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Exchange

THE SEQUENCING “FALLACY”

Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder

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Trenchant articles in the January 2007 issue of the *Journal of Democracy* by two of the most astute observers of democratization and political development, Thomas Carothers and Sheri Berman, acknowledge the now widely recognized fact that countries taking early steps on the journey from dictatorship toward electoral politics are especially prone to civil and international war, violent revolution, and ethnic and sectarian bloodshed. Indeed, they accept our argument about turbulent democratization—advanced in a series of articles and two books published since 1995—and then go us one better, charging us with being too optimistic about sequencing democratic change in ways that might reduce its risks.¹

We have pointed out that not all countries experience significant violence during democratic transitions. Brazil, Chile, Hungary, Poland, South Korea, and Taiwan are recent examples of peaceful transitions. Using both statistical and case-study analyses in our book *Electing to Fight*, we showed that transitional countries that were comparatively well-endowed with the prerequisites for democratic politics, such as relatively competent and impartial state institutions, were unlikely to detour into violence. This is a story as old as democracy itself: Great Britain’s nineteenth-century path toward mass electoral politics was smoothed by the preexisting strength of its legal system, representative institutions, and free press. Based on these findings, we argued that it is dangerous to push states to democratize before the necessary preconditions are in place and that prudent democracy-promotion efforts should pay special attention to fostering those preconditions.

In response, Berman and Carothers express doubts that getting the sequence right—building effective state institutions before holding unfettered elections—is the key to reducing the risk of violence during a democratic transition. Berman argues that even the European states that supposedly democratized in the right sequence experienced horrible conflicts. Even England had its seventeenth-century Civil War, which she considers the initial phase in the rise of mass participation in British politics.

Carothers admits that certain conditions facilitate democratic transitions: a fairly high level of economic development, an economy that is not based on oil production, the absence of deep identity-based divisions within society, prior experience with democracy, and democratic neighbors. He resists calling these factors preconditions, however, because they do not have to be fully achieved before democratization can usefully begin. He also rejects the idea of sequencing because mass political pressure on the dictator may be needed to spur progress in building democratic institutions.

It is a commentary on how far this debate has moved since our first articles in 1995 that we can now be charged with being optimists. In fact, we are not much more optimistic about sequencing than either Carothers or Berman. Our position is not that building the institutional or other preconditions of democracy is easy or that dictators are readily convinced to take these steps. We call for “humility about the ability of any outsider to re-engineer a country’s political institutions.”² Our book is a disquisition on the tactics that authoritarian leaders use to dodge pressures to build effective democratic institutions.

We also anticipate Carothers in recognizing that the creation of preconditions will sometimes have barely begun when electoral competition gets under way: “[O]ur most general rule is to start the process by building the institutions that democracy requires, and then encouraging mass political participation and unfettered electoral competition only after these institutions have *begun to take root*.”³ Like Robert A. Dahl and Samuel P. Huntington nearly four decades ago, we acknowledge that the British-style sequence of forging effective state institutions prior to starting a democratic transition has become increasingly rare, though it does still occur.⁴ South Africa successfully followed such a sequence in the 1990s, adapting apartheid-era institutions to the needs of postapartheid democracy. The likelihood that this favorable sequence will be rare among future transitions is precisely why we think democratization often may go awry, as occurred in recent elections in the Middle East.

There is, however, one key issue on which we may disagree with Berman and Carothers. We suggest not only that democratization is often violent (Berman’s main point), but also that premature, out-of-sequence attempts to democratize may make subsequent efforts to dem-

ocratize more difficult and more violent than they would otherwise be. When elections are held in an institutional wasteland like Iraq, for example, political competition typically coalesces around and reinforces the ethnic and sectarian divisions in traditional society. To forge liberal,

Once a country starts on an illiberal trajectory, ideas are unleashed and institutions are established that tend to continue propelling it along that trajectory.

secular coalitions that cut across cultural divisions, it is necessary to have impartial state institutions that provide a framework for civic action and a focal point for civic loyalty. Without reasonably effective civic institutions, the outcome in culturally diverse societies is likely to resemble Iraq and Lebanon. Once a country starts on an illiberal trajectory, ideas are unleashed and institutions are established that tend to continue propelling it along that trajectory. A key danger is that premature democratization

will push a country down this path. We highlight the importance of sequencing not because we are so optimistic about the prospects of engineering a properly ordered democratization, but because we are so concerned about the consequences of transitions occurring under other conditions.

Our findings are consistent with the conjecture that out-of-sequence transition attempts delay the eventual achievement of stable democracy, although this issue was not a central focus of our research. Many troubled partial democracies have long retained the institutional deformities born of an initial transition from autocracy that failed to produce a coherent democracy. For example, the connection between Serbian ethnic nationalism and political demagoguery began with early experiments with mass electoral politics in the nineteenth century, a pattern that persisted in the face of communist and liberal attempts to break this connection. Likewise, the foundational role of the military in Argentine, Pakistani, and Turkish mass-nationalist politics established a recurrent pattern of oscillations between semidemocracy and military rule. Similarly, Colombia's pattern of urban semidemocracy and violent rural anarchy, established during the "La Violencia" bloodletting that followed the disastrous opening to mass politics in the late 1940s, has become entrenched in subsequent decades.

Berman and Carothers are less concerned about the lasting birth defects of untimely democratic transitions. Berman's main point is that sequence is largely inconsequential: The price of democratization is constant, high, and unavoidable. Countries just have to pay it. Carothers suggests that an "historical experience with political pluralism," even a failed one, gives a country a leg up in subsequent attempts.⁵ This is not completely implausible. In Latin America, for example, the accretion of

quasi-democratic institutions—parties, labor unions, courts, and the press—left a legacy of some outward institutional forms that could be reanimated in later bursts of political reform. Nonetheless, there are other cases where failed attempts at mass electoral politics left a legacy of ethnic nationalism, military populism, and few useable democratic institutions. President George W. Bush has asserted that “it is the practice of democracy that makes a nation ready for democracy,” but all too often the reverse is true.⁶

Carothers claims to oppose sequencing, but to favor gradualism, although he admits that there are only subtle differences between these two strategies. In contrast, we favor efforts at sequencing, but not always those aimed at gradualism. As Carothers acknowledges, when countries like Czechoslovakia (or for that matter Singapore) have the necessary preconditions in place, there is no need for gradualism. When conditions are not auspicious, however, some preliminary steps—call them gradualism if you like—are a prudent precursor to unconstrained electoral competition.

When will gradual or partial steps be helpful, and when will claims to be sequencing the transition simply serve as excuses for authoritarians who seek to subvert progress toward democracy? We agree that dictators in countries like Tunisia have often used reforms tactically to coopt, divide, and weaken resistance to autocracy.⁷ Yet dictators in Chile, South Korea, Taiwan, and arguably Malaysia have presided over economic and administrative reforms that have had the unintended consequence of improving the country’s subsequent chances for a successful democratic transition.

That said, we do not see dictators as the most likely implementers of well-sequenced reforms leading to democracy. This role is more commonly played by moderate groups that seek to curtail the power of the old authoritarian elite, but that also fear a rapid descent into the chaos of mass politics. Historically, a constructive role has sometimes been played by partial reforms that are designed to protect a liberalizing coalition like the British Whigs and liberals (or the ANC of Nelson Mandela) from a backlash by threatened traditional elites like the Tories (or apartheid elites), and from radical mass groups like the working-class Chartists (or advocates of racial or tribal confrontation).

Controlled reforms create a breathing space in which the reformers can put in place rule-of-law guarantees that reassure all constituencies while the reformers negotiate golden parachutes with old elites to induce them to relinquish power. As for the precise mechanisms of sequencing or gradualism, a variety of tactics might be useful in the right hands: amnesties, elite-protecting pacts on property rights, professionalized but not unregulated news media, rule-of-law reform that starts with the bureaucracy and the economy, and the internal democratization of elite institutions such as the ruling party. Such

expedients have effectively facilitated peaceful democratic transitions in Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mozambique, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, and elsewhere.

Carothers is right that outsiders can rarely have a huge effect on the choice of trajectory, but upon occasion they can provide a decisive impetus for good or for ill. The astute tactics of the European Union in conditioning Romanian and Slovak accession on the adoption of policies to guarantee the rights of minorities (backed by strengthened rule of law) helped support the efforts of democratic coalitions to create favorable conditions for transition. Conversely, the decision of international donors to compel the ethnic-minority Tutsi military dictatorship of underinstitutionalized Burundi to hold free and fair elections in 1993 contributed heavily to the more than 200,000 subsequent deaths from ethnic violence. At the margins, realistic knowledge about the sequencing of transitions may help to promote a few successes and avert a few Burundi- and Iraq-style disasters.

NOTES

1. Thomas Carothers, "How Democracies Emerge: The 'Sequencing' Fallacy," *Journal of Democracy* 18 (January 2007): 12–27; Sheri Berman, "How Democracies Emerge: Lessons from Europe," *Journal of Democracy* 18 (January 2007): 28–41; Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and the Danger of War," *International Security* 20 (Summer 1995): 5–38; Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000); and Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

2. Mansfield and Snyder, *Electing to Fight*, 280.

3. Mansfield and Snyder, *Electing to Fight*, 17, emphasis added.

4. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); and Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

5. Carothers, "How Democracies Emerge," 24.

6. George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy," 6 November 2003, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-3.html.

7. Eva Bellin, *Stalled Democracy: Capital, Labor and the Paradox of State-sponsored Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Exchange

LIBERALISM VERSUS STATE-BUILDING

Francis Fukuyama

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I am broadly sympathetic to the arguments made by Thomas Carothers in “The Sequencing Fallacy,” including his skepticism about the wisdom of efforts by the United States and other Western governments to support liberal autocrats. The latter approach to development is nothing new: The idea that governments seek order first, then economic development, and only later democracy was first laid out systematically by Samuel P. Huntington in his 1968 work *Political Order in Changing Societies*. Fareed Zakaria’s *The Future of Freedom* and more recent “realist” calls in the wake of Iraq for sequencing transitions to democracy in the Middle East are simply variants of this basic argument.

There is nothing wrong in principle with sequencing reforms, if the constraints and capacities of the society in question make it a workable strategy. The problem, as Carothers points out, is that the number of cases where one can find genuine development-minded autocrats is extremely small. Carothers is also right that outside powers greatly overestimate their influence if they think that *they* can somehow determine the sequencing of reforms.

I would simply add that virtually all the real cases of this kind of sequencing have occurred in East Asia, where Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand (at least until the September 2006 military coup in Bangkok) have made democratic transitions, and where authoritarian governments in China and Singapore have built impressive economic-growth records. It is no accident that these cases are grouped in East Asia. Many countries in that region had long traditions of strong states with merit-based bureaucracies well before they began modernizing. Confucianism is in part a doctrine about the state, and it prescribes clear rules for bureaucratic authority and recruitment that have provided a cultural foundation for the region’s so-called developmental states. Simi-

lar traditions of deference to well-trained technocrats simply do not exist in Latin America, Africa, or the Middle East, so it is not surprising that one finds relatively few Lee Kwan Yews or South Korean planning ministries among the authoritarian regimes in other parts of the world.

The one part of Carothers's argument that I would modify concerns the potential contradiction between state-building and not just democracy, but liberalism as well. Carothers grants that in postconflict situations it might be necessary to delay democratic elections and run countries under a temporary authoritarian mandate, but holds that state-building is not otherwise incompatible with either liberal rule of law or democracy. I believe that state-building is in many cases at cross-purposes with both, and that stable states often must be constructed through violent means.

State-building in a strict sense is about creating the Weberian monopoly of legitimate violence over a defined territory, and therefore has at its core the concentration of the means of coercion—in practical terms, armies and police—under the control of a central political authority. This then necessitates the development of other state institutions, beginning with taxing authority (which must always be at least partially coercive), but also including agencies providing various sorts of public goods. Both the liberal rule of law and democracy, by contrast, involve *limiting* the central state's authority to coerce, the first by putting it under a set of transparent and universal rules, the second by ensuring that the exercise of power reflects the popular will.

The legitimacy of the state's monopoly of violence can, of course, be built on the legitimation of the state's authority through a democratic vote. Democratic theory, however, does not tell us where to draw a state's boundaries with regard to the social groups that compose it. Who belongs within the boundaries of a nation in the first place? The long-term viability of the state-building process depends heavily on getting this issue right, either through incorporating or divesting territory, or else through changing the character of the populations that live in a given territory. For better or worse, legitimate monopolies of violence (including those legitimated democratically) have been much easier to establish in societies whose underlying ethnic, racial, religious, or other structural characteristics make sense in terms of the society's territorial boundaries.

Societies with significant ethnic, religious, or sectarian cleavages or minorities have always been more difficult to consolidate as states. Sometimes, as in the case of Belgium, Switzerland, or India, institutions can be adapted to accommodate these cleavages. But it has been much more common to modify the state's boundaries to include or exclude various groups, or forcibly to exchange and thereby homogenize populations through a process now known as ethnic cleansing. Needless to say, these changes to borders or exchanges of populations have often required violence to achieve, and have seldom been constrained by liberal rules and democratic consensus.

People in the West conveniently forget how violent their own processes of state-formation were. Europe went from being made up of more than three-hundred sovereign entities at the end of the Middle Ages to containing fewer than thirty sovereign nation-states on the eve of the First World War. This involved several centuries of virtually continuous violence. In Charles Tilly's famous formulation, "War made the state, and the state made war." The process of redrawing borders and exchanging populations continued well into the twentieth century, with Greeks, Turks, Jews, Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, Lithuanians, and Russians being forcibly moved from one jurisdiction to another. The stability of the current state system in Europe came about only as a result of these violent changes. This pattern has prevailed up through the 1990s: The Bosnian civil war ultimately could not be ended based on the multiethnic Vance-Owens Plan; the Dayton Accords were built on further ethnic cleansing that separated populations into more homogeneous cantons within Bosnia.

Americans are not exempt from these harsh realities. Liberal-democratic constitutionalism was not adequate as a framework for settling the dispute between North and South over slavery. This issue—as well as the country's ultimate territorial boundaries—was decided only as a result of a civil war that claimed more than 600,000 lives out of a total U.S. population of only about 30 million. Moreover, while the Civil War settled the question of whether there would be one or two countries between Mexico and Canada, the inclusion of California, Texas, and the Southwest into the United States had also been settled violently through the earlier Mexican-American War.

If one defines state-building narrowly to mean the development of certain governmental capacities to provide public goods, and assumes that the territorial question is settled, then Carothers is right that state-building may be compatible with either liberalism or democracy. Indeed, democracy may help to establish the legitimate monopoly of power on which the state is based. But the longer-term stability and coherence of states often depends on adjustments to borders or populations that in practice only enter the realm of possibility because of violence. Sometimes this involves the use of force to disarm militias and establish the state's authority in a particular region (as in the case of Colombia trying to extend the writ of the state into regions controlled by various guerrilla or paramilitary groups). In other cases, it involves states being willing to let go of rebellious provinces or regions for the sake of long-term peace, driven in almost all cases by a violent rebellion that the center cannot suppress.

To the extent that the international community insists that state-building be accomplished under liberal and democratic rules, rather than permitting the sequencing of state-building prior to the promotion of rule of law and democracy, it may simply be freezing conflicts that will eventually reemerge, thereby threatening whatever democracy and

rule of law has been achieved in the meantime. I have already mentioned the case of Bosnia, where the stability afforded by the Dayton Accords could come about only after ethnic cleansing had effected transfers of populations into more homogeneous zones.

Sudan is another case where insistence on peaceful, democratic conflict resolution will only prolong instability. Sudan is a colonial creation whose current boundaries make no sense; it is built around an Arab core, with substantial black African minorities in the south and west that have much more in common with neighboring countries than with the population around Khartoum. Khartoum's efforts to maintain its sovereignty over these areas has led to a prolonged and bloody thirty-year civil war in the south and to the current genocide in the region of western Sudan known as Darfur. The international community, however, has seen these conflicts not as preludes to long-term state-building based on territorial change, but as humanitarian crises that have to be managed within the framework of existing Sudanese sovereignty. As long as it does so, and seeks to freeze the current status quo, it will only put off and not solve the underlying political conflict.

In Europe, the processes of state-building, construction of a liberal rule of law, and democratization occurred in three distinct phases, often separated by decades if not centuries. The vast bulk of the violence that has occurred in Europe over the past five-hundred years has been related not to the spread of democracy, as Jack Snyder has argued, but to state-building. Americans should consider how their own history would have been different had there been a powerful international community in 1863 that insisted that North and South negotiate a ceasefire after the Battle of Gettysburg. International help in providing humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons and the demobilization of blue and gray militias would have left in place the institution of slavery that was the cause of the war. The North-South conflict might have broken out at a later point, and even if it had not, Europe would have had no savior in the twentieth century.

It is perfectly reasonable, in light of the West's violent history, that today's international community should try to establish a norm prohibiting violent changes to borders or populations. Indeed, there are all too many historical cases where such violence has been a disaster for everyone involved, leading not to long-term stability or strong states but the contrary. Yet the *universal and unbending* application of this norm is tantamount to insistence by the international community that there be no sequencing between state-building and either rule of law or democracy. Today's international community is effectively locked into a no-sequencing norm with regard to state-building. On the whole, this is not a bad default position, but as the example of the U.S. Civil War indicates, it may not always yield the best results. So perhaps there should be room for a bit of flexibility on this question after all.

Exchange

THE VAIN HOPE FOR “CORRECT” TIMING

Sheri Berman

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Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder rightly observe that over the last few years the euphoria surrounding democracy’s “third wave” has largely diminished as observers have recognized how difficult the path from democratization to consolidation really is. This recognition has prompted the development of a new wave of “preconditionists”: As opposed to their predecessors who argued that without the right prerequisites democratization would not occur, today’s preconditionists argue that without the right prerequisites consolidation will not occur.

Mansfield and Snyder argue in this issue that “it is dangerous to push states to democratize before the necessary preconditions are in place and that prudent democracy-promotion efforts should pay special attention to fostering those preconditions.” Since there is also widespread agreement that stable liberal democracies are more likely to develop in countries that also possess a wide range of what Thomas Carothers prefers to call “facilitating” conditions (high levels of economic development, strong and legitimate states, citizenries that agree on the democratic “rules of the game”) and very unlikely to develop in failed states, the real debate seems to be about the likely political trajectories of those countries in between, and what if anything outsiders can do to affect them.

Mansfield and Snyder worry about democratization in such countries because they believe that political development is path-dependent: “Once a country starts on an illiberal trajectory, ideas are unleashed and institutions are established that tend to continue propelling it along that trajectory.” They claim that “premature democratization will push a country down this path,” and thus that “premature, out-of-sequence

attempts to democratize may make subsequent efforts to democratize more difficult and more violent than they would otherwise be.” Because they think that outside intervention at critical junctures “can provide a decisive impetus for good or ill,” Mansfield and Snyder warn about the dangers of pushing too hard for democratization in inappropriate cases (and too lightly in appropriate ones).

I see fewer dangers than they do in “premature” democratic experiments and am skeptical about their recommendation of trying to hold off democratic change until conditions are ideal. My reading of the West European experience sees little else but a pattern of false starts, failed liberalizations, and temporary regressions. Yet far from trapping the continent in a suboptimal path, this pattern ultimately resulted in a set of stable, liberal democracies.

I often joke with my students that when I look at today’s new democracies, I can only hope that they have an easier time of it than did the West European ones I study. After enduring an incredibly bloody and divisive revolution starting in 1789, France suffered through more than a century and a half of deep social and political conflict before achieving a stability of sorts with the founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958. Otto von Bismarck created a unified Germany in 1871 and then tried to forestall democracy in it with a form of soft authoritarianism. Yet he succeeded only in generating rising political frustration and social conflict that set the country on the path toward the cataclysm of the First World War. From there, of course, still more twists and turns ensued and things got even worse. Only after total military defeat, invasion, occupation, the forced redrawing of borders, and ethnic cleansing on an unprecedented scale did democracy and stability finally come to Germany—and then at first only to its western portion as the East found itself forced by the fortunes of war to spend decades languishing under Soviet domination.¹

Similar winding and difficult paths have characterized the political development of Spain, Italy, Austria, and almost all other European countries. Even England, the paradigmatic case of the “right” sequencing, is often misunderstood. England was placed on the path to democracy only by a bloody period of civil war and domestic chaos during the seventeenth century that reshaped the nature and norms of its political institutions and shifted the balance of power in English society—and even then, it took another 150 years for a full democratic transition to occur. If we turn to some of the “auspicious” non-European cases that Mansfield and Snyder cite, a closer look reveals similar turmoil. The relatively successful late-twentieth-century transitions of Chile, South Korea, and Brazil, for example, all had stormy and violent backstories that included failed democratic experiments, civil wars, and occupations.²

If genuine examples of “correct” sequencing and hence unproblematic democratic development are practically nonexistent, so is evidence that

“premature” attempted transitions inevitably make things worse in the long run. Pace Mansfield and Snyder, the West European cases seem to show that false starts, problems, and reversals not only failed to preclude later democratic success, but were in fact integral parts of the

On the margins, taking the side of the local democrats and reformers makes sense both morally and politically.

long-term process through which non-democratic institutions, elites, and cultures were delegitimized and eventually marginalized in order to make way for democratic successors.³ (Thomas Carothers is, I think, making a similar point in “The ‘Sequencing’ Fallacy” [p. 20] when he notes that the establishment of things such as the rule of law, strong political institutions, and accountability is much more likely to develop as part and parcel of the struggle for democracy than separate from it.)⁴

Mansfield and Snyder argue that pushing for democratization in sub-optimal situations is unlikely to help and likely to hurt. I agree that it is not likely to do much good, since the main drivers of democratic development are generally internal rather than external. But on the margins, taking the side of the local democrats and reformers rather than their authoritarian overlords makes more sense both morally and politically. The construction of stable liberal democracy generally requires breaking down the institutions, relationships, and culture of the *ancien régime*, a process that is never easy and about which the *ancien régime* itself is rarely enthusiastic. Yes, achieving a full transition to consolidated democracy is difficult. But it cannot be completed if it never starts.

NOTES

1. Ethnic cleansing affected not only the Jews and other “undesirables” during the Third Reich and Second World War, but also ethnic Germans after the war was over. Estimates suggest that hundreds of thousands died and millions of lives were disrupted in the population transfers that followed the Second World War.

2. Here I disagree with Fukuyama. As Mansfield and Snyder point out, there are more than just East Asian cases in the category of relatively successful late-twentieth-century transitions; to attribute the East Asian successes to cultural factors such as Confucianism seems misguided. As many have argued, South Korea’s strong state is as much a product of Japanese occupation as it is of indigenous development (see most recently Atul Kohli, *State Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004]). In any case, the political and economic disaster of North Korea would seem to balance out the purported “positive” impact of culture in South Korea. Similarly, China’s “strong” political institutions were built up via the tragedy of the Maoist era, bringing into question not only the impact of culture but also the price in turmoil and lost lives that China has had to pay for its current economic success and relative political stability.

3. A similar argument can be made about successful late-twentieth-century transitions as well. For example, South Korea suffered about a million deaths (85 percent of them civilian) in the Korean War, which among other things was a civil war fought over regime type. But that conflict, together with the legacy of earlier democratic experiments plus postwar agrarian reform, helped to eliminate the remnants of the country's *ancien régime* and lay the basis for the wealthy and successful democracy that today flourishes on the southern half of the Korean Peninsula. And to understand Chile's contemporary democratic success one must consider not only the many advances that the country made during the pre-Pinochet period, but also the willingness to compromise which has now been absorbed as a key "lesson learned" from the painful conflict and violence that marked the Allende-Pinochet era.

4. Fukuyama is correct to note that there are important differences between Europe's state-building experience and that of countries in the contemporary era. Most importantly, Europe's process took hundreds of years, and although borders were influenced by international agreements and outside actors, there was nothing analogous to today's "international community" working to disallow violent change. As authors like Jeffrey Herbst, Robert H. Jackson, and Carl G. Rosberg, and others have pointed out, keeping in place borders that domestic states cannot defend may ultimately slow down rather than speed up political and economic development. See Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, "Sovereignty and Underdevelopment: Juridical Statehood in the African Crisis," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 24 (March 1986): 1-31.

Exchange

MISUNDERSTANDING GRADUALISM

Thomas Carothers

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I greatly appreciate the serious, thoughtful responses by Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder and by Francis Fukuyama to my January 2007 *Journal of Democracy* essay entitled “How Democracies Emerge: The ‘Sequencing’ Fallacy.” Unfortunately, Professors Mansfield and Snyder attribute to me ideas that I do not express in that article, mischaracterize some of the points that I do make there, and fail to engage at all with some of my fundamental arguments. The very first sentence of their response hints at the problems to come. For nowhere in my article do I, as they claim, “acknowledge the now widely recognized fact that countries taking early steps on the journey from dictatorship toward electoral politics are especially prone to civil and international war, violent revolutions, and ethnic and sectarian bloodshed.” I make no such acknowledgement because in fact I *reject* this view, and I find the evidence for it set out in their book *Electing to Fight* unpersuasive.

Their use of highly refined statistical methods to make their case is undermined, in my view, by some significant problems with their classification of cases. Thus they somehow categorize the 1982 Falklands War—a conflict started by the Argentine military junta—as an example of the warlike propensities of *democratizing* countries. Similarly, most observers of Balkan politics will be surprised to learn from *Electing to Fight* that it was the *democratizing* character of Serbia under the thuggish Slobodan Milošević that was responsible for Serbia’s militaristic predations in Kosovo and elsewhere.

More generally, Mansfield and Snyder base a sizeable part of their

case for the dangers of democratization on the internecine conflicts that flared up after the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia each broke apart. Blaming democratization for the wars that sprang from the collapse of multiethnic authoritarian federations—the messy, often violent process of establishing the borders of the newly emergent states—is a significant category mistake. As Francis Fukuyama stresses in his comment, the overwhelming bulk of the many wars that have raged in Europe over the last half a millennium have been related not to democracy, but to state-building.

Throughout their response, Mansfield and Snyder steadfastly reassert the preferability of sequentialism and their disapproval of what they call “out-of-sequence” democratic transitions. They do not, however, actually address, let alone refute, my two core arguments. To recapitulate, these are:

1) Outside East Asia, autocratic governments in the developing world have a terrible record as builders of competent, impartial institutions due to deep-seated conflicts between autocracy and the second phase of state-building (that is, going beyond establishing a monopoly of force to creating effective institutions); and

2) Although emergent democratic governments struggle with this second, institution-strengthening phase of state-building and with rule-of-law development, they have some important advantages when it comes to tackling these tasks.

Mansfield and Snyder maintain a strong skepticism about the wisdom of holding elections in places that lack what they believe are necessary preconditions for democracy. Yet this view overlooks the decades of authoritarian rule in Africa and other parts of the postcolonial world that have left so many states in such terrible condition. Prescribing the deferral of democracy—and consequently the prolongation of authoritarian rule—as a cure for the ills of prolonged authoritarianism makes little sense. In this regard, it is telling that a probing recent study of African politics since the early 1990s finds that those countries which moved early toward elections and persisted with elections thereafter have done better at consolidating all aspects of democracy than those countries that delayed holding elections.¹

Mansfield and Snyder try to soften their sequentialism in two ways. First, they say that elections need to be deferred only until competent state institutions “have begun to take root” or even just until the development of such institutions has “barely begun.” But then they return to their more standard sequentialist dictum that “it is necessary to have impartial state institutions” before risking elections.

The gap between barely beginning to have competent, impartial state institutions and having them in place and functioning well is enormous, and bridging it can take fifty years, a century, or even more. This ambiguity at the core of their doctrine is surprising. Moreover, if the

higher standard is indeed the controlling one, India probably still belongs in the sequentialist waiting room, not yet ready for elections. So too, for that matter, does Italy—a rather curious result.

Second, Mansfield and Snyder try to elude the charge that, by recommending the deferral of elections, they are advocating a greater tolerance for authoritarian rule. The key to moving successfully away from authoritarianism, they say, is the presence of “moderate groups” that can be “implementers of well-sequenced reforms leading to democracy,” not dangerous democratic activists who may provoke “a rapid descent into the chaos of mass politics.” Yet the record of democratic change since the “third wave” began in 1974 reveals few successful cases of “controlled reforms” leading to democracy. A majority of the very cases that Mansfield and Snyder cite as evidence for their alternative model—the democratic transitions in Poland, Chile, South Africa, Taiwan, and South Korea—actually point the other way. In these countries, vigorous democrats with no fear of “mass politics” pushed for open political competition including free and fair elections. It was Poland’s Solidarity, the Chilean opposition to Pinochet, the African National Congress, the Taiwanese prodemocratic opposition, and South Korean student activists that drove the processes of change in their respective countries—not benevolent forces in or around the preexisting power structures.

Mansfield and Snyder several times invoke the emotive example of Iraq to bolster their case. The U.S.-led intervention has indeed been a disaster, and Iraq’s post-Saddam political life has been calamitous. As evidence bearing on the debate here, however, the case of Iraq is a red herring, one that adds heat to the issues under debate, but not light. Even if one accepts that the United States has been motivated by pro-democratic aims in Iraq and serious about pursuing them, post-Saddam Iraq is a case of attempting democratization in a context of state collapse (or perhaps, more accurately, state removal), not in a context of the second phase of state-building in which a weak state strives toward greater effectiveness. As I wrote in my article: “Where a state has completely collapsed or failed under the lash of civil conflict or other accumulated or acute calamities, moving rapidly toward open political competition and elections makes no sense.”

Getting Gradualism Wrong

Mansfield and Snyder badly mischaracterize my analysis of gradualism as an alternative to sequentialism and incorrectly argue that there is little difference between the two concepts: “Carothers claims to oppose sequencing but to favor gradualism, although he admits that there are only subtle differences between these strategies.” Actually, I said the opposite: “The difference between gradualism and sequentialism

may at first appear subtle or merely semantic. In fact, however, it is fundamental.”

Sequencing is about putting off democracy—especially open, competitive elections—until some time in the indefinite future while pursuing state-building and the rule of law in the meantime. Gradualism is different. It is based on the recognition that authoritarian rule is itself usually a key obstacle to building a well-functioning state and establishing the rule of law. The gradualist approach seeks to find a way for countries where few circumstances favor democratization to take incremental but definite steps toward open political competition while *simultaneously* pursuing state-building and rule-of-law reforms. Mansfield and Snyder’s unwillingness to recognize this difference, along with their tendency at times to mislabel as gradualism their own recommended sequentialist steps (“call them gradualism if you like”), plays directly into the hands of authoritarian rulers who habitually steal the label of “gradualism” as rhetorical camouflage for their own indefinite deferrals of democratization.

Mansfield and Snyder insist more than once that I have “charged” them with being optimists. This is another misstatement of what I wrote, which is that sequentialism is “rooted in skepticism about democracy’s value and chances” and represents “a pessimistic, cautionary view.” Certainly they are entitled to whatever amount of pessimism about democracy they prefer, but they should at least acknowledge it as such. Their vision of democracy’s third wave primarily as a process unleashing wars, revolutions, and ethnic bloodshed is indeed starkly pessimistic.

It is certainly true that the recent global wave of democracy has been uneven, disappointing, and at times plagued by harsh conflicts. Yet I believe that the advances which democracy has made across much of Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Balkans, as well as in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the former Soviet Union, East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, while deeply imperfect, have on the whole benefited those regions and the people who live in them. It is noteworthy that, despite the many serious shortcomings of democracy in those regions, public-opinion surveys have shown that a clear majority of people in most third-wave countries today hold democracy to be the most preferable form of government. Putting off democracy indefinitely until some putatively more favorable time may appeal to pessimistic scholars and recalcitrant autocrats. Risking democracy now appears to be the choice of most ordinary citizens when they get the chance to choose.

I appreciate Francis Fukuyama’s elucidation of a crucial point concerning the relationship between state-building and democracy. I have focused on that relationship as it occurs in the second phase of state-building—that is, building effective state capacity after the initial phase in which an emergent state seeks to gain a monopoly of force over a

defined territory and population. I agree that democratization has no natural place in the first phase, since this phase is usually a conflictive, coercive process carried out by strongmen leaders intent on conquest or militarized defense.

As Fukuyama points out, the contemporary international system tries to freeze in place the existing framework of states and to allow state formation or modification only through peaceful dissolution or negotiation. This approach has frozen into place some conflict-generating situations, especially in Africa, where state borders correspond poorly to identity-based divisions among the inhabitants. Fukuyama's call for "a bit of flexibility" on this issue is a good example of his well-known talent for raising crucial questions that have enormous potential implications, in an understated but thought-provoking way.

NOTES

1. Staffan I. Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections in Africa* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).