electoral authorities to furnish voters with a single ballot on which all the parties and candidates were listed, rather than having parties provide their own ballots. South American countries that shifted to electoral systems that provided for representation of minority parties, such as the incomplete list or proportional representation, generally continued to provide for minority representation in the years that followed, although countries frequently made adjustments to the precise formula they

used to achieve it.[1] Finally, South American countries that granted new suffrage rights in the early twentieth century almost always maintained these rights going forward. In fact, over the course of the twentieth century, virtually all Latin American countries steadily expanded suffrage rights, enfranchising women and illiterates, among other groups.

Why did many of these democratic reforms prove sticky? To begin with, some of the reforms were enshrined in constitutions, which required supermajority votes to amend. However, a more important factor was that many of the democratic reforms created vested interests. Newly enfranchised citizens opposed efforts to deprive them of the suffrage, and politicians who were elected under one set of rules typically preferred to maintain those rules. Moreover, the prolonged democratic experiences that some South American countries enjoyed during the early twentieth century led to the development of democratic norms among the citizenry. This made it risky for vote-seeking politicians to overturn the democratic reforms. International norms also increasingly favored democracy as the twentieth century wore on, and countries that departed from these norms faced disapproval and even sanctions from the international community. In short, the democratic laws often represented a bright line that was difficult to cross without provoking considerable attention and resistance.

In addition, some of the factors that favored democracy before 1930 continued to facilitate it in the decades that followed. Strong militaries, for example, discouraged the opposition from carrying out revolts in most South American countries post-1929, which helped stabilize democratic regimes. By contrast, countries with weak militaries, such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Paraguay, were subject to frequent revolts post-1929, which overthrew governments and undermined the likelihood of democratization.

Even more importantly, strong parties, especially powerful *opposition* parties, contributed to the preservation and strengthening of democracy in the long run. Strong parties fostered electoral competition, which was sometimes absent in countries with weak parties. Because they could typically compete in elections, strong opposition parties had fewer incentives than weak ones to revolt or to call on the military to overthrow the president. Strong opposition parties were also typically in a better position to promote further democratic reforms and to resist efforts by the president or ruling party to engage in democratic backsliding. These parties often controlled enough seats in the legislature and other institutions to pose a significant obstacle to presidential initiatives to concentrate power and undermine democracy. Well-organized opposition parties were also in a better position to carefully monitor the registration and voting process. Indeed, strong opposition parties usually had the organization and geographical reach to place their members on the committees that oversaw

[1] In the late twentieth century, some Latin American countries established mixed systems that combined proportional representation and single-member districts.

TABLE C.1 *Democracy in South America, post-1929*

Country	Number of years of democracy, 1930–2010 (BMR)	Number of years of democracy, 1930–2010 (MBP)	Mean Polity2 score 1930–2015 (Polity)	Mean Polyarchy score 1930–2022 (V-Dem)
Argentina	39	43	0.01	0.493
Chile	60	62	3.14	0.528
Colombia	64	72	5.62	0.410
Uruguay	61	66	4.43	0.673
Mean of democratic pioneers	**56**	**60.8**	**3.3**	**0.526**
Bolivia	30	38	0.87	0.372
Brazil	44	44	1.34	0.460
Ecuador	44	52	2.88	0.448
Paraguay	8	22	−2.57	0.301
Peru	31	48	2.41	0.418
Venezuela	46	52	3.02	0.439
Mean of democratic laggards	**33.8**	**42.7**	**1.33**	**0.406**

Sources: Boix, Miller, and Rosato (2013); Mainwaring, Brinks, and Pérez-Liñán (2001); Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013); Center for Systemic Peace (2012); Coppedge et al. (2023).

voter registration and the casting and counting of ballots throughout the country. In addition, strong opposition parties could use their political influence and capacity to mount popular protests to object to fraudulent elections and to demand a return to democracy in the event of a military coup or some unconstitutional seizure of power.

As Table C.1 indicates, the countries that established democracy before 1930 (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay) on average experienced significantly more years of democracy post-1929 than the other South American countries. This is true whether we measure democracy using the dichotomous BMR index (Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013) or the trichotomous MBP index (Mainwaring, Brinks, and Pérez-Liñán 2001).[2] Post-1929, the democratic pioneers have also registered significantly higher mean scores than the democratic laggards on two prominent democracy indexes: Polity II and V-Dem's Polyarchy index. A series of t-tests indicate that the differences between the democratic pioneers and democratic laggards is highly statistically significant (at the 0.0001 level) for all four measures of democracy post-1929.

Nevertheless, the degree of democracy and path dependence post-1929 should not be exaggerated. None of the democratic pioneers were entirely stable after 1929. They all experienced democratic breakdowns, some of which lasted a long time. Chile, for example, was under military rule from 1973 to 1989;

[2] I count as democratic the years that Mainwaring, Brinks, and Pérez-Liñán code as semi-democratic.

Colombia was under authoritarian rule from 1953 to 1957; and Uruguay had a military-backed government from 1973 to 1984. Of the democratic pioneers, however, Argentina suffered the most frequent breakdowns during this period. Indeed, between 1930 and 1982, Argentina experienced thirty-six years of authoritarian rule and only fifteen years of democracy, according to Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013, 67). According to both Boix, Miller, and Rosato and Mainwaring, Brinks, and Pérez-Liñán, Argentina had fewer years of democracy after 1929 than most of the democratic laggards. Similarly, as Table C.1 indicates, Colombia scored lower on V-Dem's Polyarchy index than most of the democratic laggards during this period. As I have argued, the democratic shortcomings of Argentina and Colombia post-1929 stemmed from the fact that Argentina had only one strong party and Colombia lacked a military capable of maintaining a monopoly on violence throughout the country.

The big problem for most South American democracies post-1929 was military coups. As Chapter 3 discussed, the strengthening and professionalization of the military dramatically reduced outsider revolts, but it did not bring an end to insider revolts, such as military coups. Indeed, many of the countries with relatively strong militaries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela, experienced numerous military coups post-1929. Countries with strong parties, such as Colombia, Chile, and Uruguay, suffered fewer coups post-1929, presumably because strong opposition parties could take power through elections in these countries and thus were less likely to call on the military to intervene. Nevertheless, even these countries were not entirely invulnerable to military interventions, and in some cases even strong opposition parties called on the military to intervene.

Post-1929 political outcomes, such as coups, were shaped by numerous factors. The rise of strong labor movements and populist governments, for example, sometimes provoked coups and political instability (Collier 1999; O'Donnell 1973; Collier and Collier 1991). International factors also clearly played a more important role in post-1929 political developments in South America than they did in previous decades. For example, the international economic crisis of the 1930s destabilized governments in the region and helped set off a wave of coups. Cold War tensions also led to numerous coups and guerrilla rebellions, as the United States and Soviet Union struggled for influence in the region.

In sum, the strength of the military and parties continued to matter after 1929, but they were only two of the many factors that influenced post-1929 political outcomes. Many of the democratic reforms that were adopted in the first decades of the twentieth century proved sticky, but they did not prevent military coups or other interruptions of democratic rule. Although the countries that democratized in the early twentieth century on average enjoyed more years of democracy post-1929 than other South American countries, only Chile and Uruguay stood head and shoulders above the rest of the pack.

EMPIRICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

In addition to developing original theoretical arguments, this study makes some empirical and conceptual contributions. One important empirical contribution of the book is the development of a database on all revolts in South America from 1830 to 1929. LARD includes many more revolts and contains much more information about each revolt than existing conflict databases that cover this period.[3] Chapter 3, which discusses this data set, also presents an original typology that identifies four different types of revolts based on whether the rebel leaders came from inside or outside the state apparatus (insider vs. outsider revolts) and whether these leaders hailed from the elites or the masses. It shows that outsider revolts, especially elite insurrections, were by far the most common type of revolt during the nineteenth century, but these types of revolts declined precipitously during the early twentieth century, which paved the way for the emergence of democracy in the region. By contrast, insider revolts, such as coups, remained relatively frequent in many South American countries for most of the twentieth century, which had negative consequences for democracy.

Another important empirical contribution of this book is the development of a database on historical elections in South America. LAHED, which was discussed in Chapter 2, covers all presidential elections during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, containing many more elections and much more information than existing data sets that cover this period. It provides data on the election results, the competitiveness and fairness of the elections, and voter turnout, among other variables. The database enables me to make a comprehensive assessment of the quality of elections in South America during the nineteenth and early twentieth century and to weigh in on the scholarly debate about the nature of regimes in this period.

As Chapter 2 discusses, the traditional view was that elections in nineteenth-century Latin America were a sham perpetrated by deeply authoritarian regimes, but in recent decades revisionist historians have argued that there were many democratic institutions and practices during this period. My analysis suggests that both sides are correct in many respects. As the revisionist historians have argued, numerous elections in South America in the nineteenth century were competitive and some were even relatively free and fair. Moreover, some South American countries established relatively broad suffrage rights during the nineteenth century, and in a few cases even adopted virtually universal male suffrage. Nevertheless, as the traditional view has stressed, government electoral manipulation undermined the vast majority of elections in nineteenth-century South America. More than two-thirds of presidential elections were not competitive and approximately one-third of them were not even contested. Most South American countries maintained

[3] LARD is a joint project with Luis L. Schenoni, Guillermo Kreiman, and Paola Galano Toro.

economic or literacy restrictions on the franchise, but even where they did not, voter turnout tended to be relatively low. On average, the level of voter turnout and the degree of competitiveness of elections was significantly lower in South America than it was in Europe, North America, and the Antipodes during the nineteenth century.

LAHED also enables me to identify when and where democracy first arose in South America, which is another key empirical contribution of the book. I define the emergence of democracy as the first ten-year period of uninterrupted democratic rule to distinguish it from what I call ephemeral democratization, which refers to fleeting democratic openings that do not have a significant, long-term impact. Although a few relatively free and fair elections took place in the region during the nineteenth century, the presidents who won these elections were either quickly overthrown or themselves undermined democracy by manipulating subsequent elections and/or clamping down on the opposition. As a result, these early democratic episodes failed to have an enduring impact. In the early twentieth century, however, some South American countries, specifically Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay, began to hold relatively inclusive, competitive, and free and fair elections on a regular basis. Opposition parties typically participated in these elections and accepted the results, and governments began to respect civil and political liberties more consistently. To be sure, these countries did not become full democracies during this period since some electoral abuses continued and certain suffrage restrictions remained. Nevertheless, these four South American countries took major steps toward democracy that would have significant long-term benefits.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORIES OF DEMOCRATIZATION

The findings of this study have important implications for theories of democratization. One important theoretical implication of this book is that strong militaries may be conducive to democratization. The military is not usually thought of as a democratizing force owing to its participation in coups and repression. To the contrary, much of the literature has suggested that military weakness, rather than military strength, may lead to democratization. From this perspective, governments democratize when they believe that their military is too weak to suppress the opposition or that the costs of doing so are too high.

As the South American cases have shown, however, weak militaries often have negative consequences for democracy. Where the military is weak, the opposition will be tempted to try to seize power via armed revolt, which will undermine the rule of law and typically provoke state repression. Where the military is strong, by contrast, the opposition will have greater incentives to focus on the electoral path to power. Under these circumstances, the opposition may push for democratic reforms to level the electoral playing field and provide it with a greater chance of winning elections. Thus, the strengthening

or professionalization of the military may help lead to democracy, as it did in South America during the early twentieth century.

The route taken by the democratic pioneers in South America is not the only path to democracy, however. Countries in Latin America and elsewhere have also arrived at democracy via the conflict-settlement route. Indeed, many scholars have argued that some Central American countries, such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, took this path to democracy in the late twentieth century. Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that conflict-settlement democratization may be less common than has been surmised. To begin with, the prolonged civil wars that are conducive to conflict-settlement democratization are relatively rare.[4] Lengthy civil wars have always been uncommon, but the gradual strengthening of state coercive capacity in many parts of the world have made them even rarer since governments with strong militaries are able to deter or quickly suppress most uprisings. As we have seen, the strengthening and professionalization of the armed forces in South America at the outset of the twentieth century led to a dramatic decline in revolts in that region. Even in nineteenth-century South America, however, prolonged civil wars were not that common since most revolts either toppled the government quickly or were defeated in short order.

Although lengthy civil wars have continued to take place in less developed regions of the world where state coercive capacity is low, these civil wars have rarely led to democratization. Several factors discourage the settlement of prolonged civil wars through democratization. First, informational deficits often mean that neither side in a conflict knows that it has little chance of defeating the other. Each side, for example, may overstate its own capabilities and underestimate the military strength of the other. Second, neither side can necessarily trust the other to comply with the terms of an agreement. The rebels, for example, may be concerned that if they demobilize, it will be difficult to take up arms again if the government reneges on its side of the bargain. Third, the expected costs of a democratic settlement often outweigh the expected benefits even when the conflict has stalemated. Opposition rebels may be unwilling to give up control of resources they extract from rebel-held areas in exchange for the mere possibility of winning elected positions in the future. Similarly, the ruling party may be reluctant to grant major concessions to the rebels if the rebellion is limited to isolated provinces and does not significantly undermine the economy or the government's hold on power.

[4] The conflict-settlement path to democratization is more likely to take place in countries that have prolonged civil wars in part because the duration of the war provides evidence that neither side can defeat the other. Conflict-settlement democratization is also more likely to occur in conflicts that are subject to international arbitration since international actors can help provide assurances that neither side will renege on the agreement. Finally, democratization through conflict settlement should be more likely where the conflict is significantly undermining the economy and where the rebels do not benefit significantly from the continuance of the conflict.

By contrast, the democratization path I describe here does not rely on the existence of a mutually recognized stalemate or a mutually beneficial and enforceable agreement. Rather, it depends on the opposition's recognition that government forces have the military capacity to easily suppress any rebellion. It therefore is more likely to occur in the wake of failed revolts or civil wars, but not in the middle of them. Revolts that have led to the resounding defeat of the opposition are particularly conducive to this type of democratization since they will make the opposition less likely to rebel again. Not surprisingly, the opposition suffered devastating defeats in revolts or civil wars that occurred in Argentina, Colombia, and Uruguay, shortly before these countries democratized.

None of this is to suggest that strengthening or professionalizing the military will inevitably lead to democratization. The military rarely uses its power to promote democratization and it frequently does not support democracy at all. Although a state monopoly on violence is conducive for democratization, it does not guarantee it will take place. Other developments, such as ruling party splits and the emergence of strong opposition parties, are necessary for democracy to come to fruition.

Another significant implication of this study is that opposition parties play a key role in the establishment and maintenance of democracy. With a few exceptions, the existing literature has not emphasized the democratizing role of opposition parties, focusing instead on ruling or conservative parties.[5] Strong conservative parties are said to reduce the likelihood of coups and ensure the stability of democracy by safeguarding the interest of elites (Gibson 1996; Middlebrook 2000b; Ziblatt 2017). Strong ruling parties, meanwhile, may serve as an instrument of horizontal accountability, preventing the president from concentrating power and undermining democracy (Rhodes-Purdy and Madrid 2020).

Although strong ruling parties and/or conservative parties may help maintain democratic stability, they do not have clear incentives to establish it in the first place. Some studies have suggested that strong ruling parties may be more supportive of democracy than weak ruling parties because they are more likely to prevail in democratic elections, but this does not explain why they would want to hold democratic elections at all (Riedl et al. 2020; Slater and Wong 2013). Democratizing measures, such as the adoption of the secret ballot, the creation of independent electoral authorities, or bans on police and military involvement in elections, typically undermine the control that ruling parties exercise over elections. As a result, ruling parties will usually oppose these measures, as they did in South America during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Where ruling parties have supported democratization, it has typically been because they have faced strong international or societal pressures

[5] For an exception, see LeBas (2011).

to democratize, not because the ruling parties themselves stood to benefit from democracy.

Ruling parties and conservative parties do have incentives to extend the suffrage in some instances. As some scholars have shown, ruling parties have eliminated suffrage restrictions to win support from newly enfranchised groups, such as women (Collier 1999; Przeworski 2009a; Teele 2018). In some cases, conservative ruling parties have extended the franchise because they have believed that the rural peasantry would vote for conservative local elites (Bendix 1969; Rokkan 1970). Nevertheless, these arguments apply principally to democratic polities where ruling parties face stiff electoral competition from the opposition and thus have incentives to seek the support of new constituencies. In electoral authoritarian regimes, ruling parties typically do not need the support of new constituencies to win elections because they can rely on fraud and intimidation, among other tactics. Moreover, suffrage expansion measures pose risks to ruling parties since they will bring new voters with uncertain loyalties to the polls.[6] These new voters will reduce the electoral weight of captive constituencies, such as state employees, that many ruling parties have used to dominate elections in electoral authoritarian regimes. Finally, suffrage expansion measures make it more difficult to disqualify opposition supporters through the selective enforcement of restrictions on the franchise. As a result, ruling parties in electoral authoritarian regimes usually have incentives to oppose suffrage expansion measures as well as other types of democratic reforms.[7]

By contrast, opposition parties in electoral authoritarian regimes have clear incentives to support democratic reforms since they tend to strengthen the opposition or level the electoral playing field. The adoption of the incomplete list or proportional representation typically increases the number of legislative seats held by opposition parties. Reforms such as the secret ballot and bans on police and military involvement in elections make it more difficult for the government to intimidate and sanction opposition voters. The elimination of suffrage restrictions and the creation of independent electoral authorities reduce the government's control of elections and make it harder to bar opposition supporters from the polls. As we have seen, opposition parties tended to promote all these measures in South America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and strong opposition parties were more likely than weak ones to have possessed the capacity to enact and implement the reforms.

[6] These risks were particularly high in Latin America during the nineteenth and early twentieth century since there were no public opinion surveys that could provide information on how newly enfranchised groups were likely to vote.

[7] As Chapter 1 discussed, ruling parties may have incentives to enact democratic reforms if they do not control the electoral authorities. In Argentina and Colombia, for example, ruling party dissidents gained control of the national government, but the traditional ruling party elites continued to control the electoral authorities. Democratic reform thus represented a means of preventing the traditional elites from continuing to manipulate elections.

I would not expect opposition parties to play an important democratizing role in all types of authoritarian regimes, however. In exclusionary authoritarian regimes, opposition parties may be banned from elections and the legislature, giving them few incentives to push for electoral reform and little possibility of enacting it. By contrast, in electoral authoritarian regimes, the opposition is generally allowed to compete in elections and participate in the legislature, providing it with ample incentives and opportunities to push for electoral reform. Nevertheless, even in electoral authoritarian regimes, opposition parties may focus largely on the armed struggle if they view that as a more promising path to power.[8] Thus, the coercive capacity of the state also helps shape whether opposition parties promote democratic reform.

A third important theoretical implication of this study is that divisions within the ruling party can play a key role in the democratization process. The democratization literature has long argued that splits within the authoritarian regime may trigger transitions to democracy (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Przeworski 1992). Indeed, O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 19) argued long ago that "there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence – direct or indirect – of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself." These studies, however, focused to a large extent on how divisions between hard-liners and soft-liners within authoritarian regimes shaped negotiations with the opposition on the terms of the democratic transition. Because these studies focused on exclusionary authoritarian regimes, such as military regimes, rather than electoral authoritarian regimes, they paid little attention to how the divisions shaped the electoral incentives of some members of the ruling party.

This study argues that in electoral authoritarian regimes internal splits can realign the incentives of some members of the ruling party and affect the balance of power in the legislature. In the wake of splits, ruling party dissidents often come to fear that the dominant sector of the ruling party will use its control of elections to defeat them. As a result, these dissidents have incentives to ally, at least temporarily, with the opposition to enact democratic reforms and level the electoral playing field. In this way, they hope to maintain their access to power. By contrast, in exclusionary authoritarian regimes where elections are absent or uncontested, ruling party dissidents would not have the same incentives, but such regimes have been much less common than electoral authoritarian regimes in recent decades.

A final theoretical implication of the arguments made in this book is that development increases the likelihood of democratization, but not just in the ways that modernization theory has suggested. Modernization theory has posited that economic development helps bring about democracy by fostering more democratic values among the population and by changing the class structure

[8] Opposition parties may also impede democratization or contribute to its breakdown if elites view the demands of opposition parties as too extreme.

of society, strengthening groups that support democracy and weakening those that do not. By contrast, this study argues that economic development helps lead to democratization largely by strengthening the military and parties. The export boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century helped finance the professionalization of the military in many South American countries. It also helped pay for the improvements in transportation and communications infrastructure that facilitated the development of national parties. These alternative mechanisms may well be the main avenue through which development brings about democracy in pre-industrial regimes.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

This book has left some important areas for future research. To begin with, future studies will need to explore to what extent the arguments presented in this book can explain the emergence of democracy in other parts of the world. An obvious place to begin would be in Mexico and Central America since this region has much in common with South America. At first glance, it would appear that the factors that shaped the prospects for democracy in South America also played a role in Mesoamerica. Mexico and Central America had relatively weak militaries during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and this led to frequent opposition revolts, which toppled governments, subverted constitutional rule, and provoked state repression (Holden 2004). The feebleness of parties in the region, meanwhile, hindered opposition efforts to contest elections and enact democratic reforms during this period.

Among the countries of Mesoamerica, only Costa Rica took major democratizing steps prior to 1930, enacting important electoral reforms in the 1920s, which led to an extended period of democracy. The opposition Agricultural Party, which held 49 percent cent of the seats in the legislature at the time, was the driving force behind the reforms, proposing measures in 1925 that aimed to weaken the government's control of elections by establishing the secret ballot, adopting a permanent civic registry of voters, and creating an electoral tribunal to oversee elections (Lehoucq and Molina 2002, 119–122, 131–135).[9] Legislators from the ruling coalition initially resisted the opposition's reform proposal, but when the president embraced it, they grudgingly went along, although they passed a number of amendments designed to cripple the reform. According to Lehoucq and Molina (2002, 123–124), the president, Ricardo Jiménez, embraced the proposed reforms largely to burnish his reputation as a reformer, and because the reforms did not affect his electoral possibilities since he could not run for immediate reelection in any event. A couple of years later, President Jiménez pushed through additional measures that strengthened

[9] The opposition also initially proposed extending suffrage to women, but this measure was blocked because legislators feared the uncertainty that such a dramatic expansion in the number of eligible voters would bring (Lehoucq 2000, 466).

the secrecy of the ballot and weakened the government's control of elections. Although ruling party legislators continued to resist reform, divisions within the ruling coalition made it difficult for ruling party legislators to present united resistance to the reform proposals.

Thus, it appears that the theoretical framework developed here can help explain the emergence of democracy in Costa Rica in the 1920s as well as the high levels of political instability, repression, and authoritarianism that existed in most of Mesoamerica during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Of course, other factors presumably shaped democratic development in the region as well. Existing explanations for the emergence of democracy (or the lack thereof) in Central America have emphasized a variety of factors, including institutional configurations, political culture, agrarian structure, interclass alliances, and variation in the types and consequences of liberal reforms that countries of the region enacted in the nineteenth century (Mahoney 2001; Cruz 2005; Lehoucq and Molina 2002; Yashar 1997). These explanations may well be complementary to the arguments developed here, but I leave it to future studies to assess the relative weight of different variables in the origins of democracy in this and other regions.

Future research should also attempt to provide a more rigorous assessment of the degree to which the variables emphasized here can explain post-1929 political developments in South America and elsewhere. This book has suggested that strong parties and militaries not only helped bring about democratization in the early twentieth century but also facilitated democratic development post-1929. As we have seen, those countries that developed strong parties, such as Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay, tended to have fewer coups than those countries with weak parties, presumably in part because strong opposition parties had fewer incentives to encourage the military to intervene. Strong parties also fostered electoral competition. Those Latin American countries with at least two strong parties tended to have more closely contested elections than those countries with weak parties or only one strong party. Finally, the existence of strong parties, especially strong opposition parties, facilitated the enactment of further democratizing reforms. Indeed, opposition parties continued to promote a variety of democratic reforms throughout the twentieth century, gradually improving the functioning of democracy in the region.

The strengthening and professionalization of the military in South American countries at the outset of the twentieth century also had some long-term benefits, dramatically reducing the outsider revolts that had plagued these countries in the nineteenth century. The decline in outsider revolts, in turn, strengthened the rule of law and helped reduce state repression in the region. A few South American countries, such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Paraguay, continued to experience outsider revolts in the early twentieth century, as did the Central American countries, but these countries were small and poor nations that were slow to strengthen and professionalize their militaries.

There was a resurgence of outsider revolts in Latin America beginning in the late 1950s as guerrilla movements arose that sought to carry out left-wing revolutions. The guerrilla movements grew strongest in countries with relatively weak and unprofessional armed forces, and they even succeeded in taking power in Cuba and Nicaragua, which had particularly feckless militaries. By contrast, in countries where the military was relatively powerful, such as Brazil and the Southern Cone countries, the guerrillas never managed to control any territory or pose a serious threat to the government.

The guerrilla revolts of the late twentieth century provoked vicious state repression and helped lead to the installation of highly exclusionary authoritarian regimes during this period. The military played a central role in the repression, and the most repressive regimes of this period were military regimes, although democratic governments also engaged in repression. The strength and level of professionalization of the armed forces appears to be inversely related to the degree of repression in Latin America, however. The greatest repression, especially on a per capita basis, occurred in those countries where the guerrillas were the strongest, especially Cuba and the Central American countries, which were generally countries with relatively weak militaries. Nevertheless, even strong and professional militaries participated in repression during this period.

Future research should explore the relationship between democracy, state repression, and military strength more systematically. It should also examine the role played by party strength in the deepening of democracy around the world. Although military professionalization and the rise of strong parties clearly contributed to the democratization of South America during the early twentieth century, we still have much to learn about how these variables affected democratic development in other time periods and parts of the world.