

Ramiro Gonzalez

Professor Kroeger

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Reaction Paper 3

The processes that lead towards transitions to democracy begin when citizens and elites interact. Transitions from below are when when citizens take initiative to achieve political reform, and transitions from above are when political elites take action towards political change. Internal and external forces contribute to the need for political reform. A clash between citizens and elite regimes is detrimental to both sides and therefore the end result is a compromise. In order to appease the citizens elite regimes give up some power this in turn leads to a decentralization of power a requirement for democracy.

Democratic transitions from below begin with violent and or nonviolent citizen movements such as forming organizations, boycotting, protesting and or rioting. Citizen movements pressure business, elites, and create important events that mobilize large portions of society. Major events such as economic crises expose a countries major social problems and the incompetence of an authoritarian regime, this results in political demonstrations. In Sub-Saharan Africa economic recession led to unpaid public salaries and increasing oil prices which in turn decreased government support. Bratton and van de Walle (1992) note that countries like Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau faced economic problems but did not encounter major civil unrest. (Bratton , van de Walle, 1992).

Personalist, single party, and military regimes react differently to collective action. A personalist regime lacks a “social contract” with the people, and therefore it is difficult to challenge repression. A single party and military regime are likely to breakdown following a nonviolent protest because they claim to be populist. (Ulfelder, 2005)

Non violent political demonstration are likely to be successful in transitions to democracy, this may be due to the moral costs of suppressing the demonstrations, as well as the political backlash of using force against civilians. Shock discussed that incidents such as the one in soweto where peaceful student protestors are massacred is a catalyst to opposition movements (Shock, 2010). Elites may not agree on using force to subdue peaceful protestors and therefore may advocate shifting towards a democracy. Boycotts hurt the profits of business and therefore businesses lobby for concessions.

Bunce and Wolchik discussed that authoritarian rulers keep power by keeping the opposition divided, in turn an effective way to mobilize citizens into voting is by organizing and collaborating in turn bringing the oppositions together. Opposition groups may sympathize with peaceful protest and when the regime uses force they have an incentive to cooperate with each other.(Bunce, Wolchik, 2009)

Violent political demonstrations are not effective at toppling regimes. When protestors resort to violence it legitimizes a regimes use of force. When a regime uses violence on peaceful protestors it fuels resentment towards the regime in turn factions come together and mobilize against the regime (Shock, 2010). Organization that rely on violence have very little success at recruiting. Empirical evidence shows that violent campaigns increase the likelihood for a

transition to an autocracy and non violent campaigns a transition to democracy. (Celestino, Gleditsch, 2013)

Democratic transitions from above starts when authoritarian incumbents reform or resign. Transitions from above may be caused by both international and domestic factors. In elite displacement rulers are directly or forcibly removed. In “Coups and Democracy” it is argued that coup leaders are pushed to holding elections because once their job is done, they are expected to give hand over power (Marinov, Goemans, 2013).. Political elites make a cost benefit analysis of whether to transition to democracy. In “Elite-Led Transitions it is discussed that international influences generally affect smaller, weaker, less developed countries. Foreign aid may be a factor for poor, but not rich countries, in turn external influences are weak. (Haggard, Kauffman, 2006).

The interactions between elites and citizens includes but is not limited fighting for control of the media, the flow of information such as protest from citizens may give elites an incentive to defect and change the regime and reduce strategic uncertainty(Casper, Tyson, 2013), support from security forces and dealing with regime backlash. Nepstad (2013) discusses that regimes and citizens try to gain support from security forces through incentives and punishment. citizens may raise moral and honor cost in turn shaming security forces into defecting. Regimes may give economic incentives and or political power to those that remain loyal and punish those who defect. When citizens are peaceful and the regime acts with violence this may influence whether security forces defect. Citizen demonstrations force leaders, security forces, and the media to choose sides, in turn restructuring country. If a demonstration is violent this increases the likelihood that if a leader reacts with violence then security forces and the media will align with the citizens (Kim, Kroger).

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