

Rational Sources of Chaos in Democratic Transition

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A crisis of legitimacy is a crisis of change. Therefore, its roots must be sought in the character of change in modern society. Crises of legitimacy occur during a transition to a new social structure, if (1) the status of major conservative institutions is threatened during the period of structural change; (2) all the major groups in the society do not have access to the political system in the transitional period, or at least as soon as they develop political demands.

—S. M. Lipset
Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics

In his seminal analysis of the requisites of democracy, Seymour Martin Lipset focused on the influence of the level of wealth, industrialization, urbanization, and education, in which significant change is measured over years, or even decades (Lipset, 1959). Other social scientists who have built on Lipset's work have emphasized the role of interest group pluralism, civil society, elite culture, ethnic cleavages, religion, state structure, and the distribution of the instruments of violent coercion, where change is, if anything, even more glacial (Bollen & Jackman, 1985; Dahl, 1971, 1989; Diamond, Linz, & Lipset, 1988-1989; Huntington, 1984, 1991). Yet the implantation of democratic institutions and practices is notoriously a chaotic affair, full of sudden and unpredictable shifts in behavior, and decisive watersheds where decisions made at particular moments in time appear to shape the possibilities of democracy for years to come.¹ Why is this? Why

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are periods of political stasis, where the existence of the ruling oligarchy appears to be overdetermined, interrupted by episodes of political turmoil, indeterminacy, and apparent chaos?

The commonsensical response is that the indeterminacy of such episodes reflects their complexity, the diversity and large number of relevant political actors, their multiple interactions, their incomplete information, and rapidly shifting goals. But in this matter I do not think common sense is a sure guide. Although indeterminate outcomes are often the result of complex systems, they may also be the result of very simple systems. Strategic interaction, even under radically simplified circumstances, may produce outcomes that are tumultuous and unpredictable.

In this essay, I analyze one such example of strategic interaction that lies at the heart of political change in authoritarian political systems. The strategic interaction is typical of scenarios of political discontinuity, revolutionary as well as evolutionary, having the following characteristics: (a) The institutions of the existing regime fail to regularize and contain political activity, but become themselves a locus of political struggle; (b) political power is contested by two or more groups, each of which is composed of actors having heterogeneous preferences or incomplete information about the responses of other actors in the same group; (c) choices made within one group influence the choices of the other group.

The model set forth here attempts to capture essential features of strategic interaction within and between a ruling elite and political opposition in the setting of an authoritarian regime. Each of these groups has two courses of action: The ruling elite may decide to suppress or tolerate the political opposition; the political opposition may decide to abide by the imposed rules of the regime or it may decide to operate outside of those rules and challenge the regime. A subgame takes place within each group. The ruling elite is composed of two factions that may have contrasting preferences for suppression versus toleration, and the political opposition is made up of N -individuals who must individually decide whether to abide by the rules imposed by the regime or challenge the regime in protest.

The general payoffs of the first round of the iterated game between the ruling elite and political opposition are set out in Figure 1.² The ruling elite makes the first move, either to tolerate or suppress the political opposition, and the political opposition responds either by accepting the rules of the political system or by challenging them. This order of moves is repeated an indeterminate number of times in a supergame until the elite is either toppled or abandons or bargains away its monopoly of governmental control and the oligarchy is superseded by a different regime.

The payoffs in this game are constrained in two fairly obvious ways:

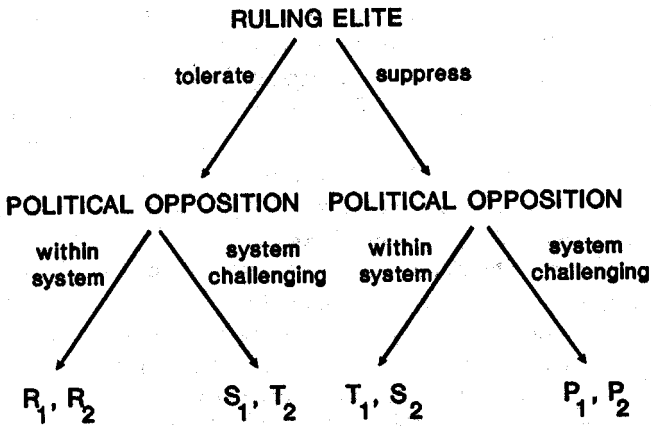


Figure 1: Game Between Ruling Elite and Political Opposition

Assumption 1: The ruling elite always prefers the political opposition to operate within the political system than to challenge the political system ($R_1 > S_1; T_1 > P_1$). As the dominant group in the society, the ruling elite wants the political opposition to accept the status quo or at least acquiesce to it. Even if the political opposition is small and can only challenge weakly, the ruling elite would prefer not to have to deal with a political opposition mobilized against it.

Assumption 2: The political opposition always prefers the ruling elite to tolerate rather than suppress it ($R_2 > S_2; T_2 > P_2$). Toleration provides the opposition with more space to mobilize followers and to formulate, voice, and press political demands.³ The opposition may also place an intrinsic value on expanded civil rights as a result of elite toleration.

The game described here has two sets of scenarios. The first set is made up of cases in which the ruling elite selects a particular course of action irrespective of the response of the political opposition. If the elite prefers its worst case under toleration (S_1) to its best case under suppression (T_1), then the elite will tolerate no matter what the political opposition does. If the elite prefers its worst case under suppression (P_1) to its best case under toleration (R_1), then the elite will suppress no matter what the political opposition does. Elite choice in these cases is nonstrategic in the sense that the decision to tolerate or suppress has nothing to do with the elite's interaction with the political opposition as modeled in Figure 1.⁴

The second set of scenarios involve strategic interaction between the ruling elite and political opposition. These are cases in which the elite prefers

toleration followed by opposition restraint, or suppression followed by opposition restraint, to any alternative in which the opposition challenges the political system.⁵ For example, the elite may prefer to tolerate, but only if the opposition does not respond by challenging the political system. If the opposition does challenge, the elite prefers to suppress. A distinguishing characteristic of this type of scenario is that the anticipated response of the political opposition is critical to the choice made by the ruling elite.

Which scenario best describes a regime at any particular time depends on the preferences of the elite. Following Robert Dahl (1971), we must examine the respective costs of toleration and suppression for the elite. However, we cannot conclude, with Dahl, that "the more the costs of suppression exceed the costs of toleration, the greater the chance for a competitive regime" (p. 15). While this statement is valid for the extremes, in nonstrategic scenarios where the costs of suppression are greater (or lower) than the costs of toleration no matter what the opposition does, it is invalid in the intermediate zone conceptualized by the second set of scenarios. If the costs of toleration and suppression are close enough in size so that the response of the political opposition may tip the balance, we have to probe the strategic interaction of elite and opposition rather than calculate the relative costs of elite toleration and suppression. In the following section, I examine the costs of toleration and suppression from the standpoint of the ruling elite and later analyze the consequences of strategic interaction.

COSTS OF TOLERATION AND SUPPRESSION

We can distinguish two ideal typical motivations for elite suppression which in practice usually coexist in varying degrees. Suppression may be adopted as an end in itself because the ruling elite regards its domination as intrinsically good, or it may be adopted as a means toward other goals valued by the elite. Where the ruling elite's monopoly of power is its overriding goal, then suppression of opposition, no matter what it entails, will be preferable to toleration. This was most nearly the case for the Nazi regime. The concentration of political power under the Nazi party and the Führer were overriding goals in themselves and not simply means that might be dispensed with if better means were found. Toleration of political opposition was abhorred not because of its consequences but because it was viewed as bad in itself. No matter what the elite expected of the political opposition, it would suppress.⁶

If all ruling elites were in this mold, then democratic transitions could only come about if the elite was coercively displaced. However, many ruling elites

have an instrumental view of the benefits of monopolistic control of government. They enjoy the diverse benefits of power, but they also prize other things, such as their material life-style, their control over the means of production, the privileges conferred on their religious institutions, and their social status.

Under these circumstances, what are the costs of tolerating political opposition? Two variables stand out in importance. First, the ruling elite has a particular stake in governance, both because it enjoys ruling and because this enables it to make authoritative decisions on matters regarding its interests. As Adam Przeworski (1986) pointed out, a distinguishing characteristic of a democracy, as contrasted to an authoritarian regime, is that there is uncertainty about substantive outcomes. As a political elite takes steps toward democracy, it reduces its hold on the state as an instrument for achieving its preferred objectives.

The elite's stake in governance may vary widely. In some cases, the worst that an elite can expect under a strategy of toleration is an unpleasant loss of status and political power that leaves its economic base and religiocultural values secure. In other cases, the call for toleration of political opposition fuels deep-seated fears within the ruling elite about its economic viability, the continued existence of hallowed institutions, or even personal survival.

Second, although toleration increases the elite's uncertainty about its capacity to maintain its monopoly of governmental power, the degree of uncertainty varies. A political elite will have some estimation of its prospective capacity to protect its basic interests both by building institutional safeguards into the emerging democratic process and by actively competing in it, and this will enable the elite to discount possible outcomes by the estimated likelihood of their occurrence. Combining these variables, we can summarize the costs of toleration for a ruling elite as *the costs of losing monopolistic control of the government multiplied by the probability of losing that monopoly as a result of liberalizing the regime.*

The costs of losing monopolistic control of government may be partially offset by the collective benefits of liberalization. Although democracy involves uncertainty about policy choices, it institutionalizes highly predictable procedures about how governments are chosen (Linz & Stepan, 1989, p. 47). Democratization may also offer enhanced legitimacy. A democracy, more than any other type of regime, is based on the inclusion of diverse interests rather than their exclusion, on institutionalizing conflicts rather than suppressing them, and on the distinction between the regime as a stable set of rules governing the polity and particular governments which are responsible for policy and which can be democratically removed from office at regular intervals. In addition to the diverse benefits of enhanced regime

stability and legitimacy, liberalization may also offer the ruling elite the prospect of international recognition and economic aid.

Suppression, on the other hand, holds out the promise that the ruling elite may sustain its monopoly of governmental control by quashing the opposition or intimidating it into passivity. The largest and most obvious cost of suppression is that of possible failure. If the elite is unable to maintain internal cohesion, if its control over the coercive apparatus breaks down, or if the opposition proves too determined or strong, the consequences for the elite are likely to be harsh. Suppression creates a brutal, zero-sum game of winners and losers in which the stakes are extremely high: coercive domination for the winner; loss of freedom, country, or even life, for the loser. But unless the elite is internally divided (a possibility I examine below), the chances that it will be defeated are extremely small. In most situations, the ruling elite's control of the state and the instruments of organized coercion give it a high probability of success against all but the most militarized oppositions.

But the costs of suppression are not limited to possible defeat. The stronger the political opposition, the more extensive and brutal the level of suppression necessary to suppress it and the greater the accompanying social dislocation. Although some totalitarian rulers may actually relish repression, such measures may be extremely distasteful for leaders who have a shred of decency. Whatever the elite's normative view of violent suppression, it is certain to disrupt the economy and threaten the flow of international investment, aid, and trade.

In addition, suppression raises the stakes of political conflict, because, as Seymour Martin Lipset (1983) argued, it reinforces radicalism among the opposition (see also Marks, 1989). Suppression tends to drive even moderate groups that would otherwise press for piecemeal reform toward radical demands. This is so for several reasons: Repression arouses feelings of deprivation and resentment among the target group; injustice is likely to be felt all the more acutely when those subject to it are explicitly denied the chance to defend themselves through their own organizational efforts; and repression cuts off political channels of upward mobility and prestige for opposition leaders. If the elite wishes to change its strategy at some time in the future to one of toleration, it will find that it is dealing with a radicalized opposition that is likely to demand the prosecution of the elite for the crimes it has committed. Thus one of the costs of suppression is that it narrows strategic options of the elite in the future.

The relative weight of these costs and benefits will vary across regimes, through time, and across subgroups within the elite. In some cases, the costs of toleration greatly outweigh the costs of suppression irrespective of whether the opposition is acquiescent or challenges the regime. This might

occur in regimes where the opposition is so weak that the costs of suppression are negligible. Primitive patrimonial regimes where there are very few associations or politically mobilized communities may fall into this category.

Nonstrategic suppression is also found in societies where the political opposition is strong, but the ruling elite's basic interests are tied directly to its domination of the state. To the extent that the ruling class views its life chances as depending exclusively on its monopoly of government, the costs of toleration will be extremely high. Such an outlook may be structurally determined or even overdetermined. Landed aristocracies clinging to traditional or labor repressive agrarian practices in feudal regimes are likely to oppose democracy for economic, cultural, and social reasons as well as for political reasons. Under such circumstances, the struggle for integration of new strata into the polity

took the form of defining the place in the policy of the old preindustrial upper classes, the church, the business strata, and the working class . . . in which the enduring economic struggle among the classes overlapped with the issues concerning the place of religion and the traditional class structure. Such controversies usually were perceived in "moral" terms involving basic concepts of right versus wrong, and hence they were much more likely than economic issues to result in sharp ideological cleavages and even civil war. (Lipset, 1963, p. 269)

This was the case in the *ancien régimes* of the larger European societies before 1848 and in some societies, such as Austria-Hungary, until World War I. In these societies, the allocation of political authority structured the allocation of economic, social, and cultural values in the society as a whole. Even when the ruling elite faced considerable political opposition and the costs of suppression were correspondingly high, suppression might be undertaken whatever the anticipated response if the stake of the ruling elite in monopolistic control of government was sufficiently great. The exercise of political authority was a vital ingredient in the efforts of the landed aristocracy to extract an economic surplus from peasants and sustain its social and cultural hegemony.⁷ The same can be said for Germany under the Second Empire and for the coffee republics of Central America in which peasants were formally free but effectively dominated by ruling elites through labor-repressive methods of agricultural production (Moore, 1966; Weeks, 1986). In Germany, the Junker ruling class monopolized government both to sustain their hegemony over the peasantry and to maintain tariffs that protected agriculture from international competition. In much of Central America, and particularly in El Salvador and Guatemala, "governments served as the direct agents of landed property, and state repression played a central role in the day-to-day operation of the large estates" (Weeks, 1986, p. 37).

Such regimes may be stable if the political opposition comes to accept that it is unable to topple the ruling elite coercively and to believe that the elite is unlikely to change its preference for suppression under any conceivable circumstances. In terms of the model of protest I elaborate in the next section, even if it is in the interest of the opposition as a whole to challenge the regime, it may not be in the interest of individual opponents of the regime to take the risks of doing so. This depends above all on the effectiveness of the ruling elite in imposing costs on individuals who protest and on whether opponents of the regime believe that by challenging they can alter the elite's strategy in the next round. If the ruling elite is both effective and stubborn, the equilibrium in this game is suppression, followed by an opposition strategy of political activity that is within the limits imposed by the ruling elite.

This scenario is not uncommon among authoritarian regimes for extended periods of time. The ruling elite is determined to suppress the opposition in the present and in the foreseeable future. The opposition becomes convinced that it can do nothing to alter this state of affairs. To mount a popular campaign of resistance would be both ineffective and foolhardy. Although there may be some extraordinarily courageous persons who speak out against the injustices committed by the regime, the sensible course of action is to lie low and turn one's energy to other matters until the situation changes. The regime appears cast in stone. The ruling elite maintains a tight grip on the political arena, signaling its absolute preference for suppression by the decisiveness and brutality with which it deals with any brave enough to challenge it.

The paths from nonstrategic suppression to strategic suppression are diverse and have been much analyzed. Economic growth, urbanization, the growth of the middle class, the spread of education, demands for participation, and so forth, may increase the ability of the opposition to mobilize politically and gradually shift the preferences of the elite away from suppression in favor of toleration, depending on the response of the opposition. Once suppression is recognized by the actors involved to be strategic, that is, conditional on the response of the political opposition, political stability can no longer be taken for granted. Single episodes, such as a mass demonstration in which it first becomes clear that this many protesters may find safety in numbers or a refusal to obey an order to repress that indicates for the first time that there is a split within the ruling elite, may, at a single stroke, transform the possibility for political transition. The impact of such episodes may be felt for years or decades into the future. Once the web of self-fulfilling expectations about the stability of the regime is punctured, what previously was regarded as inevitable becomes the subject of intense political conflict.

Regimes that just a short time before seemed to be cast in stone may crumble rapidly. The working assumption that serves social scientists well in normal periods of social development, namely, that to explain large divergences in outcome one must find large systematic differences in cause, is no longer sustainable. Critical outcomes can be traced to nonsystematic and unpredictable events, such as the failure of the regime in some foreign policy venture, the assassination of an opposition leader, or the death of the leader of the regime.

The dynamics of transformation of authoritarian regimes appear fundamentally different from the dynamics that give them stability. Regime transformation is not simply the absence or obverse of regime stability but has its own distinctive logic. In the remainder of this essay, I explore the properties of such episodes, analyzing strategic interactions between the ruling elite and political opposition in authoritarian regimes.

TOLERATION AND STRATEGIC INTERACTION

In the first set of scenarios, elite strategy can be conceptualized as a function of the costs of toleration versus the costs of repression. In the second set of scenarios, we cannot simply compare the costs of alternative choices for the ruling elite.⁸ Interaction between the ruling elite and political opposition opens up a vortex of strategic responses, responses to anticipated responses, responses to anticipated responses to anticipated responses, and so on, which can lead to multiple, rather than single, equilibria. Game theory demands that we simplify real-life situations in order to model them; but by doing so there is no guarantee that outcomes will be uniquely determined by the preferences of the actors involved. In the type of scenario depicted below, game theory helps us fathom the sources of political chaos: extreme dependence of outcomes on tiny—and effectively unmeasurable—changes in initial conditions.

There are three logically possible scenarios in which toleration results from strategic interaction between the ruling elite and political opposition, given Assumption 1 (the ruling elite prefers that the political opposition abide by rather than challenge the political system) and Assumption 2 (the political opposition prefers the ruling elite to tolerate rather than suppress) and assuming that the ruling elite moves first:

1. The elite prefers suppression followed by opposition acquiescence to any other outcome, but if the opposition challenges under suppression, the elite prefers to tolerate no matter what the opposition response.⁹

2. The elite prefers toleration followed by opposition activity within the system to any other outcome, but if the opposition challenges under toleration, the elite prefers to suppress no matter what the opposition response.¹⁰
3. The elite prefers toleration followed by opposition activity within the system to suppression followed by the system challenging political activity, but in every other case, it prefers suppression.¹¹

In these scenarios, the political opposition can induce elite toleration either by convincing the ruling elite that it will challenge the regime under suppression (Scenario 1), convincing the ruling elite that it will act within the system under toleration (Scenario 2), or by doing both (Scenario 3). Of these scenarios, the third is the most difficult to achieve and the most theoretically interesting. If the conditions for elite toleration are met under this scenario, then they will necessarily be met in each of the other scenarios where toleration is a possible outcome. The payoffs in the one-shot version of Scenario 3 are depicted in Figure 2.

The situation here is described in accounts of democratic transitions that stress the benefits of opposition mobilization followed by restraint once the ruling elite has made real steps toward democracy. In his overview of the contribution of labor movements to democratization, Samuel Valenzuela (1989) argues that

a combination of high labor and popular mobilization at certain critical moments of breakdown of the authoritarian institutions (that is, when the option for a course of redemocratization becomes possible but state elites have not yet committed themselves to it), followed by the decline of that mobilization and by the willingness and capacity of the labor movement's union and political leaderships to show restraint when the political agenda shifts in favor of redemocratization, would seem to provide the ideal mix in terms of labor's contribution to ensuring the latter's success. (p. 450; see also Diamond, 1989)

If we assume that the political opposition is motivated by continuing grievances (as discussed below) so that it prefers to challenge the political system even under toleration, the scenario is a prisoner's dilemma in which the players select their strategies sequentially rather than simultaneously. Both the ruling elite and political opposition prefer the *tolerate/act within the system* outcome (R_1, R_2) to *suppress/challenge* (P_1, P_2), yet the ruling elite will not choose to tolerate because it expects the political opposition to respond by challenging. In a one-shot game, the equilibrium is *suppress/challenge*. However, when the scenario is iterated, the Pareto optimal outcome of *tolerate/act within the system* can result if the ruling elite adopts a "tit for tat" strategy, making toleration conditional on the restraint of the political opposition. For its part, the political opposition may desist from maximizing its short-term gain from challenging the political system if it

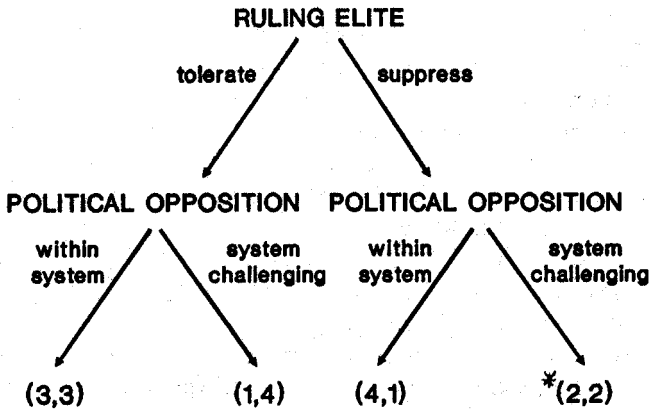


Figure 2: Prisoner's Dilemma

NOTE: Payoffs: 4 = best; 3 = second best; 2 = second worst; 1 = worst.

* Equilibrium point.

realizes that this will incur retaliation in the form of elite suppression in the next round.

The feasibility of cooperation as a result of a tit-for-tat strategy is influenced by two factors that cannot be discussed at length in this essay: the cardinal (not merely the ordinal) size of the payoffs and the rate at which they are discounted by the players through time (Taylor, 1987). The greater the preference of the ruling elite for toleration followed by opposition acquiescence (R_1) relative to suppression (P_1 or S_1), the less the ruling elite has to lose if it gets suckered by the opposition and the more willing it will be to risk toleration. By the same logic, the greater the preference of the political opposition for toleration followed by acquiescence (R_2) relative to suppression (P_2 and S_2), the greater the incentive for the political opposition to select its second best outcome under toleration in this round to sustain elite toleration in the future. The lower the discount rate (i.e., the proportion added to a future payoff to compensate for delaying receipt by one period), the less the temptation for the political opposition to challenge the system in this round, thereby gaining an immediate benefit, but sacrificing elite toleration in future rounds.

Before we investigate further the conditions under which liberalization may take place in this scenario, we need to examine the response of the political opposition, relaxing the assumption that it is a unitary actor and conceiving it instead as an N-person subgame.

OPPOSITION STRATEGY UNDER SUPPRESSION

To better understand the models described below, I use Schelling (1978) diagrams representing how individual payoffs for protesting and nonprotesting vary with respect to the number of those protesting in a group of $n + 1$ individuals (n is the number of "others" for each individual). The horizontal axis measures the number of those protesting (from 0 to n) and the vertical axis measures individual utility along each curve. Hence, in Figure 3, if the number protesting is less than a (i.e., is to the left of a), a person choosing to protest will face a penalty (reading off the curve for protesting individuals) and a person choosing not to protest will have a zero payoff (reading off the curve for nonprotesting individuals).

On balance, it seems sensible to assume that individuals within the opposition place a *positive* value (w) on engaging in protest. This runs counter to collective choice models that assume that rational individuals will free ride rather than participate in mass movements, but an assumption of positive value appears sound on theoretical and empirical grounds. The assumption that individuals place a positive value on protest is consistent both with models that explain protest as a result of private benefits and with models that view individuals as having preferences reflecting the collective benefits of their political activity (Elster, 1989, chap. 1; Finkel, Muller, & Opp, 1989; Muller & Opp, 1986; Tarrow, 1983, p. 23). Previous theorizing has focused on protest in democratic settings. In an authoritarian political setting—as dealt with in this essay—we may assume that the positive value of protest for individuals will be enhanced by the satisfaction of expressing deeply held convictions for decency and self-respect. The reverse side of imposed conformity in an authoritarian regime is a deep psychological need on the part of ordinary people publicly to voice the disapproval they always felt but were unable to act on. Such protest, across regimes in South America and Eastern Europe, has been described in terms of self-healing, catharsis, and rebounding from apathy, orientations that are rewarding for those who participate (Ash, 1990; Di Palma, 1990; O'Donnell, 1986a).

Further, I assume that ruling elite suppression poses costs (x) for those engaging in collective protest that outweigh the selective benefits. When the number of protesters reaches a high enough level (a), protesters begin to find safety in numbers, and the cost facing the individual who wishes to join in protest begins to decline. The regime is perfectly capable of repressing, say, 1,000 or perhaps even 10,000 protesters, but at some level, the sheer number of protesters begins to strain the capacity of the state repressive apparatus to arrest or physically harm the individuals involved. As the number of protesters further increases, the curve describing the utility for the protest swings

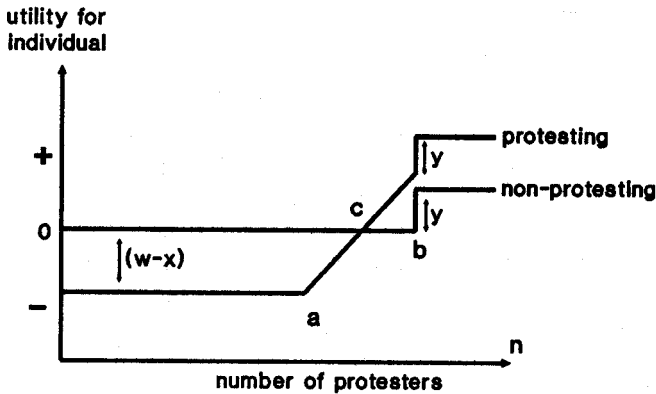


Figure 3: Individual Utility for Protesters and Nonprotesters Under Suppression

upward, cutting the curve for nonprotest at the point where the selective benefits of protest outweigh the costs imposed by the regime.

Finally, when the number of protesters reaches some level (b), collective protest becomes system challenging and both protesters and nonparticipants reap the resulting collective gains (y) or losses (z) that result from this. These collective gains or losses reflect the strategic costs and benefits of the political opposition conceived as a unitary actor. When it is in the strategic interest of the opposition to punish the ruling elite for suppression by engaging in challenging political activity, mass protest will have a collective benefit. Where challenging political activity in response to toleration is expected to lead the elite to suppress in the next round, mass protest will impose a collective cost for the opposition.

This model does not allow us to uniquely predict the choices of opponents of the regime. There are two equilibria and they are drastically different: either everyone in the political opposition will protest or no one will. The situation is an N -person assurance game. It is impossible to estimate the number of individuals within the political opposition who will protest under elite suppression without knowing how individuals themselves evaluate that number. If an individual is assured that enough other players will protest, then he or she will do the same. Otherwise, it is rational to act within the system. In the scenario set out in Figure 3, the number of people who must protest to make protest beneficial for each participant is c , which is the point at which the individual payoff from protesting swings into the positive. This

is the critical mass necessary to generate mass protest. If an individual believes that more than c individuals will engage in protest she stands to lose if she does not follow suit. If an individual believes that the number of protesters will be less than c she will suffer if she participates.

The point at which critical mass is reached is partly determined by the regime. The regime may increase the size of w , the individual cost of protest, by, for example, killing rather than arresting protesters, or it may shift the point at which protesters begin to find safety in numbers (a) to the right by mobilizing more troops, or, finally, it may deny protesters the collective good of strategic influence (y) because it prefers suppression even if the opposition challenges it. If the regime succeeds in pushing c beyond n , which is the total number of individuals in the opposition, then it is never in the interest of individuals to protest. Under all other circumstances, information about intentions is critical.

If there is to be protest under suppression, individuals must be assured that they will act as a group large enough to provide them with safety. The issue is one of coordination. Community ties, social networks of various kinds, and formal organizations may play a decisive role (Oberschall, 1973; Tilly, 1978). However, the necessary assurance does not have to be collectively provided. Individuals may take their cues from their neighbors in the manner of individuals in a school of fish or may coordinate their behavior around a focal point or incident that provides a common cause, time, and place for protest (Schelling, 1960, p. 90).

The model set out here is obviously an extreme simplification. Reality will be much more complicated: Individuals are heterogeneous, having varying vulnerability to the costs imposed by the regime and reaping varying selective benefits from protest. It is quite possible that some people may be willing to protest even if no one else does, whereas others may demand varying levels of assurance. However, the same basic feature—dual equilibria—is a logical feature of models that are more complex than the one presented here. The critical element producing dual equilibria is that the curve for protest dissects the curve for nonprotest, and this results from the basic assumption that when the number of participants is low, protest is less desirable than nonprotest for some proportion of individuals, while at a higher level of participation, protest becomes more desirable than nonprotest for some proportion of individuals.

Dual equilibria are consistent with discontinuities of protest in authoritarian regimes. In many cases, the revolutions in East Germany and Czechoslovakia being the most recent, the number of people engaging in protest did not increase incrementally over time but rose sharply once expectations about the number of protesters and the costs of protest shifted.¹² Such expectations

appear extraordinarily sensitive to external impeti that produce in people's minds an expectation that protest will take place. For example, the murder of Aquino in the Philippines created the expectation that mass protest would accompany his funeral. When individuals realized they could find safety in numbers that strained the repressive capacity of the state, each new occasion that coordinated expectations saw mass protest. This kind of scenario is frequently determined by pivotal episodes where very small and unpredictable impeti have very large consequences for collective protest.

OPPOSITION STRATEGY UNDER TOLERATION

The model describing the strategic situation facing individuals in the political opposition under toleration, illustrated in Figure 4, differs from that just discussed in two respects. First, the regime is no longer repressive and does not impose negative sanctions on those who protest. Second, when protest takes place in numbers sufficient to challenge the regime (at b), the political opposition suffers a collective bad (z), because it risks unleashing elite suppression in the future. The resulting model is based on the continued assumption that protest provides individuals with selective benefits. In the period immediately following suppression, this appears reasonable, although I discuss alternatives below.

The critical task for the political opposition in this scenario is to *limit* protest despite the penchant of individual oppositionists to protest previously bottled-up anger, grievances, and demands. The elite has decided to tolerate the opposition, but in the early stages of democratic transition the elite still retains economic and social privileges, disproportionate political power, control of the military, and responsibility for the brutalities it has previously committed. Yet at the very moment when individuals in the political opposition have the freedom to protest these injustices, to try to bring about radical change by mounting mass demonstrations, political strikes, and so on, they come face-to-face with the paradox of collective action: What is rational for them as individuals is irrational for the group as a whole.

The problem of providing restraint under elite toleration is that no rational individual will do so, because his or her individual sacrifice makes little or no difference. Communitarian norms are unlikely to be of much help. Given previous experience of suppression, the community response is likely to be one of collective anger and indignation. Leaders of the opposition are saddled with the task of trying to stem a tide of protest that they have helped build up under suppression.

If the political opposition is too small to mount a challenge to the regime under toleration (i.e., if $n < b$), then the dilemma does not exist. The weakness

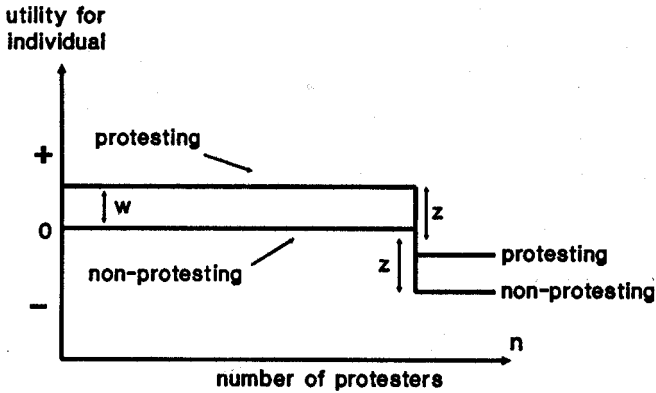


Figure 4: Individual Utility for Protesters and Nonprotesters Under Toleration

of the opposition nullifies the elite's fear of the consequences of opposition challenge under toleration, although such a situation would be double-edged, for it would also reduce the cost of suppression for the elite. This possibility reveals that there is no iron link between strength of political opposition and likelihood of toleration. Although a weak opposition reduces the cost of suppression for a ruling elite, it simultaneously reduces the cost of toleration.¹³

Where the opposition is strong, its ability to provide the collective good of restraint under toleration is positively related to its organizational coverage, coherence, and ideological cohesion. The more extensive the coverage of an organization, the more it can internalize the collective benefits that result from its restraint (Olson, 1982). An organization that encompasses a significant proportion of a group is better able to act in that group's collective interest. If, as is likely, the political opposition is made up of more than one group or party, the transition process is helped if they are not numerous and ideologically split. If there are many opposition groups, the problem of coordination at the individual level is replicated at the group level. If there are ideological splits, it will be more difficult to agree on a policy of restraint. Restraint on the part of some groups in an attempt to stabilize the transitional political system and assure the elite may involve unacceptable losses of support to opposition groups that outbid them for popular support while free-riding on their restraint. If, as discussed below, pact negotiations take place between the ruling elite and political opposition, the fewer the number of opposition parties, the more streamlined the process of negotiation be-

tween the opposition and the ruling elite (Gunther, 1992). A coherent and ideologically cohesive political opposition is therefore not only more capable of providing reliable expectations that undergird protest in a suppressive regime; it is also more able to provide the ruling elite with credible assurance that if it tolerates political opposition, the political opposition, for its part, will not challenge the political system.

Why should the ruling elite believe leaders of the opposition when they promise to act "responsibly" if the elite liberalizes the regime? If the elite retains the capacity to suppress the opposition after having tolerated it, then they have a kind of insurance in the event that the opposition defects or leaders cannot control followers. However, this insurance is weakened by two considerations. First, the discount rate for both political opposition and ruling elite is likely to be high. In a situation where the stakes encompass ruling elite monopoly of government and the future of the regime, the present and near future are likely to loom large relative to the more distant future. Second, suppression will be more costly for the ruling elite following a period of toleration. A likely effect of opening political space for political opposition is a flowering of opposition activity among those who had previously kept quiet out of fear. Political parties, political clubs, trade unions, issue groups of diverse kinds, newspapers, and so on will flourish as repressive disincentives to group activity weaken and as new possibilities of communication alert individuals and groups to their diverse common interests (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986b). It is far more costly for a ruling elite to try to suppress its political opponents after the first step toward liberalization than prior to that step.

Given this, an explicit agreement, or pact, between a ruling elite and political opposition may play a critical role in assuaging elite fears that the opposition may use its newfound freedom to challenge the political system and in strengthening the elite's hand even if the opposition does challenge. A pact may involve substantive concessions on the part of the opposition on policy. For example, a pact may guarantee the legal status of elite landholdings, foreign corporations, or private property in general, or it may involve a promise on the part of the opposition to limit prosecution of past crimes committed by the ruling elite. In this way a pact may provide the ruling elite with assurances that reduce the stakes of political conflict if it tolerates the opposition. Procedurally, a pact may shape the rules of political competition by, for example, specifying the constitutional role of the military, the character of the electoral system, or the conditions under which constitutional reform is possible. In this way, the pact shapes the terrain of political competition in favor of the ruling elite, providing the elite with the prospect of influence over post-transition outcomes.

Pacts are extremely useful in transition scenarios, but they rest on preconditions similar to those of tit for tat. They demand either that the political opposition be weakly organized, thus giving wide scope for elite bargaining without fear of widespread protest, or that the opposition be organized in a few coherent, ideologically cohesive organizations capable of negotiating and implementing compacts (O'Donnell, 1986b). Moreover, pacts between ruling elites and political oppositions are recent innovations. Only when democracy is conceived as an explicit goal of political development does it make sense to bargain about the means and institutional configuration of the resulting democratic regime. Pactmaking as the path to democracy is, therefore, a response of elites who have been able to learn from the experience of earlier transitions to democracy.¹⁴

A critical assumption in the subgame elaborated here is that individuals within the political opposition receive identical selective benefits when they protest. When we refine the model, making it a little more realistic by adding a dynamic element of preference change over time and by allowing for the fact that selective benefits vary across individuals, an elite strategy of tit for tat produces toleration even in the absence of some of the conditions set out above.

So far I have assumed that individuals in the political opposition respond to toleration by protesting pent-up demands and grievances because they gain selective benefits by doing so. This seems a sensible assumption for the round following a shift from suppression to toleration, but it may only describe the immediate response to toleration, not the response in future rounds if toleration is sustained. Consider the logical implications if protest under toleration involves a small but negative cost arising from commitment of time and energy and, further, that selective benefits derived from protest progressively decline in size if toleration is sustained. Even if protest entails collective benefits for some constituency, individuals face an incentive to free ride rather than participate. Under these circumstances, the ruling elite realizes that system-challenging protest is most dangerous in the very short term; further down the road, antisystem anger and retribution will decay if a liberalized regime is institutionalized. In this model, toleration itself shapes preferences for protest. Taking up the famous phrase used in *The Times* to describe the way in which suffrage extension in Britain in 1867 would shape working-class political activity, this can be described as the "Angels in Marble" effect.¹⁵

Consider, also, the consequences of relaxing the assumption that all political opponents of the regime have an identical preference for protest and, instead, assume that there is a normal distribution of selective benefits of protest for individuals around some mean (w_{mean}) and that protest also

involves some small uniform cost of time and energy, as above. In this case, the size of w_{mean} becomes critical in determining the number of protesters under toleration. The greater the sense of injustice and the deeper the grievances felt by the opposition, the higher we would expect w_{mean} to be. Conversely, at some level of w_{mean} , a regime that had not so brutally abused the political opposition could expect a level of protest that, while perhaps high, would not reach the threshold at which it is system threatening. The same result might be accomplished by time and generational turnover even in cases where the regime has engaged in brutal repression (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986b). For example, General Franco's regime systematically killed tens of thousands of political opponents during and after the Spanish Civil War, but by the 1970s most of the generation who had suffered through those years were no longer politically active, with the result that the political opposition was able to negotiate with the elite in good faith (Gunther, Sani, & Shabad, 1986).

INTRA-ELITE POLITICS

Let us inject an external shock into this scenario that exacerbates and drives into the open a fundamental, though formerly latent, tension within the elite. As a result of, say, the transparent failure of the elite in a foreign policy adventure or the death of a unifying authoritarian leader, the ruling elite is riven into two groups: hardliners who wish to suppress the opposition and softliners who prefer to tolerate the opposition. While hardliners and softliners differ in their preference for suppression versus toleration, their preferences are identical in one vital respect. Both groups realize that if they cannot agree on a single course of action they will be very severely punished. Softliners who defect from hardliners bent on suppression are themselves a likely target; hardliners who suppress without the active participation of the elite risk defeat. This subgame within the ruling elite is set out in Table 1.

This game has a key characteristic of the game of Chicken.¹⁶ If either of the actors is able to convince the other that nothing will deter it from its preferred strategy, then that will be the outcome. If softliners are convinced that hardliners will suppress no matter what they do, their effective choice is either to go along or pay the dire penalty of breaking ranks. Similarly, once hardliners believe that softliners are committed irrevocably to toleration, they will choose to join them rather than suppress alone. This game has multiple equilibria in both the single-shot and iterated versions, and these are starred in Table 1. The outcome is determined by the expectations of each actor concerning the strategies of the other, their expectations about the other's

TABLE 1: Subgame Between Hardliners and Softliners

		SOFTLINERS	
		Tolerate	Suppress
HARDLINERS	Tolerate	3, 4*	1, 1
	Suppress	2, 2	4, 3*

Payoffs: 4 = best; 3 = second best; 2 = second worst; 1 = worst.

*Nash equilibria.

expectations, and so on. Hardliners and softliners are driven into a realm of bluff and counter-bluff, of attempts to precommit one's strategy to force the other's hand. It is a game that turns on the ability to make credible threats, to nurse and manipulate a reputation for toughness, and to seize the initiative.

The cardinal values of the payoffs constrain such strategies. The more painful disunity is for any one faction relative to the other, the greater the disincentive for that faction to precommit. If, for example, hardliners monopolize coercive resources and are only mildly punished if they suppress without softliner support, whereas softliners are severely punished if their strategy diverges from that of the hardliners, a threat on the part of softliners to tolerate no matter what is likely to sound hollow. As O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986b) emphasize, softliners must have support within the military to effectively press for liberalization.

An interesting and critical feature of this subgame is that it is intimately linked to the subgame within the political opposition. The threat of opposition mobilization under continued suppression is an important resource for softliners, allowing them to argue for toleration as a practical adaption to societal pressures as well as on ethical terms. But, as I have stressed above, the likelihood of system-challenging opposition mobilization is not a game against inert nature. The probability of it happening cannot be evaluated independently of the struggle within the ruling elite itself. The collective good of system-challenging protest for the political opposition is devalued if softliners are weak and the prospects of toleration correspondingly dim. Conversely, opposition protest may be sparked if softliners are effective and the ruling elite badly split. This is to say that the subgames within the ruling elite and political opposition are not isolated but mutually feed into each other. Expectations about the strategic choices in one subgame directly influence strategic choices in the other. Hence, the indeterminacy of each subgame is magnified by its interaction.

CONCLUSION

This essay models a simple strategic interaction between a ruling elite, composed of two potential factions, and a political opposition, composed of N -individuals. Each actor has two, and only two, choices. The ruling elite, and factions within it, choose to tolerate or suppress the political opposition; the political opposition, and individuals within it, respond by acting within the political system or by challenging the political system.

Real situations are, of course, more complicated. Instead of two factions within the ruling elite, there may be three or more. The preferences of individuals within the political opposition will be diverse, not uniform. Also, decision making within the elite and opposition will not be as rational as assumed here. The potential use of a model such as this rests in how much it can aid us in understanding systems that, inevitably, are more complex than those in the model. Has the model captured salient aspects of a range of situations that, while different from the model in some respects, are similar in others? I have presented some evidence for the robustness of my conclusions across different sets of assumptions, but readers will no doubt come to their own conclusions about the heuristic value of the model applied to cases they know well.

One further motive for making the model as simple as possible is to reveal the minimal conditions for chaos in regime transformations. If one finds indeterminacy in a relatively simple system, then it should also be present if one adds additional elements to the model in an effort to replicate individual cases (or sets of cases) more precisely. If one begins with a very complex picture of the process of regime transformation, then the temptation is to believe that indeterminacy is the result of precisely this complexity. The corresponding fallacy is that simpler scenarios, specifically scenarios in which the number of actors or factions is smaller, are more deterministic.

Under a variety of assumptions concerning individual preferences, the decisions of individual opponents of the regime about whether to protest or not have the structure of an N -person assurance game. Either every opponent of the regime protests or nobody does, depending on the information individuals have about the intentions of others. These intentions are extremely sensitive to public cues or demonstration effects. The death of the leader of the ruling elite, reports of a revolution in a neighboring state, the murder of an opposition leader—these are the kinds of cues that transform the possibilities of opposition response to suppression, not by directly altering preferences, but by changing expectations about how others will respond. The phenomenon is in some interesting respects similar to that of creating a focal

point that has an effect on the strategy of opponents of the regime simply because it coordinates expectations (Schelling, 1960).

In this context, game theorizing alerts us to situations in which outcomes are embedded in intentions, evaluations of intentions, evaluations of evaluations, and so forth. Metagames, in which players try to shape such evaluations, take a variety of forms. In the model I have analyzed here, metagames within the ruling elite and political opposition are intimately connected. The struggle between hardliners and softliners to precommit their strategies credibly, and thereby force the other's hand, is constrained by the expected response of the political opposition. At the same time, a split within the ruling elite may provide a powerful cue for individuals in the opposition to protest.

These dynamics stand in sharp contrast to the situation under nonstrategic suppression, where the ruling elite is determined to suppress irrespective of the response of the political opposition. This type of scenario is determined by the relative costs of toleration and suppression for the ruling elite and is likely to be stable and predictable in the short term. The model analyzed in this essay reveals that scenarios of democratic transition in which there is strategic interaction between the ruling elite and political opposition have fundamentally different properties. Outcomes of such scenarios are highly sensitive to extremely small changes in relevant variables and are correspondingly unstable and indeterminate.

Hence, indeterminacy is not simply a byproduct of inadequate knowledge about extremely complex and fluctuating preferences, groups, or social systems but is, instead, an essential feature of strategic interaction in contested political systems where constraining expectations generated by established norms and institutions break down. The source of the inability of social scientists to predict political outcomes is, therefore, not to be found in complexity or in transient weaknesses of theory or insufficient data but is inherent in certain types of situations of which the scenarios analyzed in this essay provide an illustration.

NOTES

1. The term chaos was initially developed in the physical sciences in reference to "irregular, unpredictable behavior of deterministic, nonlinear dynamical systems" (Roderick Jensen quoted in Gleick, 1987, p. 306). Applying "chaos" to social systems, I define the term with reference to a distinguishing characteristic of chaotic systems in the physical sciences: *sensitive dependence on initial conditions*.

2. Figure 1 follows conventional notation. In prisoner's dilemma, R, S, T, and P symbolize Reward, Sucker, Temptation, and Penalty, respectively.

3. This is to exclude fringe groups or terrorists who prefer repression in the short term in order to provoke radical resistance to the ruling elite. The political influence of such groups on elite decisions to tolerate or suppress is, in most cases, marginal. Spain is a case in point.

4. Here my terminology departs from conventional game theory, which describes elite choice in this kind of scenario as "dominant strategy." I describe such choice as "nonstrategic" to emphasize that, within the context of the model, it is independent of other players' strategies.

5. These situations are given by $R_1 > P_1$ and $T_1 > S_1$ in addition to the inequalities specified in Assumption 1.

6. Juan Linz (1975) observed that repression itself was a goal of this type of regime: "A frightening and rationally difficult to explain characteristic of Nazi and Stalinist terror was the degree to which it was unnecessary and even dysfunctional for the achievement of the goals those systems had set themselves, the extent to which it had become an evil end in itself" (p. 228).

7. Where landed aristocracies rooted in feudal institutions dominated government—as was the case in the larger countries of Europe—the surest path, and perhaps the only path, to democracy was via revolution (Moore, 1966). However, revolution was not necessary for democratization in the smaller societies where there were not enough large estates to produce a strong landed aristocracy (Castles, 1973; Stephens, 1989) and where, as a consequence, the ruling elite did not view monopoly of government as necessary for its economic survival.

8. George Tsebelis (1989) makes a similar point in the context of evaluating decision-theoretic and game-theoretic explanations.

9. The minimal conditions for this scenario are, given Assumptions 1 and 2, $T_1 > R_1$ and $S_1 > P_1$. In this scenario, the elite's preference ordering is therefore $T_1 > R_1 > S_1 > P_1$.

10. The minimal conditions for this scenario are, given Assumptions 1 and 2, $R_1 > T_1$ and $P_1 > S_1$. In this scenario, the elite's preference ordering is therefore $R_1 > T_1 > P_1 > S_1$.

11. The minimal conditions for this scenario are, given Assumptions 1 and 2, $R_1 > T_1$ and $P_1 > S_1$. In this scenario, the elite's preference ordering is therefore $T_1 > R_1 > P_1 > S_1$.

12. For an insightful discussion of protest in Eastern Europe using game-theoretic concepts, see Valerie Bunce and Dennis Chong's (1990) as-yet-unpublished paper.

13. This is to take issue with Dahl (1971) who maintains that it is axiomatic that "The likelihood that a government will tolerate an opposition increases as the resources available to the government for suppression decline relative to the resources of an opposition" (p. 48).

14. Earlier pacts, such as the elite settlement of 1688-1689 in England or the Swedish settlement of 1809, facilitated but were not directly linked to the creation of a democratic regime (Burton, Gunther, & Higley, 1992).

15. This is merely to suggest one property of a dynamic model. Another would be that sustained suppression increases selective incentives for protest up to some point. This would lower the critical mass necessary for opposition protest. However, a suppressive regime might counter by increasing the severity of suppression, thereby raising the costs of protest.

16. The game is not strictly a game of Chicken, which is characterized by $T > R > S > P$ for both players.

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