

## The Road to Democracy: Exploring the Impact of Leadership Guidance

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### Introducing the Problem

The non-governmental organization Freedom House, dedicated to the mission to promote freedom and democracy, offers annual reports of the current conditions in the states of the world. In their most recent version of *Countries at the Crossroads* (2006), the situation in the group of states classified as “poor performers” (among them Zimbabwe, Yemen and Azerbaijan) is described rather unflatteringly: “In these states, the power-holders effectively maintain an institutional chokehold on the state, maximizing private interest while assigning a secondary role to the public interest.”<sup>2</sup> However, the analysis is also careful to point out that the current situation in this group of “poor performers” is not irrevocably, but rather contingent on the political leadership: “They are countries whose leadership can make choices to ensure basic human rights and to enable these states to join the community of stable, free and democratic nations.”<sup>3</sup> The importance of

the political leadership for countries at this crossroads is an insight shared with conducted research on democratization. When prospecting for the future, Samuel Huntington concludes: “For democracies to come into being, future political elites will have to believe, at a minimum, that democracy is the least bad form of government for their societies and for themselves.”<sup>4</sup> Considering that both democracy-promoting organizations and research of democratization credit leadership as important for countries at this crossroads, *the absence of actual studies that theorises and investigates the role of leadership in this field is puzzling.*<sup>5</sup>

This research-project addresses the problem of democratization through a focus on political leadership. In addition, the project is guided by the presumption that history contains important insights for how democracy can be reached, preserved and enhanced also today. In order to illustrate our point of view, India is a useful example. After almost 60 years as a sovereign state, India is currently described as a “mature democracy”.<sup>6</sup> Considering the intentions among the early political leadership – most notably Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru – when India gained independence (in August 1947), this is only to be expected. However, if one takes into account the

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2 Tatic & Walker (2006), available at [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).

3 Ibid.

4 Huntington (1993:25).

5 In the past five years, not one single article in neither *Journal of Democracy* nor *Third World Quarterly* focus on the importance of political leadership for democratization. In fact, if using [jstor.org](http://jstor.org), one returns more than two decades in time to find studies occupied with the role of leadership. See for instance Hayward (1984); Cartwright (1977).

6 Country report (2006) available at [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)

Emergency Act, proclaimed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in June 1975, the current democratic quality of the Indian society looks less self-evident. The emergency regime, carried out for over 18 months, involved authoritarian practices such as removal of parliament influence, imprisonment of opposition, press censorship and family-planning through forcible vasectomies. Nevertheless, in January 1977, Prime Minister Gandhi announced that free election should yet again be held, and gradually, the Indian society re-gained democracy. This illustration is useful in the sense that it illuminates that some states (like India) manage to defeat obstacles to democracy, which leads to the question that guides this project: What values and strategies of a political leadership facilitate the road to democracy, and reward their societies with a resilient democracy?

Literature on political leadership underlines the particular significance of political elites at periods characterized as societal crossroads. In essence, research on political leadership, or, central persons in representational roles, concerns the ability of these leaders to identify the relevant problems, prepare solutions and mobilize public opinion during periods of social and political change.<sup>1</sup> Ideational and institutional research points at the potential to leadership influence in the sense that they can imprint their values and beliefs in institutions.<sup>2</sup> Finally, research of democratization emphasis the importance of the

image and institutions of the state as a pre-condition to a robust democracy.<sup>3</sup>

Guided by these theoretical insights, we suggest that the choices made by the leadership during the shift between nationhood and statehood are of particular significance. In short, the leadership can either re-use images and practices of nationhood to create the state, or, they can make sure that the state is set up on the basis of democracy-promoting features. Moreover, we suggest that the capacity to face future challenges to democracy is contingent on these early choices made by the political leadership.

### **Aim of the Research Project**

The aim of this research-project is two-fold: 1) to contribute to theoretical knowledge on the role of leadership for democratic resilience and 2) to set out guidelines useful to political leaderships in societies on the road towards democratic governance. Before the project is described in further detail, next section puts our approach in relation to current research on democratization.

### **Previous Research on Democratization**

Most studies of democratization relate to one of three theoretical approaches: the modernization-, the transition-, and the structural approach. While the modernization and structural approaches emphasize a number of social and economic requisites, and change of power-structures favorable to democratization, the transition approach emphasizes political processes and elite initiatives and choices that account for moves from authoritarian

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1 Tucker (1981:14). Seligman describes leadership through the term “central person”, but underlines that it is a “representational role” which is 1) a function of acceptance by followers and, moreover, 2) who is chosen a leader is related to the conditions of a particular situation. Seligman (1950:913).

2 Berman (1998).

3 Hadenius (2001); Rothstein & Stolle (2007).

rule to liberal democracy. However, the transition-approach has more the character of analytic description than specified explanations to democratization.<sup>1</sup> In terms of explanatory-factors, research of democratization may be divided in two broad paths, which illustrates two versions of how democratic governance can be reached: either from outside-in or within. To the contrary from the outside-in view, who tends to look at the leadership primarily as detained authoritarians, our perspective puts the political leadership at the centre of the analysis. We suggest that this strategy inherits the potential to actually generate insights concerning the impact of a political leadership, when

it comes to promote or obstruct a process of democratization. As when it comes to the within-approach, previous research has explored the importance of economic and social forces to the rise of democracy, and the question of democratization tends to be reduced to an issue of free elections and what regime type and/or party system fosters democracy. To the contrary, we point at the necessity of a “state - in - society”-approach (Migdal 2001). In order to investigate the impact of the political leadership it needs to be analysed within the framework of the broader society, such as grassroots-movements, civil society and political organizations.

1 To illustrate, according to the transition approach, the general route to democratization has four main phases. First, there is the phase when national unity within a given territory is being established. Second, this national community goes through a preparatory phase marked by a prolonged and inconclusive political struggle. Each country goes through a different struggle, but there is always major conflict between opposed groups rather than some bland pluralism of group conflict. That helps to explain why democracy can be so fragile in the early stages, and why so many countries do not make it through the preparatory phase to the first transition. Third, there is the first transition, or interim period, when the parties to the inconclusive political struggle decide to compromise and adopt democratic rules which gives each some share in the polity. Fourth, there is the second transition, the consolidation phase, when the conscious adoption of democratic rules during the first transition gradually becomes a habit. Some of the political elites who were party to the compromise decision to establish democracy are eventually succeeded by a new generation of elites who have become habituated to democratic rules and sincerely believe in them (Potter et.al. 1997). See also Linz & Stepan (1996); Rustow (1970).

### Describing the Research-Project

Our research-project approaches the problem of democratic resilience from the presumption of leadership-significance at the crossroads between nationhood and statehood. In order to conduct an analysis of the process of statehood, we rely on the view of the state as suggested by Migdal’s state-in-society approach. To make clear, Migdal describes the state as shaped by “(1) *the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory*, and, (2) *the actual practices of its multiple parts*”<sup>2</sup>. By looking at the state as shaped by two elements, *image* and *practices*, the state-in-society approach helps us to recognize the corporate, unified dimension of the state, but also to dismantle this unity and examine the reinforcing and contradictory practises and alliances of its multiple parts. Obviously, the political leadership is one of these parts. As we see it, this approach is useful when studying

2 Migdal (2001:16).

the impact of leadership on democratization, since it suggests analytical focus on the reciprocal relationship between the image of the nationhood and the practices of the statehood. We suggest that in order to democratize, the newly independent state needs not only to change its practices, in accordance with the transition theory's ideas about interim decisions and consolidation, but also the images of the nation as it becomes represented by a state.

In order to explore the importance of leadership, the empirical study is conducted as a comparative case-study and includes cases successful and less successful with regard to their democratic attributes (case-selection is introduced in further detail below). The study consists of two steps. First, in order to explore the importance of political leadership to facilitate the road to democracy, the political leaderships' values and strategies at the initial challenges of the state (as state leaders) is compared with values and strategies at the national struggle (as leaders of the nation). Second, in order to explore the importance of these early decisions for democratic resilience, later obstacles to democracy – why they occur and how they are faced – are analysed. The study is so far guided by *three preliminary propositions*, introduced below, which depart from previously referred sources of inspiration. These propositions inherit potential explanations and *preliminary findings* for why the road to democracy continues, or is disrupted, depending on leadership-action.

*Proposition one: The symbol of the nation is re-used as image of state unity.* The road to democracy might become more or less successful depending on whether the political leadership re-uses the symbol of the nation (with the strong leader as the most

obvious example) to create an image of state-unity, rather than to establish this unity by help of trustworthy institutions. According to this proposition, we should expect that the successful cases included in the empirical study illuminate the readiness to create an image of state unity which is less dependent on the symbols of nationhood (personal leaders, ethnic or religious belonging) and more related to the state as a trustworthy political representation of the nation.

*Proposition two: Practices successful in order to consolidate a nation turns out counterproductive for the sake of democratic governance.* The road to democracy might become more or less successful depending on whether the political leadership is able to develop a set of strategies suited to the political circumstances or, instead, stick to practices successful during the phase of mobilising of the nation. Examples of such strategies of the nation are mobilization on the basis of emotional belonging, and by pointing at a common enemy, rather than – for instance – strategies to enable conflict-resolution, also at the presence of conflicting interest between groups. According to this proposition, we expect that the successful cases of our study reveals an adaptation of strategies, while the less successful cases included in the study illuminate an inability and unwillingness of the political leadership to leave the established practices.

*Proposition three: The informal dialogue with grassroots during nationhood is not turned into an established practice of communication with civil society during statehood.*

The road to democracy might become more or less successful depending on whether the leadership succeeds or fails to uphold a connection with the grassroots-movement, also during the societal transformation towards statehood. According

to this proposition, we expect that the successful cases of our study reveals an upheld and perhaps even strengthened communication between the political leadership and the civil society, while the less successful cases illustrate inability and unwillingness among the political leadership to communicate with “the people” after mobilizing of the nation has succeeded.

### Design and Research Method

The cases are selected due to the variation on the dependent variable. The empirical investigation addresses six main cases of comparison; Israel and Palestine/PA, India and Pakistan, as well as Cape Verde and Angola. The cases are selected with reference to the Freedom House ranking with regard to their “democratic” attributes.<sup>1</sup> The Palestinian, Pakistani and Angolan democratic failure took place early on in the process from nationhood to statehood, in each case within a few years after independence.<sup>2</sup> In comparison to Palestine, Pakistan and Angola, the Israeli, Indian and Cape Verdian route towards democracy can be considered more successful, although with the exceptions of a few side steps on the road.

The study treats political leadership as an independent variable. To be able to test the theoretical suggestion above there is a necessity for an active and involved political leadership, both in the period of nationhood as well as during the period of statehood. Furthermore, in a number of these cases, the current political leadership has strong ties to, and to a large ex-

tent still includes, the same political leadership as during the nationhood period. The study emphasizes the question of leadership in the cross-road between nationhood and statehood. Therefore, we acknowledge the importance of not only to study newly democratized countries (such as Eastern European countries). Instead, the choice of cases gives us the possibility to trace the process back in time, to pin-point the set-backs on the road, as well as the decisions to get back on track, and hence focus on the leaderships’ values and strategies during various periods and shifts in time.

The tests will be conducted as a process-tracing. The study is theory-driven in the sense that beforehand formulated indicators for each proposition is searched for empirically and, hence, functions as conditions of inference. However, it is important to note that the dependent variable is treated from the perspective of democratization as a process. Therefore, in the study, beforehand formulated criteria are defined to identify phases and periods of shifts in the process of democratization in each of the cases. This is considered an important prerequisite to conduct a focused process-tracing. Thus, the transition from non-democracy to democracy, are not looked upon in static terms, but as a continuous process.

The methodological approach is comparative in the sense that the same model and propositions will be applied on the countries involved, which is not to say that the phenomenon under study is caused by the same factors or that the factors have the same weight in all countries. Rather the model allows for the emphasis on different factors as the most important in different countries.

The empirical study will combine qualitative and quantitative data. The former

1 See [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)

2 Or in the Palestinian case after the Oslo-agreement, return of the PLO leadership and first election in the West Bank/Gaza.

consists of documents and statements, party manifestos as well as other type of manifestos from political movements and organizations, and interviews with leading political figures in former and current political movements and parties. The quantitative data consist of existing databases (in four of the cases) with survey data on elite and grassroots level.<sup>1</sup> If needed a smaller inquiry in the two remaining cases will complement these data. The applicants' language skills (in a number of regional languages), as well as an in-depth knowledge of the local societies and politics under investigation, are considered as important to the case study approach.

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