Political Creativity

by

Brett V. Kubicke

B.A. Political Science
The University of British Columbia, 1994

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE
AT THE
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

JUNE 2004

© 2004 Brett V. Kubicke. All rights reserved.

The author hereby grants to MIT permission to reproduce
and to distribute publicly paper and electronic copies
of this thesis document in whole or in part.

Signature of Author: ________________________________

Department of Political Science
April 30, 2004

Certified by: ________________________________

Richard J. Samuels
Ford International Professor of Political Science

Accepted by: ________________________________

Stephen Ansolabehere
Professor of Political Science
Chairman, Graduate Program Committee
Political Creativity

by

Brett V. Kubicek

Submitted to the Department of Political Science
on April 30, 2004 in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

ABSTRACT

This thesis is about political change and the possibilities for politically creative
individuals to achieve desired change. To identify such possibilities, I argue that we
should employ a catalog of analytical tools from the social, psychological and cognitive
sciences, organized in three sets. One covers social dynamics, the social mechanisms
behind stability and change, either sudden or incremental; the second captures ordinary
differences among group members in how they understand conditions, react to events,
and connect to others; and the third set deals with extraordinary differences in mindsets
and aptitudes which may enable individuals to exert considerable influence on conditions.

A fundamental problem is the difficulty of separating the impact of individual action
(agency) from effects of social conditions and trends (structure), given that political
events involve interaction of the two. My solution is to focus on projects for political
change, which are long-term endeavors that go against prevailing conditions and
conventional ideas, and which focus upon changing one broad element of the political
landscape (such as to restructure inter-group relations, to empower a previously weak
constituency, to change certain status quo ideas and practices, or to reshape particular
institutions of government). Such long-term work by specific actors facilitates analysis
of whether they (and people in similar positions) face extraordinary problems, and
whether extraordinary differences are necessary to bring creative political change.

The first half of this thesis builds the three toolsets and an approach for applying them to
considerations of political creativity. The second half supports this theory building by
demonstrating that the tools and approach are useful and feasible, through applications to
several studies of efforts at political change, which achieved varying levels of success.
Overall, the idea is to coordinate findings about the dynamics of social conditions and
about individual characteristics, to better understand possibilities for political creativity.

Thesis Supervisor: Richard J. Samuels

Title: Ford International Professor of Political Science
Table of Contents

List of Tables 9

Preface. Problems of concept and method for the study of individuals’ impact on social events 11

Missing tools to investigate leadership 11
Interactions of agency and structure, and problems for studying political action 14
Types of intentional and effective agency: bracketed, mystical, controlled 18
Acknowledgments 22

Chapter One. Introduction: Locating political creativity 26

Linking individual and social in the study of political change 26
Cataloging analytical tools 27
The 3TSA and controlled agency: considering problems and projects 32
Case studies 34
Conclusion 39

Chapter Two. Opening the catalog: orthodox social dynamics of stability and change 41

Causal mechanisms and social dynamics of stability 44
   Self-reinforcing dynamics 47
   Status quo bias 48
   Convention 49
Microfoundations of the orthodox approach 52
Dynamics of change: shock and trend 55
A brief test of the orthodox view: Snyder’s Reconstructing Nations 57
Conclusion 62

Chapter Three. Social dynamics of instability and a revised view of change 65

Social dynamics of instability 67
   Multifaceted social conditions 67
   Societal heterogeneity 70
   Windows of opportunity 72
   Incomplete victories 73
Social dynamics of change revisited 74
   Cascades 75
   Incremental change 77
Chapter One. Introduction

Chapter Two. The Logics of Success: Theories and Evidence

Chapter Three. The Logics of Continuity and Failure: Theories and Evidence

Chapter Four. Ordinary differences, personal and interpersonal

Chapter Five. Extraordinary differences versus extraordinary problems, in projects of political creativity

Chapter Six. A demonstration of the three-toolset approach: the Italian antimafia campaign
Chapter Seven. Locating extraordinary differences amid trends: the abolition of the British slave trade

Short history

Orthodox explanations for stasis and change
  Dynamics of stability
  Shocks and trends

Dynamics of instability
  Multifaceted social conditions
  Societal heterogeneity
  Windows of opportunity
  Incomplete victories
  Incremental change, cascade, and continuity

Ordinary differences

Extraordinary differences
  Mindset
  Aptitude

Conclusion

Chapter Eight. Locating political creativity in the Chinese village council elections project

Short history

Orthodox explanation of stasis and change
  Social dynamics of stability
  Shocks and trends

Dynamics of instability
  Multifaceted social conditions
  Societal heterogeneity
  Windows of opportunity
  Incomplete victories
  Incremental change and cascade

Ordinary differences

Extraordinary differences
  Mindset
  Aptitude

Conclusion

Chapter Nine. Applying the 3TSA to cases of failure: political reform in Iran
List of Tables

Table 2.1 A toolset of “orthodox” social dynamics and individual characteristics 64

Table 3.1 A revised toolset of social dynamics 84

Table 4.1 Microfoundations revisited: a toolset of ordinary differences 99

Table 5.1. Summary of the three toolsets for analyzing political events 115

Table 5.2 Potential politically relevant mindsets 116

Table 5.3 Potential politically relevant aptitudes 117
Preface
Problems of concept and method for the study of individuals’ impact on social events

Missing tools to investigate leadership
The historical record includes many individuals bent on changing political conditions, who have ideas about how order should be changed, and motivation to do something about it. In recent times, we could note Spain’s Baltasar Garzon, an investigating judge who “tracks Colombian drug lords and Arab gun-runners, breaks up Basque terrorist units, pursues murderous Latin American brasshats [i.e. Augusto Pinochet], [and] scrutinises Silvio Berlusconi’s involvement in the Spanish media.”¹ While critics focus on his “megalomania,” other observers argue that he has shifted perceptions about what is possible and desirable in combating violence by Basque separatists, and in the use of international law. Regarding the latter, some portray Eleanor Roosevelt’s role in the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an example of an individual having disproportionate impact on changing conceptions of the desirable and possible; and some give Carla Del Ponte praise for her role in establishing procedures to prosecute large-scale violations of human rights.²

Such leaders, as we often call them, receive much attention in the press and in historical scholarship, and it is not as if social scientists ignore them. Some who focus on how constraints powerfully shape behavior note that in certain circumstances, individuals

¹ The Economist (June 2, 2001: 54).
can be a decisive influence on outcomes when constraints have broken down.\(^3\) For example, there is a "voluntaristic" approach to the study of regime change that emphasizes "immediate, short-term processes, choices, and political crafting," though these elements are confined to a small set of political phenomena (regime change).\(^4\) Still, if we look to a broader field of study, such as that of the nature and role of institutions in general, we can find analysts who note that long-term repercussions may follow from "contingencies," such as unique events or specific decisions.\(^5\)

Nevertheless, as far as deriving generalizations about how people matter, these studies do not go much beyond saying that they do, and then showing how social dynamics take over. Furthermore, even those social scientists that do incorporate psychology often do so to understand why some options are selected over others, especially when these options are suboptimal.\(^6\) These scholars, in short, do not consider much the role of individuals in shaping the options in the first place; they do not explore how specific people may be able to control political events. Instead, the concern is to show how options are presented and favored by context. Where there is discussion of the individual level, authors show why actors chose one option instead of another, based on reasoning about how people behave in general.\(^7\)

\(^3\) See, e.g., Tsebelis (1990).
\(^4\) Mahoney and Snyder (1999: 5).
\(^5\) See reviews in Immergut (1998) and Lieberman (2002).
\(^6\) Two examples of this approach are those in International Relations who consider "misperception" (e.g. Jervis 1976, Khong 1992), and those in the behavioral wing of Economics who, for example, try to determine why consumers and investors do not behave as "rationally" as many economic models presume (e.g. Camerer 2003).
\(^7\) Examples would include the "analytical narratives" literature specifically, or rational choice in general; much work in International Relations; many forms of "institutionalism"; and macro-historical analysis. Relevant examples and reviews include Katzenstein (1997), Lichbach and Zuckerman (1997), Luebbert
Excluding a detailed consideration of how specific individuals might “lead”
political events is not in and of itself a problem – for some questions, such as about social
patterns over the course of centuries, it can be unwise to dwell much on the traits and
roles of specific people. A problem does arise, however, when we take an interest in
generalities about how people might shape social conditions in the first place, we find
ourselves lacking resources to guide analysis – and by “we” I mean especially those of us
trained in social science disciplines like contemporary political science. Note Aminzade,
Goldstone and Perry on the subject of revolutionary leaders and social movements:

That some individuals swim against the tides of history – and manage moreover
to convince millions of converts to follow in their wake – calls for a closer look at
the roots of rebel leadership. Why are some individuals self-confident enough to
defy “objective” circumstances in a seemingly irrational bid to satisfy their
political imaginations whereas others adopt a more risk averse approach?
Common sense suggests that the answer must lie in part in the psychological
makeup of the rebel leader him/herself. But social science offers few clues on
how to follow up on this common-sense proposition. Political psychology, once a
staple ingredient in theories of revolutionary movements, has fallen from
scholarly grace. The amateurish manner in which psychological studies of
revolutionary leaders were often conducted may have rightfully condemned them
to the dustbin of theory, yet the result is that we find ourselves largely bereft of

conceputal tools for probing one of the most fascinating issues surrounding social
movements.\textsuperscript{8}

The authors mention examples such as the changes wrought by the Chinese Communist
Party under Mao, and the by Tanganyikan independence movement. But they extend
claims about inadequacies of social science to the study of non-routine contentious
politics in general.\textsuperscript{9} Others hold similar concerns, even for routine politics. Samuels
encounters a similar problem of missing “conceputal tools” in his study of “leaders and
their legacies” in Italy and Japan. While he examines the roles of leaders in moments of
great change, he is also concerned to see how in the calmer moments in between, the
activities of well-placed individuals can have consequence for politics, economy, and
society. And he too finds the available analytical toolkit lacking. For him, social science
treatments of personality, culture, structure, power, and utility are insufficient: “We know
too much about constraints and not enough about choices.”\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Interactions of agency and structure, and problems for studying political action}

The reference to Samuels is not a random one, as this dissertation originates from
working for him on one particular challenge facing his study. This challenge was to
bring leadership back into political science, to address the concern of Aminzade et al in a
sense, but while retaining a systematic perspective. In other words, the challenge was to

\textsuperscript{8} Aminzade, Goldstone, and Perry (2001: 135), emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{9} Tarrow (2001: 7) explains the usage of the phrase “contentious politics” by all the authors in the
Aminzade et al (2001) volume: “The contentious politics that interests us is episodic rather than routine;
occurs in the interactions between makers of claims and their opponents; affects or potentially affects the
interests of at least one of the claimants; and brings government in as a mediator, target, or claimant.”
Since my interest includes how the non-routine comes out of, and is at least partially caused by, the routine,
I do not borrow their usage. Here, even the routine is contentious.
\textsuperscript{10} Samuels (2003: x). See his first chapter for a critique
combine case-specific stories of leadership with de-contextualized generalizations of social science. That the project was about Italy and Japan made the challenge both easier and more difficult: easier because the universe of outcomes and events to be explained was bounded from the outset; yet more difficult because the cases dictated what elements of leadership could be considered. While important figures populate the histories of both countries, figures whose careers are relevant for thinking about the nature of politics, it was not clear that these cases were going to be ideal for developing systematic theory about leadership. The fact that many important events have happened in similar ways at similar times in the two countries suggests that the best explanation for the outcomes is a sharing of similar conditions, not the roles of any particular individuals.

In the end, this problem of too much similarity proved to be an advantage, as it provided some of the benefits of a "most difficult" design for case study research.\textsuperscript{11} Because it was a case where you might not expect to find much to say about leadership, the findings – of important differences in social processes connected to the roles of leaders and their legacies – proved more useful. Nevertheless, the priority of the book was more about explaining particular events and finding the roles played by centrally placed individuals, and less about generating theory about leadership. Theory generation was important, to be sure. But in the end, in the balance struck between induction and deduction, the former had pride of place.

But what could we do if we started without any particular cases in mind? What if, instead, we began with the goal of developing theory and method to improve our \textit{ability} 

\textsuperscript{11} See George and Bennett (forthcoming).
to study (and therefore understand) how individuals might be able to reshape the political landscape? These questions provided the initial basis for this dissertation. Further, from the outset there was a sense that social science, and especially political science, had swung too far from leadership studies and psychology since their height in the 1950s and 60s. So a spur for this project has been my understanding of the social science, and the use of psychology in it, that dissuades from a concern with leadership.

Of interest has been how commonly used assumptions about the nature of social conditions, and about the nature of human psychology and cognition, lead some social scientists to expect little from political leaders with respect to controlled change – especially with respect to social issues with involve much scale and duration. Instead, the view is to expect the role of leaders to be redundant: conditions are such that events would have proceeded similarly absent their presence. Great forces, such as demographic change or economic crisis or the relative standing of major interest groups, can produce great pressure towards certain kinds of political outcomes, regardless of who are in positions of leadership. Another view, though, is to expect the effects of leaders’ actions to be unintended: certain individuals at certain times may be important to certain outcomes, but social processes are too complex for them to have significant control. So even when outcomes mesh with intentions of conspicuous individuals, it is a question of luck, not pluck.

---

12 Note Abbott (2001) on patterns in how academic disciplines in the social sciences and humanities swing from one stance to another, go too far, and then swing back the other way.
15 See Jervis (1997), and Ostrom (2002).
But how is it, exactly, that we determine that outcomes are owing to fortune and not virtue?\textsuperscript{16} This question ties in with a long history of work on the possible ways that social conditions – *structure* – or the contributions of individual actions – *agency* – generate the socio-political world that we see, and with the debate on whether it is one or the other.\textsuperscript{17} At present, there is a relative consensus among social theorists that it is the *interaction* of structure and agency, not one or the other, that produces the world we see, and so I take this stance on the debate as a point of departure.\textsuperscript{18}

In a sense, we have arrived at the same place that biology has with respect to the influence of environment versus genetics, as the growing consensus is that it is *both* nature and nurture.\textsuperscript{19} But the idea of “interaction” may pose more problems than it solves, in part because the word is so vague. At minimum, analysis is simpler if it can be limited to one side or the other. Moreover, joining agency and structure is no simple sum of adding one to the other, but is instead about understanding how they influence each other. For applying this social theory to political events, then, the trick is in how to formulate this idea of interaction in such a way that it can be usefully applied in case study analysis.\textsuperscript{20} When trying to study interaction effects, it can be difficult to see how to determine what kind of empirical indicators we need to look for, so as to determine what kind of interaction, if any, is present in a particular case.

\textsuperscript{16} The fortune versus virtue dichotomy is a nod to Machiavelli’s (1985) seminal observations on this topic in general, and his *fortuna* versus *virtu* dichotomy in particular.
\textsuperscript{17} The purpose of this dissertation is not to provide an extensive tour of the agency/structure debate, and the great names in the history of the social sciences and humanities who have taken positions in this debate – though I will occasionally make references to the debate and a few notable authors where useful.
\textsuperscript{19} See Ridley (2003) for a view that it is nature *via* nurture.
\textsuperscript{20} For more on this point, see van den Berg (1998).
The problem of discerning the interplay of structure and agency is, in a sense, the problem that Samuels faced, in trying to incorporate leadership with systematic generalizations about the social. A key element of his solution is the concept of *legacies*, how certain individuals develop models of action that are sometimes borrowed by future leaders. The actions of specific individuals at one time, then, shape the set of possibilities at another. The concept of legacies may seem intuitive, but to derive that particular means to integrate structure and agency was no simple matter given available social science – given commonly taught methods of analysis and models of the social world.\(^{21}\) The frustration at that difficulty was an impetus behind my own work, so a goal of this dissertation is to forge the “conceptual tools” that Aminzade et al discuss – to build an analytical approach that allows us to consider both agency and structure, and determine the nature of their interaction in particular cases.

**Types of intentional and effective agency: bracketed, mystical, controlled**

The difficulty in building an analytical approach that captures both agency and structure is not just a matter of getting at the interaction element. It is also that existing social science is so much more about structure than it is about agency.\(^{22}\) Or, even where we do consider individuals who have more influence on social conditions than implied by either redundant or unintended agency, there may still be strong limits inherent in the concepts we use. These limits can be on what we expect of the individuals studied, or on

\(^{21}\) I revisit this issue of training in Chapter 10.

\(^{22}\) On this issue, note Greenstein’s (1987) discussion of the limited presence of psychology in social science analyses of politics. We can also note how contemporary handbooks of social science disciplines, like Goodin and Klingemann (1996), have little or no mention of leadership.
what we expect to be able to say about them. On the one hand, there is what we could call *bracketed agency*. While there is an assumption that individuals can have intended, and non-redundant impact on the social environment, the concept involves assumed limits on the *scale and duration* of that impact.  

23 This kind of agency is “bracketed,” so to speak, as to moments of upheaval like regime change or political crisis.  

24 Here there is a combination of structure and agency, but it seems less an integration and more an ordering of events: there is structure, a break in structure, some agency, then structure again.

On the other hand, there is what we could call *mystical agency*. Here the assumption would be that certain individuals can have intended, non-redundant impact on social conditions, at a grand scale, and over a long duration. The limit this time is in what we can say, as social scientists, about such individuals. Their talents are so unique – their charisma, for example, is so abnormally captivating – that while admiring their feats of social control, we cannot learn much about what is possible in other circumstances, for the very reason that *mystical agency* is so unique.

While both bracketed and mystical agency are useful concepts, especially for thinking about the limits on human action and the ability to study it, my goal is to push further – to build a concept of *controlled agency*, and to develop means to locate any that might exist. The challenge is to imagine possibilities for individuals to have intentional

---

23 O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 5), for example, argue that there is room for some intended agency in processes of democratization, but that the chaos and complexity of such processes are especially important to outcomes.

24 See literatures reviewed in Mahoney and Snyder (1999).
and non-redundant impact on social conditions, at a large scale, and over a long duration; and to imagine those possibilities in clear, generalizable ways, such that we can take them with us when considering the possible in case studies of interest. Most of the analytical approaches that I come across take something akin to a bracketed, redundant, or unintended view of agency, and I find this too be artificially limited. As such, much of this project is about finding ways to expand that view of agency.

Nonetheless, while pushing at the boundaries of concepts about agency, my work is still about how the behavior of individuals interacts with social conditions. This focus on interaction is one reason the word "leadership" seldom appears in this dissertation. My research is meant to inform our understanding of leadership, to be sure, but it is, more accurately, about clarifying the interaction of structure and agency, and the need for "conceptual tools" to make sense of that interaction. Another way to think of my goal is as finding a place in social science for considerations like the nature and effects of leadership. Moreover, I agree with Wildavsky that the word "leadership" is itself a problem, being weighed down by the unwieldy number of common uses of the term.²⁵ Developing concepts like controlled agency and political creativity, I hope, allow me to keep my intentions clear, as both phrases are used relatively rarely in social science, and so come with less baggage.

To be clear, controlled agency is a strong concept, and a step beyond claims by some advocates of incorporating more agency into social analysis.²⁶ But it is a

---

²⁵ See Wildavsky (1989).
²⁶ A commonly cited example of such an agency advocate is Joas (1996).
theoretical idea, and an “ideal type” one at that. Even where specific individuals may
have significant control over specific political events, it will not be absolute – there will
be some unintended consequences, and there will be at least a few others who would have
done much the same if put in the same position. That is, in any particular case there may
be a combination of redundant, unintended, and controlled agency. Furthermore, there
will always be some “bracketing” of agency, some limiting of scale and duration. And
there may be flashes of personality and artistry which are not well captured in a social
science framework, and so better left as “mystical.”

All that said, I am interested in how much control is possible. Since social
scientists often take agency more as redundant and/or unintended, or at least as tightly
bracketed in scale and duration, it is useful to start from an ideal type category of
controlled agency. If we are able to find evidence that fits with this category and not with
redundant or unintended or bracketed agency, and evidence that can be captured
systematically enough to avoid the label of “mystical,” then this is a way to challenge
common usage of structure and agency. The particular kind of controlled agency I have
in mind is political creativity, which encompasses long-term efforts to change one broad
element of the political landscape, contrary to prevailing conditions and conventional
ideas of the desirable and possible. This dissertation, then, is about how to make room
for the study of political creativity in social science, by building an analytical approach
that integrates structure and agency. We require both more in the way of “conceptual
tools,” and in methods to use them.
Acknowledgements

While the work to pull together my ideas and research and shape them into the present form was often a solitary affair, we are social beings after all, and there are many times when we need the attention and touch of others to get us through. I owe my family and so many friends and colleagues so much for having played precisely this role of support and encouragement. And while I had planned to avoid writing out a long list of names to thank, I am right now too acutely aware of how important everyone else has been to do otherwise. I will miss many who deserve mention here, especially as this is the last piece of writing left to do, and my supply of energy is at an ebb. Nevertheless, an incomplete list seems better than none at all, so here we go.

At MIT, the members of my thesis committee have all proven to be perfect scholars and gentlemen. Dick Samuels gave me the opportunity to be here, to begin with, and once I arrived, he invited me to work on a remarkable project (his Machiavelli’s Children book), and gave me room and responsibility to think big, which eventually spawned my own work on political creativity. I do not believe there are many faculty who would have allowed, let alone encouraged, a project like this thesis, and so I am deeply grateful to have had Dick on my side. Josh Cohen added much to my development by pushing me to think harder, by encouraging me to take risks, by teaching me how to teach, and by adding useful perspective to problems of analysis, and of society, for that matter. Fred Schaffer provided some of the best training I have received as an academic, by opening my eyes to different ways of thinking about politics, and insisting on an uncommonly profound degree of rigor with use of concepts and logic.
The administrative staff of the MIT Political Science Department regularly provided a welcome human touch. For their many kindnesses I am grateful to Anne Carbone, Pam Clements, Ken Goldsmith, Paula Kreutzer, Grace Mitchell, Eva Nagy, Helen Ray, Janet Sahlstrom, Alison Salisbury, Laurie Scheffler, Scott Schnyer, Santina Tonelli, Susan Twarog, Jeanne Washington, Tobie Weiner, and Monica Wolf. There were also a number of professors who while not on my committee nevertheless went out of their way for me, especially Kanchan Chandra, Dan Kryder and Stuart White. The staff members at Dewey Library were also wonderful, so thanks in particular to Robin Baltimore, Mary Ellen Carter, Dan Eppelsheimer, Catherine Freidman, Julia Lanigan, Irene Mazor, Corrine Williams, and Oliver Zeff.

I owe a special thank you to my fellow grad students who provided a crucial support network in a (sometimes) trying environment. For their help, I am grateful to David Art, Danny Breznitz, Christiane Collins, Natalia Comella, Peter Evans, Doug Fuller, Rachel Gisselquist, Kelly Greenhill, Michal Ben-Josef Hirsch, Wenkai He, Yinan He, Yusaku Horiuchi, Kevin Karty, Loren King, Alan Kuperman, Julie Lorinc, John Madden, Peter Madden, Maurizio Maturo, Sara Jane McCaffrey, Dan Metz, Steve Millman, Dan Munro, Priya Natarajan, Jerry Palazzolo, Pablo Policzer, Bela Prasad, Jeremy Pressman, Karen Rothkin, Apichai Shipper, Alex Snoeren, Zak Taylor, Frank Tipton, Chris Twomey, Jessica Wattman, Trudy Wilcox, Amos Zhehavi, and J.B. Zimmerman. There is also a group of peers and dear friends who again and again were ready with a sympathetic ear, a kick in the pants, or simply delightful company whenever
I wanted or needed any such things. So I am in deep debt to Andrea Gabbitas, Jiyoung Kim, Matthew Marjanovic, Jess Piombo, Jas Sekhon, Drew Tagliabue, and Jonathan Wand. And then there is Shigeo Hirano: one simply could not ask for a more genuine, caring fellow traveler. In a sense, he is the quantitative social science Felix to my qualitative Oscar, yet we never would have inspired a Neil Simon – we get along too well to be a proper Odd Couple.

My becoming an academic began at the University of British Columbia, mostly under the tutelage of the faculty in the Political Science and History departments. For their work in laying some key foundations for this work, I thank Pete Chamberlain, David Elkins, Dick Johnston, Diana Lary, Diane Mauzy, Bill Wray, John Wood, and Alex Woodside. Crucial was my two years in the Political Science Honours program at UBC, among a remarkable group of students who taught me how to be both critical and supportive, how to drive one other on while keeping a sense of humor. I am fortunate to have been part of such a wonderful program with such outstanding people.

My community of friends certainly goes beyond political science, in Boston, Vancouver, Tokyo and elsewhere, and here there are simply too many to name them all individually here, even though so many of you have been there for me – especially when I kept having to say “one more year to go … at least.” A quick survey of the families with one or more members I hold dear include the clans of Baig, Bennett, Boggess, Booth, Chambers, Couelle, Cronin, Daughtrey, Doan, Dooling, Grzesinski, Guise, Harris, Helliwell, Inoue, Johnson, Jordan, Kamikura, Kondo, Kuga, Lee, Leslie, Li, Matheson,
Matsuoka, Peek, Sandor, Seguin, Takatori, Tyan, Unger, Willard, Yeung, and Yook. I do, though, want to specifically thank Doug and Sharon Kubicek for making sure I got out of Boston from time to time, and for re-energizing me with their care and hospitality. And I want to thank Ana Yook, who stuck with me, a grad student obsessed with and tied up in knots by his work, for over two years now. Her generosity and patience amaze me, and I am profoundly fortunate to have her as a partner, especially given the trials involved with the final stages of writing.

I am also fortunate to have the parents that I do. It seems unfair that so many other grad students I know do not have the kind of support that I have from my mother and father. With respect to physical and mental wellbeing, it is hard to match Mila for her honest depth of concern and for her brilliance in guidance and succor. And as for the writing of this thesis, I find it hard to imagine completing it without Bob. The role he played as sounding board, as critic, as someone with experience in this game who could calm me down when I got fed up with it, was indispensable. Together, they are outstanding teachers of decency and humanity, and I am still learning from them.
Chapter One
Introduction: Locating political creativity

Linking individual and social in the study of political change

This thesis is about how to study political change and the possible roles of politically creative individuals in achieving such change. It is written in context of social science that shows how conditions constrain or overwhelm initiatives to reshape the political landscape; and of social psychology that shows how human traits restrict or corrupt people’s ability to manage complex social issues. But this thesis is also written in mind of the fact that efforts at extensive political change are common, and that some are surprisingly successful. The efforts at creativity I have in mind are long-term projects to change one broad element of the political landscape, contrary to prevailing conditions and conventional ideas of the desirable and possible. And the question I seek to answer is how the capabilities of people involved affect the chances of success, given the challenges presented by social dynamics and human characteristics. But since we lack appropriate “conceptual tools,” I take a step back: the more precise concern of this thesis is how to study the ways in which specific traits could shape the politically possible.

Some examples of efforts at creative change, touched on in this dissertation, are where individuals spend careers working to abolish trade in slaves, or restructure inter-group relations, or dismantle organized crime, or construct institutions of representative government, or empower a previously weak constituency, or reshape certain conventional ideas and practices that underpin the status quo. Although the impact of these initiatives will depend on a range of social factors, a necessary element will also be characteristics
of people: those working to change the status quo or to defend it, along with those in the general population reacting in some way, or not at all, to their efforts. To understand controlled political change and possibilities for it, we need analytical tools to dig for effects of social conditions and individual characteristics, and their interaction. But common analytical approaches are not geared to linking social and individual over questions of political creativity. We are particularly lacking in means to consider effects of differences within social groups. That is, we are short on systematic ways to consider what it means for the politically possible that all Sicilian businessmen, all Polish nationalists, all reform-minded Iranian clerics, all British conservative aristocrats, all Chinese bureaucrats do not think the same way about social conditions, and are not equally capable of translating preferences into effective action. Moreover, we are short on systematic ways to consider how those individual differences may affect the politically possible.

My overall goal, in short, is to build an analytical approach which allows us to coordinate findings about the dynamics of social conditions and individual characteristics, to enable the study of questions like locating possibilities for political creativity.

**Cataloging analytical tools**

So what do we need to develop the concept of political creativity? Recall, from the Preface, Aminzade et al’s response to a similar question about how to understand rebel leadership: “Common sense suggests that the answer must lie in part in the

27
psychological makeup of the rebel leader him/herself.’’\textsuperscript{1} But noting psychological
makeup does not get us far if we do not have a clear sense of \textit{how} particular traits can be
brought to bear on particular social dynamics. That is, we need to grasp the natures and
interplay of both social conditions and individual behavior, the \textit{interaction} of structure
and agency. So to develop the concept of political creativity – a kind of controlled
agency – we need a way to capture that interaction. In this sense, I suggest a somewhat
different tack from Aminzade et al, who ask, “\textit{Why} are some individuals self-confident
enough to defy “objective” circumstances in a seemingly irrational bid to satisfy their
political imaginations whereas others adopt a more risk averse approach?”\textsuperscript{2} Instead, a
more useful question is to ask if – and if so \textit{how} – facts like the one that some individuals
are “seemingly irrational” in their drive to “satisfy their political imaginations” is
\textit{politically relevant}. Can such traits, for example, affect the shape of social processes,
and enable a disproportionate degree of control over political events?

A prerequisite for considering the political relevance of individual traits, then, is
an extensive knowledge of social processes where they might be relevant. Here a useful
demonstration of such knowledge is Lichbach (1995), who discusses many kinds of
collective action problems, and ways in which these can be overcome, and so result in
social change. Further, he notes that some of the solutions to collective action problems
may rely, in part, on traits of particular leaders. But he does not go very far in
considering whether there are more characteristics of people that we should know about –
as social scientists – to understand possibilities for significant change to a political

\textsuperscript{1} Aminzade, Goldstone, and Perry (2001: 135).
\textsuperscript{2} Aminzade, Goldstone, and Perry (2001: 135), emphasis added.
system. He catalogs collective action problems and solutions, but not the kind
"conceptual tools" regarding psychological factors that interest Aminzade et al. To get at
the interaction of structure and agency, then, a possible strategy is to build a catalog that
includes both social processes and individual traits, that captures the concerns of both
Lichbach and Aminzade et al.

Yet lumping the social and the individual together may do little good, given the
need to consider their interaction. The difficulty of capturing such interaction suggests
that one or two "conceptual tools" will be insufficient for the job of distinguishing
relevant aspects of empirical case studies. Better would be a general analytical
framework to guide the application of those tools. As such, when referring to elements of
theory, I will often speak of analytical tools to indicate that not only do I seek more and
better concepts, but a way to organize them that aids in analysis of interaction. The hope,
then, is to provide analytical leverage for questions such as the locating of political
creativity.

What I have in mind with analytical tools is the view of some scholars that a
primary task of social science is to amass a catalog of social dynamics and related
characteristics of people and their environment. Given the goal of organizing the tools,
though, effort is also needed in the cataloging, in the way in which dynamics and
characteristics are gathered and stored. We may lack appropriate "conceptual tools"
because they are unavailable but also because even when available, they may be difficult
to find. And they may be difficult to find because we would never think to look for them.

---

3 See Sorensen (1998), and other essays in Hedström and Swedberg (1998a).
By specializing in a particular approach to studying a particular phenomenon (such as using aggregate quantitative data to study consumer behavior), we tend to gather a limited set of analytical tools with systematic omissions. Having a way, or ways, to categorize broad swaths of social and psychological sciences could make it easier to locate useful analytical tools, but also know (at least roughly) what other kinds of material is available.

So, when I speak of analytical tools, I mean these catalog elements – social dynamics and related characteristics of people and their environment – and especially how we use those elements to make sense of events. In tracing through the history of a case, analytical tools provide ways to judge events. These elements, for example, serve as guides for detecting patterns, selecting indicators, judging relevance (of events, aspects of the social environment, etc.), and even for justifying boundaries for our case studies (why a specific time period, why certain groups and events). An example of an analytical tool would be Samuels’ concept of legacies, mentioned in the Preface, where certain individuals develop models of action that are sometimes borrowed by others in the future. Legacies can matter in how people use historical events to justify political action, or how they run an election campaign, or how they disable political opponents. The actions of specific individuals at one time can shape the possibilities at another.

Having the notion of legacies provides an analytical tool for trying to make sense of historical events, for guiding our study of such events. The concept helps us as we try

---

4 See Schelling (1998), for example, about how having knowledge of patterns of behavior aids social analysis.
to think about why certain strategies were chosen, or what other strategies might have been effective, or why certain patterns in politics tend to recur in some places and perhaps not in others, and so on. But legacies will not occur in a vacuum, and we need guidance in what social dynamics and patterns of behavior to be on the lookout for.

To enable such an assessment of the social and individual, I assemble a catalog of analytical tools from the social, psychological, and cognitive sciences. My system of cataloging the tools, in basic terms, involves placing them into three general toolsets, which can be labeled a three-toolset approach – 3TSA for short. One set pertains to social dynamics, which covers the broad mechanisms behind stability and change, including group-level processes which rely on shared traits. A second set is used to investigate the nature and effects of diversity among group members regarding how they understand conditions, react to events, and connect to others, referred to here as ordinary differences. A third set, of extraordinary differences, covers mindsets and aptitudes which may enable individuals to exert considerable influence on conditions, despite the difficulties for intentional and effective action generated by the constraints and opportunities covered by the first two sets.

The focus on ordinary differences is meant to complement much useful work based on “psychological laws” about individual similarities, with extraordinary differences similarly connected to research about human biases and limits. But neither contribution is intended to serve only as an add-on to existing social science. Each set of analytical tools – social dynamics, ordinary differences, and extraordinary ones – is
meant to inform the development of the other. Our understanding of social dynamics, and related similarities in how people are social and human beings, should inform consideration of what individual differences matter and how. But insight into differences should, in return, inform how we think about social dynamics and individual similarities. The interaction of the three sets, in other words, implies a logic to the structure of the 3TSA. Moreover, as will be evident in Chapters 2 through 5, there is an order of progression, starting from commonly used social science and related psychology, and building on such foundations by addressing gaps and weaknesses. The order of development and interwoven structure of the three sets are reasons why the 3TSA is not just a catalog but a method of cataloging social dynamics and related characteristics of people and their environment

The 3TSA and controlled agency: considering problems and projects

In tracing through the history of a case, then, the 3TSA supplies and guides the use of analytical tools to judge events. But how do we determine what kind of agency is in play, if any? How do we know political creativity when we see it, and avoid mistaking it for some other kind of agency? I have two interrelated strategies for locating political creativity. One is already suggested by the way in which the 3 TSA is developed. The sets for social dynamics and ordinary differences can help us develop a picture of the kinds of problems facing anyone with specific reform goals in a particular context. Research about extraordinary differences, in turn, can help us develop ideas about individual traits that are potentially relevant for solving such problems. To detect whether political creativity might be at play in a particular case, then, we would expect to
see certain traits and activities involved with solutions – or absence of the same in failures – to solve the problems. If, on the other hand, we do not see extraordinary differences, and yet problems get “solved” all the same, then there is some reason to believe that this is not a case of political creativity.

There is still, however, the issue of luck versus pluck. It could be coincidence or good fortune, not virtuosity, that individuals with extraordinary traits, performing extraordinary actions, are connected with a particular outcome. Recall, furthermore, that controlled agency and political creativity, both, demand attention to *scale and duration*. A single event, no matter the scale, does not fit this definition. To the extent we think about political change as a sudden change, we may artificially limit our view to bracketed agency, the idea that individuals can contribute to the shaping of political order, but only during brief moments of rupture in the social structure.

The second strategy to locate political creativity, then, is to look for sources and shapers of change during longer periods of time than we would with a bracketed agency concept. So rather than focus on specific decisions, for example, I advocate the study of long-term *projects* to change one broad element of a particular political system – at least in the early stages of developing concepts and theory about political creativity. A project-based view can encompass how dynamics of stability and change interact with efforts to change politics; how ordinary people respond to efforts at creativity; and how opponents of change mobilize defenses. In this way we can better see whether reformers move in lockstep with changes in social conditions, or whether they work against such
forces, especially given their focus on changing a particular aspect of the political. Looking at projects for creative change, and concentrating on the form and timing of events and outcomes along the way, allows us to bring the interaction of individual and social to the foreground.

Projects aimed at creative change are useful as a case-study subject because as they proceed, certain individual characteristics confront social conditions in a relatively direct and persistent manner. Focusing analysis on sustained attempts to design and engineer creative projects, and on those who spend their careers trying to change a particular broad aspect of politics, allows for extensive "process tracing" of interactions between social and individual.\textsuperscript{5} There is time to look for multiple indicators of whether certain processes are or are not taking place, and thus whether problems in the way of projects for political change are severe enough such that extraordinary differences could be \textit{politically relevant}, in the sense of making solutions to those problems feasible. If we focus only on specific events like an election or a military crisis, or on choices like voting on a piece of legislation, it may be hard to see the effects of trends and conditions. Projects for political creativity, instead, provide the means by which to study politics that encompasses a wider range of detail, regarding both the social and the individual, than is commonly employed.

\textbf{Case studies}

The 3TSA can guide and provide insight into ways in which individual traits \textit{could} contribute to the generation of political stability, instability, and change. But

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{5} For more on process tracing as a case study method see Chapter 5 of this thesis.}
insight into how characteristics do combine requires historical case studies, amenable to investigating how traits interact with social conditions. That is, the theoretical possibility of extraordinary control does not necessarily mean a real possibility, so we need a way to formulate the empirical implications of such theory, and see whether they are present in real cases. Joining the 3TSA to a focus on problems and projects suggests that it is feasible to study political creativity in a context of structure-agency interaction. But this methodological feasibility is also a “theoretical possibility.” The question, in short, is whether the concepts and methods developed in this dissertation are reasonable and practical.

To answer this question of feasibility, then, the second half of this dissertation comprises several case studies, intended to support the theory developed in the first half. The empirical chapters are not formal “tests” of the theory. But they nonetheless play several important “theory building” roles. They are meant to show how an application of the 3TSA would look, especially where there is an interest in controlled agency. Moreover, they are intended to show that political creativity is plausible, that (for example) politically creative individuals can achieve change during stable times, and that therefore political creativity can be reasonably considered a potentially important factor to consider in social analysis. Further, the cases show that the 3TSA is a tractable method to locate political creativity, that it fits with and extends extant scholarship (and so adds value), especially in how it combines different levels of analysis as well as integrating structure and agency.

---

6 On theory testing, see Van Evera (1997).
Over the course of this thesis, I consider five projects for change, which achieved varying levels of success, according to accounts by certain specialists on the countries involved. The first project is one conducted by a group of Polish intellectuals and activists who worked to build cooperative ethno-nationalist relations with eastern neighbors Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine – an “Ostpolitik” project, for short. They began work in exile, while all of the now-independent states were still under what many regarded as stable Soviet rule. But the individuals involved assumed that the Communist regime would eventually collapse, possibly soon, and believed that resulting opportunities for security and prosperity might be lost if certain ethnic problems were not diffused before they could be triggered. In simplified terms, they foresaw potential for violence (similar to what would come in the Balkans), threat of a resurgent Russia, along with opportunity for prosperity through ties with the Western European community. They worked to mitigate the first two, and so protect the last; that is, they worked to prepare. I use this case of a project in Chapter 2 to highlight some limitations of common analytical approaches to political order and change, and also to support the theory presented in Chapters 3 through 5.

The second example of a project is the legal and political effort to fight the Sicilian mafia and its hold on Italian politics and society, beginning in the 1970s and proceeding into the 1990s. According to several accounts, key campaigners believed that with careful, persistent work in multiple spheres of social and political life, they could convince many in state and society to change ideas and practices. But a look at the prevalent conditions and conventions makes this kind of project seem unlikely to occur,
or last long, let alone achieve much success. Recognizing the effects of certain social factors is necessary for understanding events, but relying on that perspective alone looks to leave too much unexplained. So I use this case in Chapter 6 to emphasize the need for analytical tools to make sense of dynamics within groups, and of the roles of individual traits. Because the problems faced by some of the actors in this case are more numerous and acute than in the other cases, I also use this case to suggest what the 3TSA would look like when applied more fully.

A third project considered is the effort to end slavery in the British Empire. The movement gained momentum in the 1770s, obtained legislation outlawing the slave trade in 1806/7, and finally achieved emancipation in the 1830s. Abolitionists struggled for decades against the social and political orders that condoned the trade and use of slaves. Economic returns from the trade and from slave plantation produce were at their peak and growing, and both the state and the economy were firmly under the grip of agricultural and commercial elites, at least into the 1830s, yet abolition, which seemed to fly in the face of these interests, was achieved. I examine this case in Chapter 7, where I note how the case initially seems to fit in with an orthodox approach focusing on social conditions and trends, with little or no place for controlled agency. A closer examination of events, one guided by the 3TSA, suggests that an orthodox approach may miss too much, may fail to explain the form and timing of important outcomes, and may gloss over an important role for agency in driving the political changes needed to get abolition by conservative gatekeepers, and implement it as an effective policy. This case also helps show that the analytical tools can travel to cases in different eras.
A fourth example is the election procedures established for Village Committees in China, a project designed and implemented by a small cadre of reform bureaucrats starting in the early 1980s (proceeding to the present day), from what was initially a weak and resource-poor ministry. According to some accounts, the officials' goal was to make the state more accountable to ordinary people, in face of skepticism and suspicion from within government, as well as from among villagers, and even among foreign observers usually in favor of democratic reform. An important element of the story, though, is fear of rural unrest among Chinese Communist Party leaders, which could be seen as forcing the central government to allow more local autonomy. This case, the focus of Chapter 8, is useful for suggesting how the three toolsets can help adjudicate between competing explanations for a set of events, especially where competing explanations tend to focus either more on structure, or more on agency. At the same time, this case helps show that the 3TSA can provide plausible interpretations regarding different political systems and processes in different geographical regions.

The fifth example is about political reform in Iran, especially about the failures of liberal reformers. This example helps to show that the 3TSA is for more than interpretation of relatively successful projects; it can provide insight into the feasibility of alternatives, and into whether a failed project was doomed all along, or whether one that did not materialize could have. Where change seems unlikely because of conditions, the presence of individual diversity may provide avenues for innovation. Where we see failed projects we should look to conditions, but also to the presence and absence of
characteristics in those involved. The Iran case is also useful for further emphasizing that the concepts are plausibly used in different places and political systems.

**Conclusion**

One way to think about the application of the 3TSA to an empirical case is as a series of steps. We can start off with a search for the social dynamics to get a general idea of the forces in play, then we can check for dynamics within the groups of interest by looking for ordinary differences. Once we have a fuller picture of inter- and intragroup dynamics, we can move to consider what kinds of problems face individuals interested to change (or to stop a process of change in) the political order. With those problems in hand we can then consider the kind of politically relevant traits that could enable political creativity, and check to see if they are present. Noting the absence of such traits can also be useful, as in understanding failures and alternative possibilities. Either way, at least while developing theory about political creativity, it should be more productive to apply the 3TSA in cases resembling long-term projects focused on changing one broad aspect of the social environment, especially where conditions do not favor such a change. That way we should, relatively speaking, be more confident in distinguishing controlled agency from other possible kinds.

A more basic way to increase our confidence, however, is having better analytical tools in the first place. We should, in other words, work to refine the catalog, to improve our ability to discern indicators of when they are present and important (as best we can).

---

7 While I focus upon efforts to change the political order, a way to extend the theory and method developed here is application to projects to prevent change.
There are at least two sides to such improvement: the quality of the catalog elements (analytical tools) themselves, and of our selection and use of them. In developing the 3TSA, Chapters 2 through 5 address both sides. Regarding quality, I follow those who advocate for more consideration of causal mechanisms (in addition to the common concern with causal factors, or "variables") as a way to improve quality, and generate more accurate ways to search for and read indicators. Regarding selection and use of catalog elements, there are tradeoffs involved with any research program, and these should be easier to understand if we have a sense of other available tools. But if our catalog is unwieldy, such awareness may be difficult to achieve. The 3TSA offers a way to organize our catalog (and cataloging) of tools.
Chapter Two
Opening the catalog: orthodox social dynamics of stability and change

In their use of concepts, social scientists do typically include some form of interaction between structure and agency, even if one sided. For example:

[Political structure is] a collection of institutions, rules of behavior, norms, roles, physical arrangements, buildings, and archives that are relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals and relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals. In contrast to theories that assume action is a choice based on individual values and expectations, theories of political structure assume action is the fulfillment of duties and obligations.¹

This quotation presents a version of social structure with little room for agency. If political behavior is about fulfillment of duties and obligations, changes in behavior should come primarily through changes in conditions, given that individual behavior is a function of an individual’s position in the political structure. But there is still a combination of structure and agency, as you still need individuals to fulfill the “duties and obligations.” It just does not particularly matter which individuals, rendering this the redundant form of agency.

Nevertheless, a good way to start the building of a formal catalog of analytical tools is to use the basic available materials, what I label the “orthodox” set of concepts

about social dynamics and individual characteristics. Furthermore, this is a good way to start because there are many strengths to the orthodox set, and a proper catalog of analytical tools should be able to keep such advantages. Moreover, given that questions of interest to social scientists are often of the broader variety, it is reasonable to expect that key analytical tools will often be more about structure than agency. Nevertheless, when it comes to testing even structural explanations on the ground, in concrete case studies, the issue of interaction arises, since indicators of causal mechanisms will involve the behavior of people.

Assumptions about the relative standing of individuals and social conditions will influence how we understand stability and change in politics, and therefore how we explain events in political history. For social science this relates to an old problem: to deal with the “paradox” that “human agency is the only moving force behind the actions, events, and outcomes of the social world ... [Yet] human agency can be realized only in concrete historical circumstances that condition the possibilities for action and influence its course.”² This statement can be considered a “paradox” because of an apparent contradiction: if it is structure (the “concrete historical circumstances”) that better explains social events it cannot be agency, and vice versa. The opening quotation exhibits this kind of logic, with political structure being “resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals.”

The word paradox is in quotation marks, however, because, as discussed in the Preface, many contemporary scholars assume that social events are the result of an

interaction of structure and agency, and that there is no contradiction. But a question remains: what form does the interaction of structure and agency take? The “orthodox” position on the structure-agency relationship is that conditions are powerful shapers of events, and that while agency can matter, it is only in limited ways.\textsuperscript{3} For the most part, there is little control over social conditions and events. There is room in the orthodox position for \textit{redundant agency}, where while it does take individuals to produce social events, there is little to note about those individuals as individuals. Anyone else put in the same social position would do much the same. There is also room for \textit{unintended agency}, while specific individuals can make special contributions to social events (that others put in a similar position may not have made), they cannot have control over events since conditions are too complicated and powerful. There is even room for \textit{bracketed agency}, when there is a breakdown in social conditions, and a few well-placed individuals may be in position to guide events in the short-term.

This picture of the orthodox position is a simplified one, but it is not a caricature. The orthodox approach to social analysis can be both informative and convincing. Social conditions do powerfully shape behavior, as we can observe when a country is hit by economic crisis, civil conflict or war.\textsuperscript{4} The roles of some individuals prominent in certain political events are, to a great extent, redundant.\textsuperscript{5} We can admire the courage and leadership of Rosa Parks, for example, yet it would be difficult to argue that she was necessary to the success of the social movement already gathering momentum prior to

\textsuperscript{3} See, e.g., Immergut (1998), Krasner (1984), Tsebelis (1990), Rabushka and Shepsle (1972), O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), and Mahoney and Snyder (1999).
\textsuperscript{4} See, e.g., Goureivitch (1986), and Katzenstein (1985).
\textsuperscript{5} So argues Luebbert (1991).
her famous act.\(^6\) And the roles of other individuals in events are unintended. As Breslauer argues, Gorbachev’s effort to transform the Soviet system of politics was not redundant (had another person been in his position, “it is fair to say that things would have happened quite differently”), but the train of events he helped set in motion did not go where he had hoped.\(^7\)

Rather than a caricature, then, I use the orthodox approach as a point of departure, with the idea of making sure we keep clear in view the strengths of that approach. Furthermore, starting with the strengths of the orthodox approach can serve as corrective to possible excesses of “great man” history, where focus on individuals may blind to the flow of events; and to possible excesses of political psychology, where focus on specific traits may blind to the power of social forces.\(^8\)

**Causal mechanisms and social dynamics of stability**

The orthodox view of agency is often implied in the way that we set up our studies in social science, which typically look to the social environment to find independent and dependent variables – categories of factors and the outcomes they influence – such as the use of geography to explain economic development; of economic development to explain regime type; or of regime type to explain propensity to go to war.\(^9\) Especially where the variables are broad and static, it is of little surprise when

\(^6\) I owe this example to Dan Kryder.  
\(^8\) For more on the balance, in political analysis, between conditions and individuals, see Greenstein (1987).  
\(^9\) For geography affecting economic and social development, see Diamond (1999); for economic development affecting regime types, see Przeworski et al (2000); and for regime type affecting propensity to go to war, see Levy (1988).
explanations do not feature much agency. In simplified terms, this approach is biased, often intentionally – and often rightfully – so, towards conditions, as the purpose is to find elements of the social environment which explain particular outcomes. The picture that emerges of the socio-political world from this angle is one of constraint or impetus, where circumstances limit or drive political outcomes, as when per capita income is used to explain the probability that a government will survive.

While findings are often presented in terms of variables, some authors aim to show more than just correlation between factors and outcomes. Where seeking to explain events and patterns in history, they want to know how it is that outcomes follow conditions; they want to see the steps through which particular factors lead to the developments of interest. Some label these steps the causal mechanism, which can be defined as “a series of events governed by lawlike regularities” that link “the event or pattern to be explained” to the “circumstances that are believed to explain” it. Our understanding of these regularities will influence how we analyze and explain political history, as it will lead us to look at some factors and not others. The idea of a causal mechanisms focus, in other words, is to go beyond “merely establishing systematic covariation between variables or events; a satisfactory explanation requires that we are also able to specify the social ‘cogs and wheels’ … that have brought the relationship into

---

10 On this point see Abbott (1992).
11 For more on the usefulness of focusing on, for example, “macrostructural” variables, see Katzenelson (1997), and Waldner (2002).
13 The first quotation is from Little (1991: 15), while the second and third are from Little (1991: 3).
14 For more on how understanding of the social world colors analysis, see Hall (2003).
existence."\textsuperscript{15} This shift to mechanisms is of use for this dissertation given the concern with the interaction of structure and agency over time. It may be easier to capture the place of agency in particular if focus shifts from structural factors to processes or mechanisms, through which factors may connect to outcomes.

To be clear, pressure-adjustment models of change are a useful place to start for cataloging analytical tools for understanding political change. It is, however, an empirical question as to whether and to what extent pressure-adjustment models are relevant to a particular case. To answer this empirical question, we must have some idea of how events on the ground should look, of how people behave – especially if our interest is to determine whether controlled change is possible or not. As such, we are better off having more specific understandings of the nature of political stability and change than offered by general models of change, pressure-adjustment or otherwise. If it takes pressure to force adjustment, then there should be processes in play which reproduce order and prevent change; and there should be other processes by which those processes that reinforce order are broken. For controlled change to be possible, at least some individuals must be capable of getting through processes preserving order, and capable of initiating and guiding processes of change. But that is getting ahead. First we should consider what kinds of social processes preserve the status quo – these are social dynamics of stability. These are first entries into the 3TSA catalog of analytical tools (see Table 2.1 at the end of this chapter).

\textsuperscript{15} The quotation is from the introduction to a collection of essays about social mechanisms. See Hedström and Swedberg (1998b:7).
Self-reinforcing dynamics

A place to start when looking for specific social dynamics of stability is to consider research on how, in general, social order can be self-reinforcing, or self-reproducing. Some form of feedback is often found to be at work. With “economic path dependence,” for example, the investment made in an initial choice, as to adopt a technology, involves sunk costs; as people buy into to this choice, and where there are benefits to using a popular technology, shifting to another becomes all the more costly, locking in this new order. Or, once a policy is made, such as establishing certain market rules or funding schemes for social welfare, the policy can become entrenched as people adopt practices to manage with the new rules.

And the more people adapt, the less they may be open to alternatives, in part because of the common preference for known over unknown. But they may also become used to solving social problems in certain ways, as with market- or state-driven approaches. And as they re-apply such conventions to more problems, they become more skilled at and comfortable with their ready-built genre of problem solving. The feedback may be even further strengthened if those who benefit from the existing order are in a position to defend it, as by rigging the application of rules in their favor. Furthermore, over time, a web of complex interdependencies can form around a policy, or institution or practice, since other policies, institutions, and practices take the former as given as they themselves develop. Some authors use metaphors like “inertia” or

---

16 For more on self-reinforcing sequences, see Mahoney (2000).
18 See, e.g., Zerubavel (1997) on the power of social conventions.
19 Dobbin’s (1994) explanation for the distinctly different ways that the US, the UK and France tend to address political economy follows this kind of logic.
“stickiness” to describe how established social entities can become very difficult to change.\textsuperscript{20} In brief form, then, we can enter \textit{self-reinforcing dynamics} into the catalog of analytical tools as about how \textit{adjusting to order reinforces it and how winners have incentive to preserve it}.

\textit{Status quo bias}

Self-reinforcing dynamics can occur in many different spheres of social life, as suggested by the mention of economic path dependence. Given that my particular concern is competition over political conditions, I find it useful to separate out some social dynamics of stability that are particularly common, if not unique, to politics. Everyday policy-making procedures themselves often have a \textit{status quo bias}.\textsuperscript{21} If there are veto points for affected parties to have input, it may be difficult to change policy. Given that change will tend to punish entrenched interests (e.g. anti-monopoly legislation will punish monopolies), if those interests have effective access to the policy process then change is less likely.\textsuperscript{22} Moreover, politicians have tools to block change: delay or adding complexity can bog down and so effectively kill legislation, especially given that concern for any issue may be short-lived. Incumbents may also be in a position to change the rules of government procedures in order to preserve their interests, as with gerrymandering.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{20} See Pierson (2000).
\textsuperscript{21} For discussions of status quo bias see Mickey and Pierson (2003), Pierson (2000), and Wilson (1989).
\textsuperscript{22} See Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth (1992) on how some political procedures enable veto for affected interests.
\textsuperscript{23} See Cox and Katz (2002).
\end{flushright}
Moreover, when there are public goods involved (such as defense, road construction, and universal social welfare programs), coordination problems may impede policy. If no one can be excluded from benefit, then there is incentive to free ride, or at the very least misrepresent how much one would be willing to contribute. Finally, to the extent that those in power value the existing order, the very success of a budding reform movement may lead incumbents to change the rules which initially gave reformers room to move. It is not, then, only the constraint and complexity of social conditions that confound control of outcomes, but often the nature of political processes themselves. In short, we can enter status quo bias into the 3TSA catalog in regards to political procedures favor incumbent interests, and how collective action problems over public goods make change difficult.

_Convention_

Given that the controlled political change would involve having to change the “hearts and minds” of significant numbers of people, I also find it useful to separate out more cognitive dynamics that reinforce stability. Under self-reinforcing dynamics I referred to the idea that one reason order becomes stable is that people become used to solving problems in particular ways. Here I want to take note of work that expands on this idea, that considers the power of convention to limit social life.

Preda, for example, discussed the importance of social things, which are “knots of socially sanctioned knowledge” that, once built, “play an active part in the generation,

---

24 Olson (1971) is the seminal work on collective action problems.
25 See Jasper (1997) on this kind of pattern.
stabilization, and reproduction of social order and sociality.” Concrete objects such as monuments, flags, houses of government, uniforms, and prisons, are included in this category. But so are rules and practices, as with voting rules, race classification schemes, ethnic requirements for government jobs, promotion procedures in courts of law, and norms for operating within organized crime. An intuition behind the concept of social things is that certain kinds of knowledge and behavior are sanctioned, and so flourish, while others are not, and so do not. When in place, “things” have an independent effect on the relevant social circle; they can be powerful shapers of experience, as when rules of government target a population for particular treatment, or simply when they provide incentives and models for a particular set of routine practices, as with a tax code.

With respect to the political, one of the most studied “things” is the institution. Tsebelis refers to institutions as “rules of the game,” while Immergut describes them as “formal rules of political arenas, channels of communication, language codes, or the logics of strategic situations.” All four of the latter, for example, would be involved in the ways in which politicians do business with the mafia in Sicily. And while such rules can be tenacious, they exist primarily, sometimes exclusively, in the minds of people. But the same can be said in more formal circumstances, as with the common distinction between the letter and the spirit of a law. Which rules and regulations are followed and

---

enforced, and how, may be common knowledge, it may be convention, but that need not be recorded knowledge. The UK’s unwritten constitution is a suggestive example.

The interrelation between things and cognition is perhaps even more evident in research on politics when actors are metaphorically portrayed as using frames, scripts, and repertoires. The idea is that there is knowledge available, derived in some way from events past, to use as guide for making sense of the present, and for acting therein. Chinese student protestors made use of impressions of the past for motivation and strategy during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. Further, we can note that there are general ideas about what makes a “market” or a “democracy” that both differ across countries, and studies suggest these frameworks impact significantly how people build and interact with the relevant institutions. Acceptable government interventions and public/private interrelationships in one country may be anathema, even inconceivable, in another. We can place convention in the 3TSA catalog, then, as being about how there are a limited set of ideas and practices available in any particular context.

---

29 Social science use of these metaphors can be seen in research on social movements. See literature reviews in Jasper (1997) and Aminzade et al (2001). In another object metaphor, Swidler (1986) refers to these kinds of element as “tools of action”. McAdam and Sewell (2001) discuss “master templates” for revolutionary action. And Samuels (2003) notes how early leaders in Japan and Italy created “blueprints” for, e.g., how to conduct party politics, that have informed political behavior ever since.

30 A related genre of concepts is the social psychology idea of schemas, subjective theories about the way the world works; they are mental frameworks that help us make sense of information. Formative experiences early in life or career generate assumptions, which thereafter fix, to a significant extent, how an actor views the social world, and the possibilities therein. See, e.g., Markus and Zajonc (1985: 145). Goldgeier (1994) uses this approach to try to understand leadership styles among Soviet leaders.

31 On such “scripts” and “repertoires” in China, see several essays in Wasserstrom and Perry (1994).


**Microfoundations of the orthodox approach**

We now have some patterns, in our catalog, to guide our consideration of political events. To discern such patterns, though, we need indicators, many of which will involve looking at the actions of people — but which people? Usually we are interested in particular social groups, such as an ethnic minority, for example. Can we look at any of its members? Or any one among its elite members? What are the relevant characteristics of the group anyway? Put differently, how is it we can speak of “lawlike regularities” at the social level, when events depend on the myriad actions of diverse individuals? How do we bridge the gap between the two? According to Little, “the fact that human beings conform to a loose set of psychological laws permits us to draw cause-effect relations between a given social environment and a pattern of individual behavior.”33 These “laws” describe how people usually interpret information and respond to incentives, for example, and so a social environment would cause behavior through the information and incentives it produces. Part of what makes the orthodox view, then, is the “psychological laws” invoked.

For the study of politics, where the subject matter is often competition between interest groups, assumptions about individuals are often tied to how the analyst takes groups as the units of analysis. For example, if an ethnic population is targeted for discrimination by state policy, we can think about plausible outcomes by assuming all members of that group share a certain set of ideas and related goals, and share the rational sense to want to do well by those goals. Once we take stock of conditions, such as

---

position of influence relative to other groups, we can derive reasons for why a group in such a position would behave in one way or another.\textsuperscript{34}

To speak of a group, especially when the concern is inter-group relations, scholars usually assume that its members share something in common. On one hand, an intuitive analytical move is to presume that group members share a set of conventions, historical memories, and so on. On the other hand, since sharing implies viewing those conventions similarly, group members may also be presumed to share cognitive foundations for understanding what skills and ideas matter and how. On this basis of shared ideas and reasoning, we can proceed, for example, with assumptions about the strength of status quo conditions in the pressure-adjustment model of social change. Given that traits or ideas are shared, the force of social conditions will be relatively straightforward as there will be no significant variation among those on the receiving end. Shared ideas mean that group members will be affected by self-reinforcing dynamics in the same way. Since they move as a group, there is no need to look for individual differences within it, and so no need to worry much about which individuals' actions we choose to observe for our indicators of social patterns.

One reason not to care too much about which individual is observed is that when thinking about political behavior, it is can be reasonable to assume some form of rationality: people do the best they can, given the information they have.\textsuperscript{35} If social conditions (primary sources of that information) are fixed, the same should be generally

\textsuperscript{34} See, e.g., Horowitz (1985).
\textsuperscript{35} See essays in Friedman (1996).
true of behavior patterns. For example, repeated victories or consistent outcomes will shape expectations of what is likely and possible, and such expectations become entrenched as people adjust preferences and behavior to convention. With a rationality assumption, the causal mechanism at the individual level, either implicitly or explicitly, is assumed to be that “individuals will select the option that best enables them to realize their private goals when faced with a range of behavioral alternatives.”

Dynamics of stability indicate some limits on that set of alternatives and the information about them, as with the role of convention in reproducing the existing order. And by considering individuals as members of groups, we tend to assume that individuals share the same set of limits.

While individual similarity assumptions are a simplification, they do not imply simplistic scholarship. As suggested by the discussion of convention above, much detail can be uncovered in how certain kinds of information become important and influential in particular settings. In his research on ethnic conflict, for example, Petersen makes use of research into emotions involved with feeling membership in one group, and feeling rage, fear, resentment, and hatred towards other groups. For example, he argues that certain kinds of political outcomes are “driven by people’s need for social approval … [and] by their reliance on each other for information.”

He uses research on emotion as a “loose set of psychological laws” to generate detailed models of distinct social dynamics “linking structure [i.e. conditions] to information, information to belief, belief

---

36 Mahoney (2002: 3) says that this is the basic causal mechanism underlying rational choice theory. As others point out, similar assumptions underpin many other approaches where conditions are used to (such as institutions) explain outcomes. See Immergut (1998), and Hall and Taylor (1996).

to emotion, and emotion and belief to action.” He is thereby able to look for indicators, as the particular emotion triggered should produce distinct patterns of individual activity.

Dynamics of change: shock and trend

Now that we have catalog elements about dynamics preserving social stability, and microfoundations on which to base the use of those dynamics, we can ask how social change happens. If self-reinforcing dynamics are widespread, it would seem something new can only come via abnormal pressure. Since so much behavior becomes geared to existing institutions and to other people’s practices, and since so much is invested in the status quo, it is going to take a lot to convince people to change. Radically new modes of action should come out of an event or series of events whereby a now altered social environment holds different incentives and/or different alternatives.

Since it is the environment that is explaining the patterns of behavior, if these conditions are considered stable, change may only come through a shock to the social system, such as an environmental disaster, a regime collapse, or an economic crisis. Anderson, for example, characterizes the impact of early print-capitalism on the politics of Europe as an “earthquake.” Another possibility is that while conditions seem stable, there is actually a slow, long-term trend which is building up pressure, as with population aging, immigration flows, or shifts in relative size of class or ethnicity-related groups.

---

40 For example, see Green et al (2002) on how large numbers of people come to identify with a political party, or political stereotype, and how this party identification tends only to change with broad, slow social transitions, or sudden, thorough regime collapses.
Similarly, some broad changes in public policy are explained by the ascension of new
generations, where coming-of-age events – such as war or peace, poverty or plenty –
shape the political demands of an age cohort, and as they increasingly take over positions
of influence, those demands shape policy.41

With shocks or trends – both of which we can add to our catalog of social
dynamics – it is forces from changes in the social circumstances which produce changes
in patterns of political behavior; individuals are shown as reacting to circumstances,
instead acting on them, and so controlled agency seems unlikely.42 In general, I refer to
these ideas as pressure-adjustment models of change, with punctuated equilibrium being
one of the more commonly used examples.43 Conditions are stable – in equilibrium – for
long periods of time, which are occasionally punctuated by some kind of shock or crisis,
which then settles into a new equilibrium. It is at such punctuation moments that there
may be a critical juncture, an opportunity for bracketed agency, to make choices about
social practices that have long-term effects on the social order.44 These are moments
when certain well-placed actors may have the short-term opportunity to “rewrite” some
of the “rules.”45 Yet once events begin to settle down again, constraints and forces
outside of specific actors’ control come to shape the new order. Efforts at political
engineering can be frustrated by factors such as the relative numbers in ethnic groups, or

41 See, e.g., Inglehart (1990), or Samuels (1977).
42 For some discussion of rationality as reacting see Jones (1999); for shocks producing change, see
45 See Mahoney and Snyder (1999).
a country's size and place in the international system. Even if the new rules affect the reformed status quo, there is a good chance it is not the designed impact.

**A brief test of the orthodox view: Snyder's *The Reconstruction of Nations***

The orthodox view, which leads us to look for change as punctuated equilibrium and for any intended agency to fall within critical junctures, suggests that in times of stability we should see processes like widespread self-reinforcing dynamics, a limited set of commonly accepted conventions, and a strong status quo bias in the political system. And where we do, the suggestion is that something new could only come via abnormal pressure. Since so much behavior becomes geared to existing institutions and to other people's practices, and since so much is invested in the status quo, it is going to take a lot to convince people to change.

This difficulty of getting people to change and, conversely, the power of social conditions to do so, can be seen in the study of ethnic conflict. In this context, Snyder's (2003) *The Reconstruction of Nations* stands out for his argument that a few Poles had a disproportionate and intended effect on Poland's post-Soviet "Ostpolitik," the structure of ethnic relations with its eastern neighbors in the Baltics. He notes that,

In the years following the revolutions of 1989, every imaginable cause of national conflict could be found among Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine: imperial disintegration; frontiers without historical legitimacy; provocative minorities;

---

revanchist claims; fearful elites; newly democratic politics; memories of ethnic cleansing; and national myths of eternal conflict.\textsuperscript{47}

Remarkable in this light is the \textit{lack} of violence upon the heels of the Soviet collapse, given demonstrations like Petersen's (2002) of how ethnic violence can explode after collapse of a regime or state system, and given that most if not all of the "imaginable" causes listed by Snyder can be linked to the violence in the Balkans.

Snyder captures the extent of the difference between northeastern and southeastern Europe by noting that in 1999, "as NATO admited Poland, it bombed Yugoslavia. As the world followed conflicts among Serbs and their neighbors, a joint Polish-Ukrainian peacekeeping battalion was dispatched to Kosovo."\textsuperscript{48} So, the brief test for a social science grounded on dynamics of stability, with related pressure-adjustment models of change, is whether this case of what seems to be surprisingly peaceful cooperative ethnic relations can be satisfactorily captured via such an analytical approach. While only a "brief test," this example suggests the possible importance of finding a place for controlled agency in social science, given the normative importance of understanding ethnic conflict, and finding ways to mitigate it. In other words, if we do find crucial roles for intentional agency in cases \textit{like} this, and at significant levels of scale and duration, we are surely better off having analytical tools to search for any controlled agency that might be present. Otherwise we are stuck labeling such cases as "mystical,"

\textsuperscript{47} Snyder (2003: 2).
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid: 3.
and thereby abandoning such cases to observers perhaps less “sensitized” to political and social “realities.”

Snyder’s explanation for this Baltic phenomenon hinges on a group of Poles who began planning their homeland’s foreign policy well before the breakup of the Soviet Union, while living in exile in France: “The image of a peaceful region arose not from the order Polish policy inherited, but from the order it created.” These Poles set about building cooperative relations during the stable times prior to the Soviet collapse by settling accounts with other nationalities, and helping them prepare to enter an envisioned world of nation states.

Some key individuals of Snyder’s story are Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski, and while they dreamed of Polish independence from the Soviet Union along with their peers in the Polish émigré community, they did so in ways that differed radically not only from other Poles, but from “East Europeans émigrés in general.” They did not accept the nostalgia for old institutions, and the desire to take back lands lost to the Soviets. In part this was because of their sensitivity to nationalism as they envisioned a problem: how to establish peaceful relations among a set of recreated states with historical grievances, with populations interspersed over disputed territories.

---

49 Greenstein (1987: xxviii) makes a similar point, in arguing for integrating studies of politics and basic psychological theory and research.
51 For some of the specific grievances involved, see also Petersen (2002: 152-3) on Lithuanians and Poles.
53 Giedroyc and Mieroszewski were leaders among the exiled intellectuals who shaped the ideology of the Polish underground (including people like Adam Michnik), and who eventually returned to Poland to build this new form of international relations. While both have passed away, they continue to be credited by Poland’s political leaders as a founders of their foreign policy doctrine.
saw particular danger in the possibility of Polish and Russian nationalism mobilized over competing claims with respect to Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine.

This kind of conflict, they thought, would cause much harm to Poland. By helping to legitimize these other political units as independent and stable states, Giedroyc and Mieroszewski were aiming to protect Poland both from Russia, and also from itself (i.e. from Poles harming their own interests by becoming embroiled in nationalistic conflict). They were also aiming to prepare Poland to take part in “the fully modern world of nation-states.”

There was a chance at prosperity in being able to link up with the western European systems of states. While structural conditions are important to understanding the nature of their problem, context did not define the problem; simply looking to such conditions (especially in light of the Balkans) does not reveal which ones will matter and how they will matter. This ambiguity is suggested, for example, by the way Mieroszewski, in Snyder’s account, almost alone foresaw the importance of nation-states for keeping order and promoting national interests. He read conditions this way, while few anywhere else did. In short, rather than a focus on how to keep ethnic groups with historical grievances apart and take back lost lands, the Polish reformers defined their Ostpolitik problem as how to forge peace without touching borders, without moving people, and without violence.

---

55 Another important structural factor is that, “Polish communists had already consumed the last major national question in Poland by ethnically cleansing Ukrainians in 1947. This left any pretenders to postcommunist nationalism in Poland without a compact national minority to present as a threat or use as a scapegoat.” Ibid: 230.
56 See ibid: 221.
Petersen provides some general conditions for why there has been "general ethnic peace in the Baltics":

[T]he general populations of the eponymous peoples feel "masters of their own house" while the most ambitious individuals from other ethnic groups accept their new status ... because they still retain an outlet for economic advancement.\footnote{Petersen (2002: 160).}

But judging from Snyder's account, these conditions of peaceful order were not inevitable – they had to be created, especially with respect to "ambitious individuals ... accepting their status."

That conditions are insufficient to explain the Polish case (as on side of the Balkans), seems more evident when looking at the form and timing of the "responses" to conditions. Preemptively building cooperative relations was complicated in \textit{form}, and since unprecedented it was not so obvious. Their strategies included negotiating friendship treaties with leaders and groups in the other states prior to the Soviet collapse – having to predict which ones would be important, seek them out, and convince them to listen and trust. The Poles also agreed to significant concessions, such as giving up claims on their co-ethnics living in the other republics; and brought together academics from all four states to work on cooperative histories and to promote understanding. With \textit{timing}, both planning and execution of strategy began earlier than one would expect. The Poles were not reacting to crisis, when they deliberated in Parisian cafés over foreign policy for a state that did not exist. And this is not a trivial point: had planning not
started until after the fall of the Soviet Union, success seems less likely. They were both preparing themselves and potential adversaries, who may have been less receptive to ideas of ethnic cooperation in the chaotic moments after the Soviet collapse.⁵⁸

**Conclusion**

If Snyder is right about how surprising the peace is in the Polish case, then the story of preparation seems key to understanding it, a point that will recur throughout this dissertation; and structural assumptions about conditions and pressure-adjustment models of change seem ill equipped to explain it.⁵⁹ But even if Snyder is not quite right about how surprising the peace is in this case (i.e. that conditions were relatively more favorable to it than he claims), the nature of that peace nevertheless remains remarkable in form. According to Snyder's account, having the option to choose preemptive peace at all required a long-term, multifaceted *project* whose desirability and possibility was unimaginable to peers.

This kind of preemptive, project-based perspective could inform how we think about the possible in other arenas of ethnic conflict, potential or realized.⁶⁰ If we look simply to conditions and assume only pressure-adjustment models of change in order to consider the possible, it may be hard to imagine any "choice" other than ethnic conflict in a context including "every imaginable causes of national conflict," or even in circumstances where only some of those causes are present. It is easy to envision

---

⁵⁸ Petersen (2002) explores how ethnic conflict often explodes soon after regime collapse.
⁵⁹ I do not advocate abandoning the practice of distilling "choices" from conditions in political analysis. More knowledge of social dynamics and individual characteristics, though, should improve such practices.
⁶⁰ See conclusion of Petersen (2002) for some thoughts about how certain types of ethnic conflict might be prevented, or be channeled along different paths.
declaring war, but less so declaring peace, in a sense, especially under such inauspicious circumstances.

More generally, the problem here is partly with the method. The structural focus on how conditions affect behavior suggests we look at how people acted at particular times, primarily at critical junctures – at how they made their choice.\textsuperscript{61} A project that includes extensive preparation, however, is about long-term work to change the set of possible alternatives, which may begin prior to a break in equilibrium. So the next step to take is to expand our notion of the social dynamics at work when conditions are relatively stable, when they are not at a critical juncture.

\textsuperscript{61} Mahoney (1999: 1187-1188) suggests that Collier and Collier's (1991) method of variable-based comparison leads them to concentrate on certain moments in history ("critical junctures"); and that this selection method, \textit{irrespective of any case study work}, leads to deterministic conclusions about the role of those moments in political development.
Table 2.1 A toolset of “orthodox” social dynamics and individual characteristics

Dynamics of stability

- Self-reinforcing: adjusting to order reinforces it; winners have incentive to preserve it
- Status quo bias: procedures favor incumbent interests; collective action problems over public goods make change difficult
- Convention: limited set of ideas and practices

Sum: dynamics of stability preserve social order during normal times

Dynamics of change

- Fast – shock: sudden, large-scale pressure to change practices/conventions
- Slow – trend: long-term building up of pressure to change practices/conventions

Sum: adjustments come from pressure; control unlikely

Microfoundations

- Reasoning: rationality
- Ideas: shared conventions

Sum: actors within the same group, or who sit in the same social position, share traits
Chapter Three
Social dynamics of instability and a revised view of change

To begin expanding the catalog of analytical tools for considering dynamics at play during relatively stable times, we can note views of ordinary politics that focus on multifaceted legacies, different alternatives or paths close at hand, and a diversity of definitions and uses of existing institutions, all potentially vulnerable to renewed conflict and renegotiation. For example, note Sewell’s overview:

… social historians have demonstrated how, in a great variety of times and places, structures are in fact dual: how historical agents’ thoughts, motives, and intentions are constituted by the culture and social institutions into which they are born, how these cultures and institutions are reproduced by the structurally shaped and constrained actions of those agents, but also how, in certain circumstances, the agents can (or are forced to) improvise or innovate in structurally shaped ways that significantly reconfigure the very structures that constituted them.¹

Compared with more rigid or one-sided views of social structure which focus primarily on the effects of conditions, this quotation shows more concern for what can emerge from within a social setting given that the actions of agents are also considered. It is a so-called “dual” view of social structure.² On one hand, while people are in a sense free to

¹ Sewell (1992: 5).
² The author is drawing on the concept of “structuration”, as put forward by an author like Anthony Giddens (1979: 69, emphasis in original): “The concept of structuration involves that of the duality of structure, which relates to the fundamentally recursive character of social life, and expresses the mutual dependence of structure and agency. By the duality of structure I mean that the structural properties of
choose, the principles guiding those choices come out of the past, from already existing social structures. On the other hand, according to this dual view, those structures are reproduced and maintained by people as they continue to act in line with them – social structure conditions action, but also depends upon it. A possible conclusion, then, is that social structure may be more vulnerable to agency than the orthodox view suggests, if we take more account of ways that people like "improvise or innovate" – both of which are words that imply some departure from the ideas and practices conventional among individuals' peers.

But what are these "certain circumstances" where "agents can (or are forced to) improvise or innovate," and just how "structurally shaped" is that kind of agency? The orthodox view has answers: these circumstances are ruptures produced by shocks and trends, and the possible agency – especially anything resembling controlled agency – is tightly constrained by the weight and complexity of social conditions. That weight and complexity, in turn, can be described in some detail if we look for social dynamics of stability and change. But we can also examine further the circumstances within which agents reproduce their "cultures and institutions" to see whether regular social dynamics are as orderly as the orthodox view of punctuated equilibrium and critical junctures implies.

social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems.” Bourdieu’s “habitus” concept can be conceived in similarly dual lines. See van den Berg (1998: 214).
Social dynamics of instability

If the dynamics of stability that support orthodox pressure-adjustment models of change do not sufficiently capture politically important social dynamics, a response can be to try to expand our view of social dynamics. For there are non-shock, and non-trend routes to change, which do not quite fit with an orthodox, equilibrium notion of long-term conditions. These routes do not fit because they rely on processes and characteristics of social life that, while relatively common under stable conditions, open possibilities for significant change that do not necessarily require shock or trend. It is an empirical question as to whether any of these social dynamics of instability are in play in a particular case, and even if they are present, they may not necessarily lead to any significant change. But recall the Polish “Ostpolitik” example from the previous chapter: given how much action occurred prior to the critical juncture (the collapse of the Soviet Union), how much was achieved prior to the punctuation (in building cooperative relations with other ethnic groups), some of dynamics of instability may be politically relevant for possible, large-scale social outcomes.

Multifaceted social conditions

A prominent element of the Ostpolitik project was work to redefine conventional views within each ethnic group – their own as well as those in the Baltic states – about the interests of those groups. The aim was to reframe such views away from redressing historical wrongs (real or imagined), and towards the benefits to be gained from becoming members in a secure, prosperous position in a new European order. In a sense, this element of the Ostpolitik project took aim at specific dynamics of stability, regarding
the power of convention in general, and of specific social “things” in particular – such as widely recognized historical “memories,” and the meanings tied to specific geographic places and monuments.

The suggestion, then, is that the influence of social objects is vulnerable, even when powerful people, groups, and social dynamics work to preserve a particular kind of influence. Social things can become objects of contention, as when conflict flares over census taking, over environmental and energy policy, over places and memorials, and over official language use. A reason why such contention is possible is that many social objects are multifaceted, and we can catalog this idea as indicating that there are multiple dimensions to issues and multiple uses for resources, which enable development of alternative ideas and practices.

An example of a multifaceted view is Lieberman’s notion of political order – or, rather, multiple orders existing at the same time, sharing the same space: “any political moment or episode of outcome is situated within a variety of ordered institutional and ideological patterns, each with its own logic and pace.” His concern is to show how the simultaneous presence of different institutions and ideas can, even without impact from outside forces, produce “friction” between orders, which he considers an important

---

3 For politics around census taking, see Nobles (2000). Jasper (1997) covers examples of popular protest over government-sanctioned production of energy and use of environment. Regarding the politics of language, for Somalia see Laitin (1977), for former Soviet republics see Laitin (1998), and for Quebec see Mann (2002).

source of political change. He argues that his “perspective presents politics as a process that may have stable elements but contains within itself the seeds of change.”

One aspect of dynamics of stability discussed in the previous chapter is that there are advantages for incumbents present during times of calm. Considering multifaceted nature of social objects and conditions, however, indicates limits to incumbents’ advantage. It can be difficult, for example, to monitor and control social conditions. Laws written in the capital may be selectively enforced in the provinces, depending on local conditions; and apparatus designed to subjugate and control a target group may unify and enrage an otherwise diffuse and quiescent population.

Moreover, things can be resources for action: state funerals may be used as a rally in support of the government, or as a pretext for opposition to gather in protest of the regime; historical records and artifacts may similarly be used to legitimize state or rebel activity; and technologies like fax machines, cellular phones and the internet, could provide the backbone for delivery of government services and a stable economy, or the lifeblood for activists trying to organize and mobilize a step ahead of security forces. People also make use of conventions as tools of action, as “scripts” or “repertoires.”

---

5 He says, for example, that, “where friction among multiple political orders is more prevalent, the likelihood of significant extraordinary political change (as opposed to normal variation) will increase.” Lieberman (2002: 703). For another view of friction in social life, see essays in Åkerman (1998).
7 For how objects of control can be hijacked by the “weak”, see Scott (1990).
8 For use of communication technologies in popular protest, as in the Philippines, see Rheingold (2002); see several essays in Wasserstrom and Perry (1994) for how state funerals in China were used to express opposition to the state; and for the use, manipulation, and invention of history for political purposes in Japan see Vlastos (1998).
labels used to denote the idea that people look to the past for models of action. In Chapter 2 I noted the example of Chinese student protestors reaching into Chinese history for models of action. But another interesting aspect of the Tiananmen protests is that models were also borrowed from abroad and *combined* with domestic ones. As noted by authors like Schelling and Lichbach, certain symbols and conventions can be used to overcome certain collective action problems, at least in the sense of solving the problem of getting many people to focus attention on a particular issue. That conventions and symbols can be used and combined in novel ways (at least novel in relation to the collective action problem involved) suggests that ordinary, multifaceted social conditions can indeed hold Lieberman’s “seeds of change.”

*Societal heterogeneity*

Given that the focus here is on possibilities for political change, and that so often this is about some form of group conflict, I find it useful to keep separate a particular way in which social conditions are multifaceted. This has to do with *societal heterogeneity*, the fact that societies of any scale contain many different types and sizes of group and organization, whose activities and purposes may commonly work at cross purposes. Members of interest groups are usually also members of other groups, and this multiplicity of memberships does not occur in one stock pattern. In other words, just because people share membership in one group does not mean that they will do so in

---

10 For more on how people combine cultural tools, see Samuels (2003) on the subject of “bricolage.”
others. One implication of heterogeneous membership patterns is that there can be connections between groups and organizations even when there are not any formal links, and even when those groups are in competition. These connections comprise social networks, and the nature of those networks in any political unit can have repercussion on what is politically possible.

The study of social network effects deals with how the spread of ideas and shifts in behavior do or do not catch on, sometimes in spite of but more often because of societal heterogeneity.\(^{12}\) Networks crosscut organizations, and so provide channels for the spread of ideas, as well as extra resources for the competition between different groups and institutions.\(^{13}\) In Italy, for example, networks that divide government institutions mirror some that divide legal institutions, with the result that particular networks can coordinate a multi-front attack or defense over specific policies and procedures.\(^{14}\) In general, some authors note how it is often where structures collide that we should expect to see people reshaping them: “innovation is generated by networks that crosscut important institutional boundaries; societal heterogeneity facilitates the mobilization of political challengers and constitutes loci of structural indeterminacy that may be exploited by political entrepreneurs.”\(^{15}\) So, for our catalog of analytical tools, the category of societal heterogeneity captures the idea that overlap of and networks between

\(^{12}\) For discussions on social networks research see Barabási (2002), Buchanan (2002), and Gladwell (2000).

\(^{13}\) On societal heterogeneity and its connection to innovation, see Clemens and Cook (1999: 453). On the normal competition between members of different groups, and related potential for change, see Lieberman (2002), as well as Baumgartner and Jones (1993).

\(^{14}\) See Granovetter (1995) for how people commonly have connections across social groups.

\(^{15}\) Clemens and Cook (1999: 453).
groups and organizations (of their activities and interests) can generate conflict and novel uses and combinations of conventions.

Windows of opportunity

The possibilities for change generated by multifaceted social conditions and societal heterogeneity may nonetheless be insufficient for change. With people belonging to separate groups, and having multiple responsibilities and interests, it may be difficult to get and hold their attention. But it may not take a rupture in the social order or the pressure of a long-term trend to move them either. Kingdon argues that windows of opportunity to get attention and support for a pet policy crop up regularly, not owing to any crisis or shift in underlying political conditions, but to events that, while not in themselves threatening to the regime, may refocus public attention. They do not, in short, require the pressure of a shock or long-term trend to the political system. For example, a high profile accident might rally the public around seatbelt legislation. Rather than changing preferences, some windows may help focus already existing preferences, bringing together an otherwise weakly committed and dispersed support base.

Windows open unpredictably, shut quickly, may never open for a particular effort, and can open and shut without impact. Furthermore, even if actors recognize the opportunity, action may still fail to bring noticeable effect, let alone the intended one. A few days on the front page may not be enough. But even given their element of randomness, policy windows are, according to Kingdon, a defining and dynamic aspect

of everyday political processes. Windows of opportunity, in short, are *common events that can assist efforts at political change*.

**Incomplete victories**

That multifaceted social conditions, social network heterogeneity, and windows of opportunity can lead to significant change absent forces of shock or trend assumes that there are people around working for such change. Is this a fair assumption, or would dynamics of stability tend to bury or diffuse such opposition? Here it is useful to consider the patterns in which political battles are won and lost, and often political victories are incomplete with losing groups and interests still present, meaning that there will usually be people around looking to make use of available opportunities.\(^\text{17}\) For one thing, it is not often that opponents are eliminated, either by expulsion, confinement, conversion, or literal elimination. For another, it is near impossible to know the full membership of the opposing group, in part because the boundaries of that group can be fuzzy, and in part because there are often incentives for people to hide their true preferences.

Moreover, even where the identity of opponents is known, an intuitive strategy to quell opposition is to incorporate opponents into the incumbent order. This may work, for the short term at least, but may create future problems. In his analysis of post-Revolutionary Iran, for example, Brumberg speaks of “dissonant” institutions where “competing images of political community [reform and conservative]... are reproduced

---

\(^{17}\) See the work of authors like Michael Piore, Charles Sabel, and Jonathan Zeitlin on the implications of losing groups remaining.
in the formal and informal institutions of state and society. Khomeini's legacy of writings and speeches, for example, contains material to support both a religious Iranian state dominated by conservative religious leaders, and a secular Iranian state governed by elected officials and a merit-based civil service. There are resources, in short, for both winners and losers in the competition between reformers and conservatives. One group's tenure may be vulnerable given the tools of action for competitors near at hand.

Victories can also be incomplete because support may quickly wane once initial victories are achieved, where thorough consolidation of that victory may instead require more long-term devotion to the cause by those same supporters. Furthermore, given the complexity of social conditions, and incomplete knowledge about conditions, it may be difficult to determine what is needed to truly consolidate a victory. For the catalog, then, incomplete victories mean that losers remain in play, available to work for change.

**Social dynamics of change revisited**

With dynamics of instability in hand, we can consider more kinds of social change than common in the orthodox approach. Intuitively, it seems that change generally comes in two forms: fast and slow. The orthodox view implies that fast change is some kind of shock to a stable system, and slow change is produced by pressure from some trend – neither of which leaves much room for controlled agency, as both are about the pressure of conditions forcing adjustment. The limited exception is in moments of disarray, where there can be room for bracketed agency. But during such moments it

---

19 See work on social movements, like that of Jasper (1997) and McAdam (1999).
may particularly difficult to keep control. The very disarray, and the speed with which change occurs suggests strong limits on control, and even in these moments of opportunity, agency is more about reacting to conditions than initiating designed change. Noting dynamics of instability, however, suggests we look for more detailed patterns of change, in either fast or slow forms. And with more detailed patterns of change it may be easier to see how motivated agents could gain some control over social dynamics.

Cascades

An example of sudden forms of change can be seen in how rapid were some of the turnarounds in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with sudden regime collapses, and turns from ethnic peace to war. But other examples of sudden change can be seen in more placid conditions, including analyses of “normal” politics in the US: “Political ideas become popular quickly and diffuse throughout large areas of the political system until they have replaced many old ones. Political bandwagons build up power, as politicians and interest-group leaders become active in a new cause as it gains popularity.”

Authors like Kuran favor the use of the cascade metaphor to refer to the kind of rapid social change they have in mind, where broad social beliefs (and behavior attached to them) can in certain circumstances swing rapidly from one state of order to another, as with an explosion of ethnic conflict. With respect to mobilization around ethnicity-based issues in particular, “Insofar as each personal ethnification decision triggers reputationally induced ethnification on the part of at least one other person, the decisions collectively form a reputation cascade.”

---

20 Baumgartner and Jones (1993: 16-17).
about what is desirable and possible depend on what they see others doing, there is potential for a cascade of imitative behavior, ranging from fashions and fads to anti-regime street protest and ethnic war.

As implied by work on dynamics of stability, however, there are common barriers to cascades. In simple terms, many people will be reluctant to abandon familiar practices and conventional views for something untried, which may involve cost – as to learn a new practice. If few other people are adopting the new practice or technology, there may be little incentive for an individual to try something new. This reluctance is captured by the idea of a threshold, where most people will not shift to another behavior until enough others have already changed.\(^{22}\) Once over that threshold, a bandwagon effect can occur, and general patterns can suddenly cascade from the old order to new, as in market sell-offs, adoption of a new technologies, or a swings from minimal to mass violence.\(^{23}\) But until the threshold is reached, that some people do things differently or that an unusual event occurs will have little impact on the overall order.

Application of the cascade model usually involves two states of the world, such as ethnic peace and ethnic war.\(^{24}\) The first can be sturdy, holding in face of clashes between members of different groups, but this depends on beliefs. If, in private, people think that public norms of peace are dependable and good, the situation is stable. But if there is disjoint between private and public belief, if there is latent hatred, widespread violence can be triggered. Things can change when (for even innocuous reasons) a critical mass of

\(^{22}\) On threshold effects see, e.g., Granovetter (1978) and Schelling (1978).
\(^{23}\) On bandwagons and cascades see, e.g., Baumgartner and Jones (1993) and Kuran (1998).
\(^{24}\) Also see Schelling (1978) on this social dynamic. One example he considers is “white flight.”
people exhibit behavior at odds with current social practices, such as increased wearing of ethnic dress. People who had kept ethnocentric preferences hidden may now feel emboldened to express their views publicly – and such action may inspire others. Moreover, even though many may lack convictions about the issue at hand, their preference to be (safe) in the majority can prompt them to join: public actions by a few people can convince many to change behavior and even belief.  

For our catalog of social dynamics, then, we can add another form of fast change, where the *cascade* dynamic leads us to consider how there can be potential for great changes in behavior to emerge rapidly from what look to be stable conditions – without external shock as necessary prerequisite.

**Incremental change**

The cascade dynamic does receive a good deal of attention in social science, and I suspect that one reason is that it provides a more detailed mechanism for how the pressures considered in the orthodox approach translate into broad changes in behavior. That is, shocks and trends affect many individuals’ beliefs, setting the stage for a small event to trigger a cascade. This is a useful picture for how agency can be “redundant.” And this is a useful application of the cascade model. But the discussion of dynamics of instability in this chapter should suggest another. The heterogeneity and movement present in ordinary social circumstances may also be sufficient to build the conditions for

---

25 In some cascade models, the percentage of indifferent is much larger than the committed, yet wild swings are still shown to be possible. For example, Lichbach’s (1995) “five percent rule” states that popular protest typically involves less than five percent of the relevant population. Far less than this proportion of a city’s population, he argues, can bring down a government by taking to the streets. The critical mass needed to prompt a major swing in beliefs, then, may be relatively small.
a cascade. Individual dynamics of instability may not generate much pressure for social adjustment at a particular moment. But over time, different beliefs about multifaceted things could spread through heterogeneous social networks, giving losers left by incomplete political victories the change to leverage a window of opportunity into a cascade.

So, another form of slow change to add to the catalog, besides trends, is incremental change. This would include ways in which political institutions could be transformed or redirected, and in which people can be brought together for coordinated action – without need for great historical moments of crisis. This kind of change would seem important, for example, in efforts to build public trust in government. Furthermore, while a potential way to build the conditions for a cascade, incremental change may in and of itself be a potential means of controlled change. It may not be necessary to trigger a large-scale cascade, even if the latter is found to be a more common route to political change. There may be a point after which such groups are able to take control of certain political processes, but reaching that threshold could, conceivably, occur without a cascade dynamic.

Of use for developing ideas about incremental change is scholarship on how institutions survive the vagaries of (even everyday) politics through adaptation. Thelen, for one, is interested in how new groups get incorporated into institutions not designed for them, and through processes more subtle than great crises bringing change. She looks at how institutions survive political battles through transformation, adaptation, and
reinvention over time, and presents two mechanisms of incremental change: "functional conversion" and "institutional layering." The first process models how "incorporation of new groups into existing institutions drives a change in the purposes and functions served by these institutions"; while the second "involves the partial renegotiation of some elements of a given set of institutions while leaving others in place."\(^{26}\) Having an analytical toolkit that includes incremental dynamics of change such as these should improve our capabilities for considering the politically possible.

**Keeping continuity in mind**

Focusing so much on possibilities for political change can lead one to lose sight of important continuities. With punctuated equilibrium and critical juncture models of change, there may be a temptation to see the world after the rupture to be a whole new world from the one before.\(^{27}\) To consider social change, perhaps of any kind, it is important to consider differences between frameworks or conventions before and after a moment of change. That said, looking for differences can lead one to miss deep similarities, which can lead analysts both to overstate the nature of "big" changes they consider significant, understate the importance of "small" changes, and in general cloud the nature of stability and change.

Considering dynamics of instability suggests that the orthodox view is vulnerable to this kind of error. That conditions are multifaceted suggests that while one facet may

---


\(^{27}\) Some see this assumption in the paradigm shift model of intellectual change, and take issue with what they label the "incommensurability" assumption – the idea that those on one side of a paradigm shift would not be able to communicate, to put it bluntly, with those on the other side. Critiques include Miller (1996) and Sulloway (1996), while "paradigm shift" originates from Kuhn (1996).
undergo important change, others may not. As observers we are vulnerable to missing
important continuities – important here since they may permit certain kinds of political
action – if we put too much stock in certain spectacular changes. For example, some
observers of the last presidential election in Iran made much of the drop in voter turnout,
but this was primarily based on numbers from Tehran, which, while important, were in
many ways is not representative of events in the rest of the country.\textsuperscript{28} The reverse is also
ture, in that we may miss important change when we assume that relatively stable
conditions are in “equilibrium.” Further, that political victories are incomplete suggests
that while one view or group has lost, it may well return another day; that a cascade may
involve many people who are not passionately for or against the issue at hand suggests
that a swing back to something close to the prior order may be possible as well; and that
windows of opportunity favor one interest one day suggests that they may well favor
another interest another day.

As with Samuels’ \textit{legacies}, actions by individuals prior, even much prior, to a
critical juncture may continue to influence events afterwards.\textsuperscript{29} Put slightly differently,
“Choices in one period not only limit future options, they may also precipitate later
crieses, structure available options, and shape the choices made at those junctures.”\textsuperscript{30} If a
punctuated equilibrium model of change leads us away from considering continuities
between the time before and after the punctuation, we may miss important effects of
agency. As such, even when using analytical tools about cascade and incremental forms

\textsuperscript{28} I owe this example to Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh.
\textsuperscript{29} See Samuels (2003).
\textsuperscript{30} Haydu (1998: 353).
of change, it is a good idea to keep track of ways in which continuities can influence both stability and change in general, and possibilities for political action in particular.

**Revisiting microfoundations, and possibilities for control**

Dynamics of instability suggest that there may be more possible outcomes in any case, and more possible routes to a single outcome. For example, it may matter if people, in a particular context, act first as a religious follower, a worker, a parent, a citizen, an ethnic, a clan member, a local, a reformer, a conservative, and so on. A point to take away from the discussion above on social dynamics of instability, then, is that as social scientists we may want to be cautious when defining groups – winners, losers, members of ethnic groups, holders of specific positions in the political order, or otherwise. We may want to be more careful with the assumptions about similarity of individuals within groups discussed in Chapter 2. As implied in the discussion of social network heterogeneity, people have *multiple biographies*: they are members of multiple groups, and have different sets of memberships and ideas than even their close acquaintances.\(^{31}\) The Polish Ostpolitik case is suggestive. Even among the émigré community of Polish intellectuals and activists there were sharp differences in vision and preference.

Such multiple biographies, and related dynamics of instability (along with cascade and incremental forms of change), can suggest more room for agency than does an orthodox approach. Interest groups now seem less monolithic than they might under an orthodox view, and so perhaps some actors can more easily locate allies and use manipulable characteristics of social conditions (like windows of opportunity) to change

---

\(^{31}\) Both Brumberg (2001) and Jasper (1997) incorporate multiple biography-type concepts.
widely held beliefs. Yet opportunities to reshape conditions provided by dynamics of instability do not necessarily imply much control for individuals, especially if the concern is for political outcomes of much scale and duration. While actions can bring immediate, short-term, intended effects, outcomes at the social level are often unintended, as shown when we compare the intentional choices of individuals with the aggregate result in the “tragedy of the commons,” for example.\textsuperscript{32}

But before giving up on the possibility of control, however, we can note that while we have expanded our catalog of social dynamics, to include instability and more types of change, we have paid little attention to assumptions about the individual – apart from brief mention of multiple biographies. Indeed, a critique of social theorists (such as Alexander, Bourdieu, Giddens, and Habermas) who lay claims to better integrating structure and agency is that the latter is often left vague.\textsuperscript{33} Expanding our catalog of social dynamics may suggest that there are more possibilities for agency, but without individual-level foundations, it is difficult to know how to discern which social dynamics and what kind of agency are at work in a particular case.

### Conclusion

We risk missing possibilities for controlled change if we do not consider dynamics of instability. If self-reinforcing dynamics are strong, then thresholds to

---

\textsuperscript{32} See the literature on collective action problems, which is about how self-regarding behavior and suspicion of others’ motives can lead to social outcomes that none of the participants desire, the classics being Hardin (1963) and Olson (1971). The tragedy of the commons is where a resource that is potentially renewable, if properly cared for, is destroyed for all when individuals extract too much too quickly, in part because of their fear that others will do so, and so take their share while there are still shares to take.

\textsuperscript{33} See Rosenberg (2002: 48) and van den Berg (1998: 223).
change are going to be high. But if we take into account research on incremental change, on regular opportunities to redirect events, on the multifaceted nature of political issues, on social network heterogeneity, and on incompleteness of political victories, then thresholds to change begin to look lower.

But while an expanded catalog of social dynamics provides insight into particular political processes of change, we are still left with a vague on the mechanics at the individual level. There may be possibilities for different forms of social activity, but without individual level foundations, it is difficult to know how to make sense of them. To see more specifically how people might use such room, the next chapter turns to the characteristics of ordinary social actors.
Table 3.1 A revised toolset of social dynamics

Dynamics of stability (orthodox view)

- **Self-reinforcing**: adjusting to order reinforces it; winners have incentive to preserve it
- **Status quo bias**: procedures favor incumbent interests; collective action problems over public goods make change difficult
- **Convention**: limited set of ideas and practices

**Sum**: dynamics of stability preserve social order during normal times

Dynamics of instability (revised view, in addition to orthodox)

- **Multifaceted social conditions**: multiple dimensions to issues and multiple uses for resources enable development of alternative ideas and practices
- **Societal heterogeneity**: overlap of networks between groups and organizations (of their activities and interests) generates conflict and novel uses/combinations of conventions
- **Windows of opportunity**: common events can assist change efforts
- **Incomplete victories**: losers remain in play, available to work for change

**Sum**: dynamics of instability generate possibilities for change during normal times

Dynamics of change

- **Orthodox**: fast – shock; slow – trend
- **Revised**: fast – cascade; slow – incremental; control more likely

**Sum**: where adjustments come from pressure, control unlikely; control more likely given dynamics of incremental change and cascade
Chapter Four
Ordinary differences, personal and interpersonal

The previous chapter concluded with an argument for more individual-level foundations to go along with our now expanded catalog of social dynamics. That is, we need to develop our “loose set(s) of psychological laws” – now plural because, for example, some questions may only require “laws” about how people share certain conventions, while for other questions we may want to consider “laws” about how people have (and move between) multiple biographies. Put differently, when considering how to catalog sets of “psychological laws,” we can think of them in three general ways. They can be about people as human beings, who share universal psychological and cognitive characteristics; as social beings, who acquire sets of traits as group members; and as individual beings, who each have a distinct set of characteristics.¹ Social scientists tend to focus on the first and second of these levels, ignoring the third, as it can be too idiosyncratic for generalizations about society and humankind.

An alternative view begins from the observation that as individual beings we can differ from one another in idiosyncratic and systematic ways, which have little or no connection to our status as social beings. The analyst will often need to filter out much (if not all) of the idiosyncratic in order to locate patterns, but ignoring the systematic may hide relevant dynamics. Considering common differences in perception, learning, and connectivity, internal to groups, could reveal that political conditions are more malleable than we may otherwise suppose. There may be intra-group dynamics that could provide

¹ I borrow this three-way distinction from Zerubavel (1997: 5).
means towards controlled agency. If group members regularly develop significantly
different understandings of their social environment, or if there are conflicting available
conventions, and if some have disproportionate influence over their peers, then certain
changes in political behavior could be driven by within-group dynamics, even in the
absence of more general pressure.

**Personal differences**

As suggested by the Polish Ostpolitik example from Chapter 2, there can be
significant differences within groups over the interpretation of conditions, and over what
is seen as desirable and possible for future conditions. People in near identical
circumstances with near identical interests nevertheless held very different definitions of
what their problems were, and therefore what kinds of solutions needed to be sought.
Moreover, these differences seem to have had significant repercussions for political
outcomes. But not only was it important that the small group of Polish activists and
intellectuals include exceptional individuals, it was also important that there be audiences
within the relevant ethnic groups receptive to their message. This is especially true given
the availability of clear, strong alternative messages about historical injustices and hatred
– messages that, if anything, are easier to convey than one of building peaceful relations
based on cooperation and mutual self-sacrifice. Given, then, that differences within
groups of elites and more broad-based groups may be important, we really do need to
distinguish between different sets of psychological laws.
A common finding in behavioral genetics is that, in general, roughly 50 percent of inter-individual variation in behavioral traits (personality and capabilities) is genetic, with most of the rest due to non-shared environment, both physical (as through variance in health and nutrition, affecting development), and especially social (as through interaction with close peers). If variation among individuals within a population or group is significant in a particular case, then, we can expect that the role of genetics and other non-shared factors are also significant. And extensive differences in behavioral traits do commonly emerge, as among siblings, even though they share parents and many elements of the social environment. Moreover, since the variation occurs along specific dimensions, such as temperament and intelligence, we can find patterns in how individuals differ. It is such patterns, in particular, that make the psychology of difference relevant to social analysis. It is not the case, in short, that ordinary differences should be dismissed because they are idiosyncratic.

Nevertheless, not all individual differences are going to be politically relevant; for the purposes of this thesis, for example, they may not affect social dynamics supporting political order and driving political change. So how do we establish which ones are going to be important? One place to start is with the cognitive aspects of stability dynamics, as some of these must be broken for change to occur. In particular, we can think about conventions, the prevalent practices and norms that shape a particular social

---

2 See, e.g., Bouchard et al (1990), Loehlin (1992), Pinker (2002), Plomin et al (2003), Ridley (2003), Sulloway (1996), and Turkheimer (2000). Note that these findings about heritability and non-shared environment are about the variation in behavioral traits. The claim is not that 50 percent of people’s traits, such as intelligence, are inherited, but that 50 percent of the variation is.
order, which leads us to look for – and then catalog – patterns in how people differ in their perception of such characteristics of the social environment.

Ordinary differences in the perception of conditions

One pattern in which individuals differ is over how they regard the existing order. An example of where this difference is politically relevant is how some people are more inclined to favor the status quo, to favor conservative causes, to assume that existing conditions cannot and should not be changed. This is a bias that a number of people are either born with or develop by early adulthood, which in either case can be acquired independent of social environment (parents, class, education, etc.). A tendency to rebel, to question the desirability of existing conditions, to question the status quo, to push for change, to look for and see other better possibilities, and to be more open-minded to different alternatives is also heritable. In other words, a pro- or anti-status quo bias – a general view of the desirability and possibility for social change – can emerge in individuals separate from the influence of stock social science variables, including the ideology of the political group to which individuals belong.

An example from experimental research is that in some collective action tasks, different people with similar social traits consistently react with different levels of cooperation. The information cues do not convey the same information, in the sense that

---

3 To be sure, background and context are important for these sorts of individual qualities too, which is why we must not ignore social dynamics and related characteristics of individuals as social and human beings.
4 For sources on findings listed in this paragraph, see sources listed under Footnote 2 above.
5 It is now a common finding in experimental economics that people cooperate more than rationality models would predict. See Kagel and Roth (1995). Frohlich and Oppenheimer (2003) find that the more "pessimistic" outcomes expected from the literature on free riders (in collective action problems) are both more rare than expected, and driven by the presence of "egoists" when they do occur.
it is received differently, as individuals make consistently different decisions based on their personal notions of fairness, which fall into a range of types from egoist to altruist.

People differ more than in how they feel about information, they also differ in their ability to manage the complexity of social information, and see multiple dimensions of an issue, with potential implications for social-level phenomena. Differences in the ability to derive and process information will affect how people do or do not regard certain kinds of change as desirable and/or possible, which can affect the likelihood that new political conventions can displace old ones. In short, there is evidence to suggest that how people fundamentally understand and feel about their social circumstances can vary significantly from person to person. So, in general, we can catalog ordinary differences in the perception of conditions as patterns of heterogeneous views of change as possible and/or desirable, within social groups.

Ordinary differences in learning capabilities

Analysts who take an orthodox view and rely on shared traits may accept that differences of perception exist but object that, as with ethnic conflict, the important cases are those where conditions are powerfully shaping behavior, and so overwhelming differences. That ordinary differences in perception exist during stable times, in this sense, can be taken as unremarkable. When push comes to shove, when shock or trend forces adjustment, ordinary differences will be overwhelmed by social conditions – they will not be politically relevant. But while it is clear that conditions can be powerful, the

---

6 See, e.g., Rosenberg (2002), and essays in Plomin et al (2003) and Sternberg (2000b). Social conditions can also affect intelligence, but above certain thresholds the effect decreases sharply.
extent they can overwhelm ordinary differences is unclear. Another set of patterns of
difference to consider, then, are differences in how people learn from events.

Certain kinds of experiences tend to affect beliefs and behavior more than others.
The *surprise* generated when one’s expectations about events are suddenly and forcefully
proven wrong is one way for people to learn something new, as shock-adjustment models
of change would predict.\(^7\) An example is the aftermath of the attacks of September 11,
2001, which changed many views of the desirable and possible both inside and outside
the US. At the same time, there are also long-term ways of learning, what we might call
*training*, where over time, repeated experience with some pattern of events and outcomes
turns knowledge about something into belief. This kind of learning is a process of
becoming *expert* in a particular social environment, as basic rules and procedures for a
given domain become second nature.\(^8\)

While both surprise and training are general ways in which people learn from
conditions, identical surprises and courses of training will not produce identical lessons
learned. The September 11 attacks have taught Americans wildly different lessons, some
of which differ along lines of partisanship (as evident by the testimony at and
commentary about the 9/11 hearings ongoing as I write), though others likely do not.
Some of these lessons may be idiosyncratic, but research into the experience and
remembering of trauma suggests that we can expect different general lessons to be
learned from an event like 9/11, even independent of individuals’ social positions.

---

\(^7\) See Kagan (2002).
\(^8\) For research on expertise see Klein (1998).
People tend to react to adversity in three general ways, dividing into “those who were permanently dispirited by the event, those who got their life back to normal, and those who used the experience as a defining event that made them stronger.” Prior experience and genetic factors seem to affect how people react to traumatic experiences such as battle, imprisonment, torture, and child abuse. But whatever the source, the relevance for thinking about individuals as group members – and as users of convention – is that even identical conditions of trauma are not shared. Alongside any similarities, connected to factors like nationality and partisanship, are systematic differences in how people regard their trauma and their post-trauma world, as being, in a sense, something to accept or challenge, as holding constraint or opportunity.

We can also expect differences in patterns of training, of long-term learning about conditions. Lessons learned – be they sudden or gradual – depend on the individual’s prior state, including not only experience and preferences, but also traits shaped significantly by non-social factors. Rosenberg, for example, in his research on how people think about social and political problems, finds general patterns of thought, “differences between people in what they are able to learn and understand.” Basically, he finds that some people stick rigidly to views developed early on; some rely on a small number of trusted sources to learn new ideas, though only simple, black and white ones; while some others are able to see multiple dimensions to issues, and can engage in critique and debate with a possibility of learning new perspectives. These patterns show

---


11 For more on the idea of prior states shaping current thought, see, e.g., Fauconnier and Tuner (2002).

12 Rosenberg (2002: 19).
people to interpret social information in systematically different ways, which is crucial for how people do and – he emphasizes – often do not learn from social stimuli like political information, even when the stakes are high.

As will be touched upon in Chapter 6, accounts of Sicilian show that many residents became expert in living with the mafia, and many of them believed there was either no better way, or no way of getting to a better way. If these conventional practices and beliefs were shared, then we need not bother looking for sources of change lying within the Sicilian population, and yet that is where some key sources originated. Experiencing basically identical surprises and training, a significant number of people learned lessons such that they were open to changes in conventional ideas and behavior. In short, to catalog ordinary differences in learning capabilities, we can note how they may be politically relevant because heterogeneous learning capabilities can be relevant to adoption of new conventions.

**Interpersonal differences**

But, one may object, those who study group dynamics do not expect that everyone be identical, only that enough are similar enough so that groups move as if they were unified – hence the “loose set of psychological laws.” Especially for political competition between groups, should not the role of shared conventions (and related cognitive similarities) render ordinary differences trivial in importance?\(^\text{13}\) Sometimes this would seem reasonable, especially in the midst of intense group conflict, or where the concern is with long-term questions of “macro-history.” But it may also be true that

\(^{13}\) Waldner (2002) would answer that “deterministic” social forces do indeed wash out such differences.
ordinary differences can be politically relevant, for the control of political events of
significant scale and duration. That individual diversity can be important is clearer when
*personal* differences, in *perception of conditions* and *learning from events*, are joined
with *interpersonal* differences in how individuals are connected to, and have influence
over, others.

In most groups there are some whose opinions and actions are more valued and
emulated than others; and there are those who have many more connections than others.
Such differences can matter for change in conventional norms and practices, because if
those who are connected and influential adopt a new idea or practice, it can quickly
spread.¹⁴ And if they also happen to, by nature, lean against the status quo, then they are
more likely to adopt such new practices, which are in turn more likely to spread. For
those trying to bring creative change, the relevance is that the task of converting large
numbers of people to new conventions is reduced to converting a smaller number of the
*right* people.

*Ordinary differences in connections*

As discussed in Chapter 3, people have multiple biographies, they have
memberships in many groups, or at least they may have acquaintances in other groups.
Ordinary people have the “weak ties” studied by Granovetter, they have ties to others in

¹⁴ See Gladwell (2000). See also Barabási (2002) and Buchanan (2002) on the general role of hubs in
networks, as connectors function like network hubs.
different social spheres, and they often make use of these ties for social activities like finding employment or mobilizing for political causes.\textsuperscript{15}

Such weak ties, however, are not distributed uniformly. As such, social dynamics of instability will depend on the distribution of weak ties, on the nature of individuals’ multiple biographies. In other words, the degree to which \textit{multifaceted social conditions}, \textit{societal heterogeneity}, \textit{windows of opportunity}, and \textit{incomplete victories} can be leveraged into political change will depend, in part, upon the extent to which there are social networks along which transmit new information. From one perspective, this is an issue of “emergence,” in that where some communities are characterized by many weak ties, changes in behavior can spread quickly without much concerted effort to generate such a change, if any. But the presence and strength of these ties is not only a matter of numbers of ties, but who are the hubs of these ties. Some individuals come to be far more connected than others, and so can have far more influence on the spread of ideas and practices than others – making their characteristics politically relevant.

The argument is that if these \textit{connectors}, as Gladwell terms them, come to favor a new idea or adopt a new practice, it can quickly spread to many other people. This has implications for our understanding of threshold effects. For if the population were made up of similar people connected to an average number of others, then to achieve a threshold of, say, 20 percent of the population – that is, 20 percent of the population would need to change their behavior before the vast majority of people would consider changing their own – then someone pushing a new practice may have to work to

\textsuperscript{15}See Granovetter (1995).
individually convert a large fraction of that 20 percent. The concept of connectors suggests, instead, that the task can also be achieved by converting a much smaller number of the right people. We can, in short, catalog ordinary differences in connections as about the heterogeneous extent that an individual's actions and ideas are observed by others.

Ordinary differences in influence

But how does a connector come to favor a particular idea or practice in the first place? Gladwell argues that the spread of ideas and practices depends not only on connectors, but also mavens and salesmen. The former are people who collect unusually large amounts of information about things, and who like to tell others about that information. Mavens are the "people we rely upon to connect us with new information."\(^\text{16}\) Salesmen, for their part, are people who are unusually persuasive in getting others to buy into a piece of information, especially when initially reluctant to buy.

While mavens, salesmen, and connectors are all presented as being a normal feature of everyday life, they are not to be taken as average people, as Gladwell presents them as being in the minority. Furthermore, authors like Barabási and Buchanan argue that that the number of really effective network hubs, including connectors, may be very small in number due to a "rich get richer" dynamic, where a small advantage in connectivity can quickly multiply into a big one.\(^\text{17}\) So while mavens, salesmen, and

\(^{\text{16}}\) Gladwell (2000: 59).
\(^{\text{17}}\) See Barabási (2002: 88) and Buchanan (2002: 114-15).
connectors are ordinary elements of social networks, they do have extraordinary roles within those networks. Nevertheless, I treat them as ordinary because they are regular and important parts of a network structure facing anyone working towards creative political change. These network hubs are ordinary in their presence, but because of the relatively small numbers involved, they can manifest themselves in unpredictable patterns, with inordinate influence going to certain individuals. We can catalog ordinary differences in influence, then, as about the heterogeneous extent that actions and ideas are accepted by others.

**Possibilities for control**

There are, in short, a number of ways that ordinary differences could be politically relevant to politics. If differences in how people perceive, learn, and influence are strong and common they may, in the aggregate, add a degree of friction and disorder to everyday politics: incompatible views and activities clash within as well as between movements, trends, and organizations.\(^\text{18}\) In this context of movement we could expect to see everyday forms of innovation, as elements of multifaceted conventions are combined in different ways in new groups. Even where incentives are clearly to capitulate in face of some form of pressure, like mafia extortion, some may have different ideas about what is desirable and possible, be more inclined to try something new (even if costly), and have influence over the ideas and practices of many others.

---

\(^\text{18}\) On social friction and its role in social mechanisms, see Lieberman (2002) and Åkerman (1998). The classic work on social friction is Clausewitz's (1968) discussion of the "haze" or "fog" of war.
Possibilities for change, then, may be closer at hand than implied by more context-based interpretations, where social conditions are portrayed as unidirectional in causing general behavior patterns, and where change comes through some shock or long-term trend. In such views, the status quo holds because conditions are self-reinforcing, creating incentives to persist with convention. But this idea often assumes that individuals understand and respond to social forces similarly, or that enough do. If, instead, there is significant divergence, then the stability may be illusory, at least to a greater extent than we would expect from an orthodox approach.\(^{19}\)

But while differences can add instability and opportunity to any social context, they also add complexities, and thus constraints, for projects aimed at political creativity. The very opportunity for agency opened by dynamics of instability and ordinary differences may add yet more problems for anyone attempting controlled agency. The intentional and effective change required for political creativity may remain implausible. An example like the Polish Ostpolitik one gives reason to believe that political creativity may be possible, but the complexity and constraint implied when considering the relevant social dynamics and individual characteristics makes political creativity seem a rare find – one too rare and “mystical,” perhaps, to be of concern for social science.

**Conclusion**

The cognitive and psychological sciences help with consideration of possibilities for political creativity because they provide material for cataloging potentially important

\(^{19}\) See Baumgartner and Jones (1993) for an argument that political “equilibria” are not equilibria in the formal sense because they are too fragile, and not sufficiently self-reinforcing.
"psychological laws" about processes involved in perception and belief, about how they do and do not change. Some sets of "laws" show how cognitive mechanisms work to preserve existing frameworks. At the same time, however, worldviews come from a mix of formative emotional events and experiences, along with inherited elements of personality. New events and different experiences can alter frameworks, and the basis need not be any great shock: slow-paced learning is another way to change belief, though some people take to learning new social practices more readily than others. So even when facing a group characterized by specific ideas and conventions, individuals wanting to change them may be able to find people within that group whose modes of perception and learning are amenable to change, and to their idea of change. Moreover, by working with salesmen, mavens, and connectors, individuals working towards political creativity may be able to set off a cascade or implement an incremental process of change from one form of conventional social practice to another.

But perhaps this is going too far, perhaps it is assuming too much of people to allow them this much control over people and events. While efforts at social innovation are, according to authors like Jasper (1997), common if not constant, few leave any great mark. The suggestion is that perhaps creative change is best explained by good fortune, not capabilities. When considering factors such as the forces and complexity of social phenomena, redundant or unintended agency seems more likely.
Table 4.1 Microfoundations revisited: a toolset of ordinary differences

Personal differences

- *Perception of conditions*: heterogeneous views of change as possible and/or desirable
- *Learning from events*: heterogeneous capabilities relevant to adoption of new conventions, either through *surprise* or *training*

**Sum**: common differences within groups may generate potential for changes in conventional ideas/practices

Interpersonal differences

- *Connections*: heterogeneous extent actions and opinions observed by others, as with *connectors*
- *Influence*: heterogeneous extent actions and opinions accepted by others, as with *mavens* and *salesmen*

**Sum**: common differences within groups may enable some individuals to lead changes in conventional ideas/practices
Chapter Five
Extraordinary differences versus extraordinary problems, in projects of political creativity

It is not clear if, and if so how, possibilities generated by social dynamics and by ordinary differences can be used towards intentional and effective political change of much scale and duration. When attempts to engineer large-scale political change do leave a mark, the consequences may prove more unintended than anything else. With such projects, failures of political leadership may be more common than successes. There are many attempts at controlled agency, but there may be few achievements of it; and where there are achievements, they are not necessarily controlled. For individuals aspiring to change politics are faced with the complexity of social phenomena, the self-reinforcing nature of many forms of social organization, the frequency of failure and unintended consequences in political action, and the relative ease of guarding the status quo and confounding attempts to change it. Conditions, trends, and shocking events are powerful shapers of conventional practices and beliefs about the desirable and possible. In this context, success may be just as unintended as failure.

Moreover, even where controlled agency may be at work, we may, as social scientists, be unable to find it. The task of picking out patterns of creativity may prove overwhelming: the very diversity of social dynamics and individual characteristics that may enable innovation may prove too chaotic and case-dependent to enable generalization systematic enough for use in social science. To locate political creativity,

---

1 Authors like Joas (1996) and Jervis (1997) argue that unintended consequences are inevitable in social contexts.
2 Some commonly cited works on failure are Halberstam (1972), Khong (1992), and Tuchman (1984).
we need appropriate analytical tools in our catalog, and appropriate ways to organize them if we are to locate political creativity. On one hand, we can use the toolsets of social dynamics and ordinary differences to help specify the kinds of extraordinary problems that efforts at political creativity must overcome. On the other hand, we can look to research on exceptional capabilities (i.e. develop a third toolset, on extraordinary differences) to see if there are types amenable to overcoming extraordinary challenges. And to keep a handle on the interaction of social dynamics and individual characteristics – at least at this stage of building concepts and methods to consider controlled agency – we can limit the focus to long-term projects to change one broad element of the political environment.

**Problems for the aspiring creative**

For the aspiring creative, social dynamics and ordinary differences set constraints to overcome and opportunities to exploit.\(^3\) We can lump constraints and opportunities together in the sense that both will be plagued by problems, at the individual, group, and social level. Based on the first two toolsets, we can specify problems for political creativity-oriented at the individual level. These would include, for example, the power of convention to limit one's own view of the desirable and possible; the difficulties and personal costs of working against self-reinforcing conditions, and the people with interests to preserve those conditions; the effort needed to handle the complexity of working with multifaceted social conditions, and navigating societal heterogeneity; and

---

\(^3\) To be clear, "social dynamics" includes effects of similarities among individuals as human and social beings.
the difficulty of gaining and maintaining influence in a hostile, competitive context, with a status quo bias.

At the group level, problems include the power of convention on the beliefs of others; the difficulty of persuading and coordinating them, given the influence of self-reinforcing social dynamics in general, and status quo bias in particular; and the difficulty of working with them over the long term, as with keeping attention and seeing that new conventions are not forgotten, in a context of competing images, identities, and interests (given multifaceted social conditions, societal heterogeneity, and windows of opportunity for opponents).

At the social level, problems include the difficulty of grasping the multi-dimensionality of political issues, given incomplete victories, multifaceted social conditions, and societal heterogeneity; the inevitability of shocks and unintended consequences for any long-term effort, as generated by windows of opportunity for opponents and incomplete knowledge owing to multifaceted social conditions; and the need to work with institutions and resources geared to preserving the status quo.

Some ordinary differences, as with connections and resilience in face of adversity, should provide advantages when confronting certain social problems. But where the issue is a project for political creativity, and long-term competition over the “rules of the game,” the actors may have to face all the problems listed above and more. In such cases, one or two advantageous traits will be of limited service. Instead, an individual or
team will need an extraordinary confluence of differences, and unusual levels of some of them. The toolsets for social dynamics and ordinary differences give us a general idea of the relevant trait types for such a confluence, by specifying problems confronting projects for creative change. Thus, the other sets do much of the work in locating political creativity. By showing constraints and opportunities facing projects for change, they specify elements that need to be managed for political action to have intended effect, and in this sense lead us to look for certain kinds of individual traits.  

**Extraordinary differences**

To be clear, when considering issues of agency, we need to keep track of research on traits liable to cause mistakes and failures. We have an extensive literature on how decision-making, and even “genius,” goes bad. It is in part to balance research on limits and failures that this thesis focuses more on ways people do things well, but this is not to dismiss so-called “negative” psychology. Along with orthodox views of social stability and change, and related concepts about individual similarity, such negative psychology is assumed already in the catalog of analytical tools. In this dissertation, however, the focus is on making room in social science for politically relevant positive psychology.

---

4 If the reader is still unsure as to why I labor to avoid using the word leadership, note that it is only now, in Chapter 5, that the subject matter of leadership studies is finally on the table. They do have a role to play, and in future developments of this work I will make more extensive use of leadership studies. For this dissertation, however, I have found it more useful to come at the issue of controlled agency from a different angle of attack.

5 Much of the “heuristics and biases” school of decision-making research shows how people tend to misperceive conditions: they make faulty inferences, poor risk assessments, misbegotten analogies, etc. See, e.g., Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky (1982) and Kahneman and Tversky (2000). For a recent work on “when genius failed,” see Lowenstein (2000).

6 Because of the emphasis on traits that enable more control of social events, this thesis could be considered as falling within “positive psychology,” as developed by Seligman and his colleagues (for an example, see Seligman 1991). At the same time, I write in a context where the psychology borrowed for political analysis is often of the “negative” variety, and my intent is to provide balance, not a substitute. See Easterbrook (2001).
Mindset

One relevant category of traits is *mindset*, which I catalog as *level of willingness to take on extraordinary problems at the individual, group, and social level*. Mindset is related to, and so extends, the common concern in social science with *preference*, in that when we think of actors behaving rationally, the idea is that they try to choose the options that best meet their preferences, given the information they have. Presumably where individuals have stronger preferences, they will work harder to overcome problems in the way of satisfying such preferences. This idea is too vague, however, to provide leverage on possibilities for creativity. We need, instead, to “tighten” our “loose set of psychological laws” further.

Given the level of problems faced by individuals aiming at creativity, it is useful to include more detail, of uncommon motivation, of resilience to adversity, of persistence, of patience, and of obsession, albeit of a controlled kind. This is not a random list: these traits link to *problems* generated by socio-political conditions, flagged by the *social dynamics* and *ordinary differences* toolsets. Given the individual, group, and social-level *problems* listed above, we can deduce types of mindset that could be relevant to overcoming such barriers. I come up with five types, but regard this as a first cut at developing a toolset for extraordinary differences.

Mindsets are important for considering *willingness*, in how some have (1) the motivation to launch a project against the status quo and its defenders, given the
likelihood of high personal costs; (2) the resilience to accept setbacks without conceding defeat; (3) the persistence to work on long-term, incremental forms of change; (4) the patience to wait for better opportunities; and (5) the obsession to stay focused on a problem for the long term, but with the self-control that may be necessary, for example, to enable alliance building, and avoid triggering too much counterattack. Again, this is not to be taken as the definitive list of mindsets. As our catalog of analytical tools develops, so might our list of (potentially) politically relevant mindsets. One way to develop this toolset is to see whether these five mindset types help us make sense of real-world events. Chapters 6 through 9 of this thesis provide some brief demonstrations of how to use the extraordinary differences toolset, and in the process suggest that it is feasible and reasonable to take this analytical approach.

Another way to develop the toolset is to gather research from the cognitive and psychological sciences. As suggested in the previous chapter, elements of character traits like mindset can vary significantly within groups – the point here being that mindsets not only vary but do so radically. General studies of those who achieve high levels of creativity commonly focus on mindset elements: “motivation that stems from the individual’s personal involvement in the work … is crucial for high levels of creativity in any domain.”7 Here we can think back to the reference in the opening passage of the Preface to Baltasar Garzon’s supposed “megalomania,” and note how certain kinds of extreme personality trait may be politically relevant to possibilities for change. In this light, research into other “abnormal” conditions is useful for developing the catalog of

extraordinary differences, such as conditions where people exhibit abnormal
determination and dedication when it comes to working on domains of interest.  

In short, variation in mindset may be politically relevant because the willingness
to take on difficult problems can be crucial for certain projects for political creativity.
Creativity is in part defined as going contrary to prevailing conditions and conventional
ideas of the desirable and possible. In the case of working to remove the Sicilian mafia
from political, economic, and social life (discussed in the next chapter), one of the
prevailing conditions was that you were likely to die for doing so. That some people
were nonetheless willing to take on the project and its problems, that they would step into
positions of assassinated predecessors, that they would continue to work after failed
attempts to kill them is remarkable, as is that their work was for the most part done with
little-to-no support (from Rome, from superiors, from peers, or from the public).

Aptitude

When facing the problems of social dynamics and of ordinary differences,
however, extraordinary motivation will only go so far. A preference to change the
political order will have little bearing on outcomes if there is not some capability to
understand conditions, formulate plans, and take effective action. Mindsets, then, must
be accompanied by relevant aptitudes, which I catalog as levels of ability to solve
extraordinary problems at the individual, group, and social level.

---

8 One example is research into Asperger’s Syndrome. See Baron-Cohen (1995), Morton (2001), and
Silberman (2001). Indeed, of late there is something of a cottage industry of studies looking for signs of
Asperger’s in historical figures of exceptional genius or creativity. See, e.g., Muir (2003) for a review of
some of this work. Evidently Einstein and Newton both showed symptoms of Asperger’s Syndrome.
When traits are assumed similar, as in the orthodox view, how some individuals are able to perform tasks is sometimes tied to position: if someone has attained a place in the political system, we might assume they have a certain skill level. But where the issue is competition over the shape of the system itself, such assumptions limit our view of the possible, which may depend on differences in capability. These can include uncommon open-mindedness, intelligence, expertise, insight, influence, and adaptability – all of which are traits deduced as politically relevant given the kinds of problems suggested by the toolsets of social dynamics and ordinary differences discussed above.

Aptitudes can matter for how some have (1) the open-mindedness to question convention and to look to improve upon it; (2) the intelligence to derive an exceptional understanding of the possible given a set of conditions (including social dynamics and ordinary differences); (3) the expertise to navigate the political order, as to attain and keep a position from which to engineer a project to change that order; (4) the insight to find ways to bypass or turn conventions and institutions (geared to preserving the existing order) towards novel uses; (5) the influence to persuade and coordinate others and keep their attention; and (6) the adaptability to recognize dead ends and shift strategy. As with mindsets, this list of aptitudes should not be considered complete; indeed, the same is true of social dynamics and ordinary differences. Nonetheless, all lists are to be taken as extensive expositions of both the formatting and content of the overall analytical approach – extensive enough to initiate initial trials in case study research, as suggested by Chapters 6 through 9.

---

9 Rabushka and Shepsle (1972) is an explicit statement of this position-as-proxy-for-skill assumption.
For developing the catalog of *aptitudes*, from the cognitive and psychological research side, we can focus on research about the use and communication of information, given that the six types listed above deal with considerations like understanding conditions, and working with conventions. Relevant, then, is work on intelligence.\(^{10}\) Neuroscience is shedding more light on the subject, supporting the validity of intelligence as a concept in general, and of certain methods of testing in particular.\(^{11}\) As with other character traits, the common finding is that roughly half of inter-individual variation in intelligence is owing to heredity, the other half to environmental factors.\(^{12}\) There is also rapidly growing research into specifying different types of intelligence, some of which hold more potential of being politically relevant than others. Here we could note research into “social intelligence,” for example, which “encompasses our abilities to interpret others’ behaviour in terms of mental states (thoughts, intentions, desires and beliefs), to interact both in complex social groups and in close relationships, to empathize with others’ states of mind, and to predict how others will feel, think and behave.”\(^{13}\)

It would seem that the success of Gladwell’s “salesmen,” those who try to persuade the reluctant or the disinterested to buy into a new idea or practice, would

---

\(^{10}\) See, e.g., Sternberg and O’Hara (1999), who write that many scholars of the subject regard intelligence and creativity as overlapping. Sternberg (2000a) notes, though, problems with the term “intelligence,” with many analysts talking past each other, and with a lack of consensus on certain dimensions. Brody (2000: 30-31) says, “We know how to measure something called intelligence, but we do not know what has been measured. We do know that whatever has been measured is predictive of performance in academic settings. And, we know that what we have measured is influenced by a person’s genes.” Davidson and Downing’s (2000: 47) review does, though, trace some common aspects in several major contemporary models of intelligence: “adaptability of cognitive processes,” along with facility in information processing.


\(^{12}\) See, e.g., Grigorenko (1999: 690).

depend on their social intelligence. Cognitive ability is not sufficient for creativity, but given the importance of interpreting conditions and defining problems, significant differences are a relevant consideration. In this sense, it seems wise to include among our analytical tools a range of evidence relevant for thinking about, and showing, how some people are (or at least become) innately and sometimes radically more capable at certain kinds of information processing than others.

Such variation in aptitudes is politically relevant because the ability to take on difficult problems could be crucial for certain projects for political creativity. In the case of Chinese Village Council elections (discussed in Chapter 8), some accounts show the civil servants in charge of the effort having to deal with every level of government, factions within each level, factions within factions, a maze of bureaucratic and political procedures, periodic crackdowns on political reformers (especially post-Tiananmen), varying social conditions at the local level, opposition from local party cadres, cynicism among villagers and local officials, and more. Given the litany of problems facing any effort at political reform in China, the story of Village Council elections is notable for the orderliness in which reforms have been implemented and extended. This case suggests that controlled agency may be at work, and if it is, given the problems involved, the aptitudes of reformers could be key to the political changes. The ability demonstrated in a case like this, where individuals recognize and work with a complex political system, can speak to how we think about the politically possible, about how individuals may behave under particular kinds of social conditions.
Applying the toolsets to case studies

In tracing through the history of a case, the tool set for extraordinary differences provides a way to judge events. If we are satisfied that the sets for social dynamics and ordinary differences have provided a reasonable picture of the kinds of problems facing reformers, we would expect to see certain traits and activities involved with solutions— or absence of the same in failures—to solve the problems, and see them repeatedly and/or persistently over time. If, on the other hand, we do not see extraordinary differences, and yet problems get “solved” all the same, then there is some reason to believe that this is not a case of political creativity.

A general way to think about applying the three-toolset approach (3TSA) is through a series of steps. Someone coming from a background in psychology or leadership studies may want to start by applying the toolset for ordinary differences, and someone grounded in leadership studies may prefer to start with extraordinary differences. Since this thesis is aimed at a social science audience which is used to focusing upon the effects of social conditions, a useful place to start is from an orthodox approach to get a general idea of the forces in play. But the next step should be to look for dynamics of instability to derive a fuller understanding of the social dynamics. We should also check for dynamics within the groups of interest by looking for ordinary differences. Once we have a fuller picture of inter- and intra-group dynamics, then, we can move to consider what kinds of problems face individuals interested to change (or to stop a process of change in) the political order. With those problems in hand we can then
consider the kind of politically relevant traits that could enable political creativity, and check to see if they are present.

Developing the catalog of analytical tools, though, is not a one-way affair of taking research about and models of social dynamics and individual characteristics, and applying them to cases. The application to case studies should, in turn, help us understand what is and is not politically relevant, as well as what kind of analytical tools we need in our catalog. Psychology and cognitive science can provide insight into how social dynamics and individual characteristics could combine towards political stability, instability, and change. But insight into how characteristics do combine requires historical case studies, amenable to investigating how politically relevant traits interact with social conditions. Projects for political creativity provide the amenable cases, and the three toolsets provide guidance for investigation of them.

This project oriented approach shares some characteristics with Haydu’s “reiterated problem solving” framework for comparative historical analysis. He argues that by envisioning cases as long-term sequences of events, we gain analytical advantages in that the approach “provides a plausible way to represent and account for historical trajectories; it builds social actors and multiple causal time lines into the explanatory account; and it offers a richer sense of how earlier outcomes shape later ones.”14 An example he uses is the battle over time between management and unions over the shape of American industrial relations.

Where I differ somewhat from Haydu is in how I view the nature of the “problem.” In his approach, the view is to locate some enduring social problem, then examine over time who tries to address that problem, how, and to what effect. My view, instead, is to locate specific individuals working over the long term on what they perceive to be a significant social problem. In this sense, some of the projects I would be interested in observing may not fit in Haydu’s category of “problems.” One potential way that those working on creative projects may differ from their peers is that they define problems and regard conditions in radically different ways than most other people, in which case it may not be accurate to label the issue an enduring social problem.

Nevertheless, the general logic of analysis I offer is similar to Haydu, with the hope of reaping similar benefits. By following projects over the long-term, the advantage should be the ability to see how dynamics of stability and change interact with efforts to change politics; how ordinary people respond to efforts at creativity; and how opponents of change mobilize defenses. In this way we can better see whether reformers move in lockstep with changes in social conditions, or whether they work against such forces, especially given their focus on changing a particular aspect of the political. Looking at projects for creative change, and concentrating on the form and timing of events and outcomes along the way, allows us to bring the interaction of individual and social to the foreground. Such “process tracing” makes issues of biased case selection less relevant, as it is more about “within-case” analysis, and as any extended project will have both successes and failures, and to differing degrees.15

---

15 For more on process tracing, see George and Bennett (forthcoming). On within-case analysis, see several essays in Brady and Collier (2004), especially the discussions of “causal process observations.”
Following a sequence of events within a particular case, on its own, does not provide much analytical leverage. Gerring, for example, argues that while useful as a tool, process tracing is under-specified and so not properly seen as a method. He therefore lumps it in with a series of other terms such as narrative explanation, the historical method, and ethnography.\textsuperscript{16} Advocates of process tracing, however, note that it is not to be used as an independent method, but is to be guided by theory and by what we know about other cases.\textsuperscript{17} In a nutshell, the 3TSA is to serve as such a guide. So there is a second way in which I depart from Haydu, perhaps, in that I argue not only for choosing certain kinds of cases (taking sequences of problems solving as a unit of analysis), but for applying a certain set of analytical tools to those cases, at least if we are to locate possibilities for political creativity.

\textbf{Conclusion}

A question I have in mind in developing the category of extraordinary differences is to wonder what people can do with political conditions, and not just within them. We have plenty of scholarship to show that individuals can generate unintended consequences, that they can reproduce the existing order, that they can be a conduit for the rapid spread of new conventions, and even that they can on occasion take advantage of opportunities presented by the social environment, and control events at a small scale and short duration. The controlled agency required for political creativity, however, is a step beyond. I argue that the social and psychological sciences, which account for why

\textsuperscript{16} See Gerring (2001: 195, 201 fn.2).
\textsuperscript{17} See George and Bennett (forthcoming), especially Chapter 10 and 11.
some people aiming to transform politics have redundant or unintended effect, can also suggest traits that would enable a degree of control over circumstances. By bringing together a fuller spectrum of social dynamics and individual characteristics, fuller than normally used in the orthodox approach to stability and change, we can get a detailed sense of the problems facing projects for political creativity. Then, by considering research into extraordinary individual differences we can imagine ways in which such problems can be overcome. This theoretical possibility for political creativity needs, however, to be verified through historical case study.
Table 5.1. Summary of the three toolsets for analyzing political events

**Toolset 1: social dynamics**

Dynamics of stability (orthodox view)
- **Self-reinforcing**: adjusting to order reinforces it; winners have incentive to preserve it
- **Status quo bias**: procedures favor incumbent interests; collective action problems over public goods make change difficult
- **Convention**: limited set of ideas and practices

Dynamics of instability (revised view, in addition to orthodox)
- **Multifaceted social conditions**: multiple dimensions to issues and multiple uses for resources enable development of alternative ideas and practices
- **Societal heterogeneity**: overlap of/networks between groups and organizations (of their activities and interests) generates conflict and novel uses/combinations of conventions
- **Windows of opportunity**: common events can assist change efforts
- **Incomplete victories**: losers remain in play, available to work for change

Dynamics of change
- **Orthodox**: fast – shock; slow – trend; adjustments under pressure; control unlikely
- **Revised**: fast – cascade; slow – incremental; control more likely

**Problem**: assumptions of individual similarity used to understand social phenomena mask intra-group dynamics, which could be important in possibilities for political change

**Solution**: extend use of “psychological laws” to cover ordinary differences within groups

**Toolset 2: ordinary differences**

Personal differences
- **Perception of conditions**: heterogeneous views of change as possible and/or desirable
- **Learning from events**: heterogeneous capabilities relevant to adoption of new conventions

Interpersonal differences
- **Connections**: heterogeneous extent actions and opinions observed by others
- **Influence**: heterogeneous extent actions and opinions accepted by others

**Problem**: unclear if/how constraints and opportunities generated by social dynamics and ordinary differences can be managed towards intentional, effective change

**Solution**: extend use of “psychological laws” to cover extraordinary differences

**Toolset 3: extraordinary differences**

**Mindset differences**
- **Willingness** to take on extraordinary problems at individual, group, and social level

**Aptitude differences**
- **Ability** to solve extraordinary problems at individual, group, and social level

**Problem**: theoretical possibility of extraordinary control does not mean real possibility

**Solution**: apply toolsets to historical case studies of projects for political creativity

115
Table 5.2 Potential politically relevant mindsets

Mindsets

There are problems generated by socio-political conditions for efforts at political creativity, flagged by the social dynamics and ordinary differences toolsets. Mindsets are important for considering willingness to confront these problems over time.

(1) **Problem**: high personal costs of working against self-reinforcing conditions and status quo bias, and the people with interests to preserve those conditions.

**Potentially relevant mindset**: the motivation to launch a project against the status quo and its defenders, given the likelihood of high personal costs.

(2) **Problem**: setbacks generated by complexity of social conditions (multifaceted, societal heterogeneity, incomplete victories, personal/interpersonal differences, etc.) and opportunities for opponents (windows of opportunity).

**Potentially relevant mindset**: the resilience to accept setbacks without conceding defeat.

(3) **Problem**: controlled change may require long-term work on training, and working with incremental processes of change.

**Potentially relevant mindset**: the persistence to work on long-term, incremental forms of change.

(4) **Problem**: may be few windows of opportunity for significant victories when working against self-reinforcing dynamics, status quo bias, and conventional belief/practice.

**Potentially relevant mindset**: the patience to wait for better opportunities.

(5) **Problem**: launching projects against convention and status quo bias may quickly trigger crackdown, or mobilize powerful opposition.

**Potentially relevant mindset**: obsession to stay focused on a problem for the long term, but with the self-control that may be necessary, for example, to enable alliance building, and avoid triggering too much counterattack.
Table 5.3 Potential politically relevant aptitudes

Aptitudes

There are *problems* generated by socio-political conditions for efforts at political creativity, flagged by the *social dynamics* and *ordinary differences* toolsets. *Aptitudes* are important for considering *ability* to confront these problems over time.

(1) **Problem**: power of *self-reinforcing dynamics, status quo bias, convention* to limit views of the desirable and possible  
**Potentially relevant mindset**: the open-mindedness to question convention and to look to improve upon it.

(2) **Problem**: complexity and power of social conditions (*multifaceted, societal heterogeneity, incomplete victories, self-reinforcing dynamics, personal/interpersonal differences*, etc.) make very difficult to imagine different, feasible possibilities  
**Potentially relevant mindset**: the intelligence to derive an exceptional understanding of the possible given a set of conditions (including social dynamics and ordinary differences).

(3) **Problem**: difficulty of gaining and keeping a position of influence given, and incentives of those in power who gain from *status quo bias* and *self-reinforcing dynamics*  
**Potentially relevant mindset**: the expertise to navigate the political order, as to attain and keep a position from which to engineer a project to change that order.

(4) **Problem**: difficulty of getting people to change ideas/practices given power of *convention, etc.*  
**Potentially relevant mindset**: the insight to find ways to bypass or turn conventions and institutions (geared to preserving the existing order) towards novel uses.

(5) **Problem**: difficulty of getting and keeping support for long-term *training*, given multiple demands on individuals (*societal heterogeneity*) and incentives to follow *convention*  
**Potentially relevant mindset**: the influence to persuade and coordinate others and keep their attention.

(6) **Problem**: the difficulty of building effective strategy over the long-term given power of *social dynamics of stability* and complexity of *social dynamics of instability*  
**Potentially relevant mindset**: the adaptability to recognize dead ends and shift strategy.
Chapter Six
A demonstration of the three-toolset approach: the Italian antimafia campaign

Up to this point, the goal has been to develop theory and method to give us more leverage on discerning the interaction of structure and agency. In particular, the idea has been find a theoretical place for controlled agency, a kind of social activity directed at intentionally and effectively changing social conditions. Specifically, I am interested in the possibility of political creativity, where there is controlled transformation of the political structure. Considering together social dynamics, ordinary differences, and extraordinary differences indicates what political creativity could look like, in the sense of giving us specific kinds of problems to look for, and traits along with related patterns of behavior that might be useful for overcoming such barriers to projects for political creativity.

The question I turn to now is whether this picture is realistic, whether there is evidence in political events of the dynamics and traits posited to enable political creativity. A primary goal for the remaining chapters is to show that the theory makes empirical sense, that it provides plausible means to make sense of important events, especially with respect to discerning the interaction of social conditions and individual activity – the interaction between structure and agency. A recurring concern in this dissertation is the issue of finding empirical indicators of social processes and related psychological “laws” at the individual level. The theory must not only make empirical sense, but practical empirical sense; it must be applicable to studies of a range of political circumstances, it must travel well.
This chapter presents the most extensive application of the three toolsets of all the empirical chapters, in part because of the problems for creativity in this case are so numerous and extreme, making it easier to see the application of the 3TSA. Other chapters focus more on certain elements rather than the whole approach. The antimafia campaign in Italy is useful because it features some individuals – Giovanni Falcone and Leoluca Orlando in particular – who, according to some accounts, recognized and worked with the constraints and opportunities we would expect to find by applying the three toolsets. These individuals set out on a long-term project to remove the mafia from social, economic, and political life in Sicily in particular, and Italy in general. They recognized that it would be a long-term, dangerous project that would require persistence, including incremental work during stable times to create and/or prepare for a break in ordinary social conditions. And they recognized that much of this would involve locating and retraining, so to speak, a number of the right ordinary people.

My interest in the antimafia campaign was sparked by Gambetta’s take on Italian attitudes towards mafia organizations in Sicily:

Until a few years ago, everyone believed that the Sicilians actively liked the mafia and considered it as a legitimate authority … all agreed on one thing: This is the way things are, and that nothing could be done or was worth doing. This gravely hampered the fight to eradicate the mafia. … As soon as all the most important

---

1 Sometimes the word mafia is used to denote Italian organized crime in general. Here it only refers to the Sicilian brand, and is used interchangeably with Cosa Nostra (‘our thing’). See, e.g., Jamieson (2000: xv).
mafiosi ended up in jail, and the government determination became credible enough to reassure Sicilians that the bosses were not only jailed but were likely to stay there for life, the mood shifted dramatically. Even in villages where the mafia was rife, new left-wing antimafia politicians have been elected and have received much more support than ... would have [been] predicted.²

Here, it seems, is an orthodox punctuated equilibrium kind of social change: a stable order with one set of conventions about the desirable and possible, then some sort of rupture followed by a new set of conventions, in the sense of a shift from assuming to challenging the mafia presence. But there are reasons to look deeper than an orthodox view would suggest. For one thing, there is this mention of “the fight to eradicate the mafia,” which had been in existence well before the dramatic shift in “mood.” A question to ask is who in their right mind, especially when the mafia was so deeply entrenched, would fight to eradicate them? We could dismiss them as crackpots, but where the interest is the interaction of structure and agency, it is reasonable to look closer.

Another reason to look deeper is Gambetta’s reference to “government determination,” which seems at odds with an orthodox view of change, at least when it comes to building it. Both changing government determination, and especially persuading ordinary people of that change, seems like an incremental process that could be shaped by controlled agency. And it would be agency faced with problems for creativity generated by social dynamics and individual diversity. It may be that shocks

and trends explain many events in this case. Nevertheless, it is a promising place to start, to see whether the theory about the interaction of structure and agency, and the analytical approach developed here make sense when applied to empirical case studies.

**Short history**

As soon as the shops closed, the streets would empty and people would hurry home. A claustral sense of dread and insecurity hung over Palermo like a pall, and even in the warm months, there was very little nightlife ... no lingering in the streets or sitting at trattorias, none of that wonderful outdoor vivacity which renders the long, warm evening of Mediterranean cities so charming.  

Following the Second World War, mafia clans based in Sicilian towns and neighborhoods developed collective organizational structures. In this sense, it is accurate to speak of *the* mafia as a whole, especially for dealings with government and the law, and for division of particular industries, legal and otherwise. It is this more organized stage that precedes Gambetta’s change in conditions, when mafia families were a “legitimate authority,” or in Jamieson’s words, a “state-within-a-state.”

---

4 Lupo (2000) focuses on how post-war developments worked in favor of the mafia. See also Chapter 8 of Blok (1988), though it is somewhat dated, coming before the discovery of inter-clan cooperation. See Tilly (1988) for a strong critique of the “myth” of *the* mafia as a collective organization. For much of its history as a phenomenon, the present consensus seems to be that there was, as Tilly argues, no unity and no large-scale coordination. Mafia clans were local and independent, though some powerful bosses would have influence beyond their own territories. The clans behaved similarly, and so a single term was appropriate to think about the phenomenon. But over time they did develop peak associations to coordinate certain kinds of activity, and in this sense, the mafia became its myth. See Gambetta (1993), Ginsborg (1990, 2001), Jamieson (2000), Orlando (2001), Robb (1996), and Stille (1995).
Rome has typically done little to change this state of affairs. There have been periodic crackdowns in reaction to upswings in violence, but any criminal proceedings went nowhere. The Antimafia Commission of 1963-76, produced extensive documentation about mafia activity, all of which “was left to gather dust in parliamentary archives.”6 But then owing to problems with terrorism and the economy, the long-dominant Christian Democrat Party (DC) lost ground in the 1975 elections, and some in Sicily saw this as opportunity to change the party from within. One of these was Piersanti Mattarella, who became president of the region in 1978. His team went after budget procedures and building standards that favored mafia businesses, and sought investment from the North and abroad – all unprecedented maneuvers.

But public attention was elsewhere, as with the Red Brigades kidnapping and killing of President Aldo Moro. In this context, the mafia flourished and they soon moved to quiet Mattarella’s campaign by killing him.7 He was one of the earlier victims of a general mafia campaign to target threatening, or at least vocal, members of the political, legal, or law enforcement class. It was a campaign of “excellent cadavers” or “illustrious corpses.”8 They did not, however, entirely stop the trickle of reformers into positions of influence. A Mattarella ally, Leoluca Orlando, successfully ran for Municipal Council in Palermo. And a few others were gaining ground in the Palermo

---

Palace of Justice, one being Giovanni Falcone, who took his first mafia case in 1980, and who proved unusually effective in gathering evidence and prosecuting cases.\footnote{Paolo Borsellino is another key magistrate. I do not include him here for lack of space.}

The mafia responded by killing the head prosecutor in Palermo, Gaetano Costa. But this time assassination proved less effective in silencing threats to the mafia as now there was greater public attention to issues of crime, especially regarding spikes in drug use and in violence, both of which involved the mafia. Regarding violence in particular, one clan from the town of Corleone was moving to wrest control of Sicilian organized crime by systematically murdering members of other families.\footnote{Jamieson (2000: 30).} Further, it seemed that the Italian government was in a new position of strength against organized crime. Given how the Red Brigades had been defeated in a drive led by General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, there seemed to be an available model of state action. And there were widely broadcast demands that it be used against the mafia. Communist Pio La Torre led the call for action in Rome, and Dalla Chiesa was sent to Sicily. In quick succession, however, both men were assassinated, having brought little real change in Rome’s approach.

Nevertheless, there was some movement in Sicily itself. Funerals, such as Dalla Chiesa’s, became events where widows, a few priests, and some protest groups would publicly, and sometimes literally, attack Italian politicians, accusing them of inaction and complicity. Yet the funerals became more frequent. In July 1983, Falcone’s boss was the next to die, though this was still not enough to quiet the Palermo Palace of Justice. The replacement, Antonino Caponetto, carried the effort forward, working to make the
most of limited resources in prosecuting Cosa Nostra. Moreover, with new, sympathetic ministers of Justice and the Interior, Rome finally provided the Palermo team with resources and security.

Successes followed: 1984 brought the first mafia boss willing to inform, and 1986 saw the first “maxi-trial,” against nearly five hundred defendants. The DC was stung when some of its own were among the arrested. So in 1985, for the position of mayor of Palermo, they nominated an avowed mafia opponent from within their ranks, Leoluca Orlando, who proved unusually vocal and persistent in his opposition to the mafia. But when police killed a mafioso during interrogation, the ensuing scandal erased some of the public goodwill built up by Orlando, Falcone, and their allies. Unemployed workers staged pro-mafia rallies, the local newspaper intensified its support of the mafia and opposition to the magistrates, and the archbishop of Palermo (once an ally) came out against the maxi-trial. Moreover, the police scandal resulted in many officers being transferred elsewhere, and as Cosa Nostra continued targeted killing of some among those who remained, the Palermo police force remained in a weakened state for years.

It was in this context of setbacks that the magistrates were able to launch the first maxi-trial. Even with the initial excitement generated by the mass of arrests and the spectacle of so many “men of honor” behind bars in the specially build “bunker” courtroom, the mafia soon dropped from the agenda in Rome. Even in Sicily there

\[11\] At that time, the mayor was not directly elected, but appointed by the dominant party (or coalition). The DC still had enough presence to nominate mayor, and Orlando was selected to repair the party’s tainted image.
seemed to be growing apathy about the trial, aided by a coordinated suspension of violence on the part of the mafia.

The trial ended in December 1987, with guilty verdicts for 344 defendants. Given Falcone's prominent role in this success, and with his boss moving on, he seemed next in line to head the Palermo Palace of Justice. But infighting in at the top levels of the judiciary meant otherwise.\textsuperscript{12} Worse for Falcone’s cause, the man chosen instead, Antonio Meli, had no experience with mafia cases and no interest in guidance from the Palermo team – in fact, he dismantled it. Moreover, Supreme Court Judge Corrado Carnevale, the so-called “sentence killer,” overturned almost every mafia case that came before him on appeal. By early 1989, most convicted in the maxi-trial were out of jail, albeit many of them were out awaiting a final verdict. And the stream of informers was drying up as well: the cooperation of witnesses seemed to vary with signals of judicial capability and government determination, and at this time both were looking weak.\textsuperscript{13}

In this context, Falcone still managed to produce results, albeit by shifting to problems like the drugs trade, which were less directly threatening to the mafia and which were more likely to get support from Rome, given that the mafia’s political connections were not targeted. But this strategy still hit at mafia finances, and so Falcone remained a target. One assassination attempt was of particular note because it bore traces

\textsuperscript{12} Even such local positions are decided by votes in the national High Council of the Judiciary, which governs recruitment, promotion, and discipline procedures. It was there that Falcone lost the vote.\textsuperscript{13} Burnett and Mantovani (1998: 41) argue that, “the willingness of pentiti [informers] to talk to the magistrates depended on their view as to whether the Italian State was really committed to the struggle, would support the magistrates, and had any chance at all of winning some battles, if not the war.”
of involvement of people high up in government, possibly including Andreotti.\(^\text{14}\) Falcone had been working under threat of death for years, but his belief about high-level political involvement shook his confidence. His response was to reverse track, back off all investigations of politicians, and look for allies in Rome – an unpopular move among his colleagues. Meanwhile, Orlando was having his own problems. In 1991 Andreotti became prime minister for the seventh time, and one of his first acts was to turn the Sicilian DC against Orlando. As with Falcone, the key source of problems seemed to lay in Rome, and Orlando’s response also disappointed friends: he left Palermo and the DC, and founded a national-level reform movement, winning a seat in parliament.

Ongoing mafia violence, however, was back on the political agenda, and to address the public outcry, Andreotti appointed Socialist Claudio Martelli his minister of Justice, who in turn chose Falcone as director of penal affairs. Falcone’s friends lamented his acceptance as surrender or at least naivety, since Martelli had been a vocal critic of Orlando, as well as a leader of a 1987 campaign to reign in the magistrates. But this new partnership quickly produced results. Carnevale had been freeing prisoners under a new law limiting the time anyone could be held prior to sentencing, so Falcone and Martelli created an exception for dangerous ones, which landed a number of mafia back in prison: “It was an important signal that reversed the atmosphere of indifference and defeatism in Palermo almost overnight.”\(^\text{15}\) The two intervened in judicial appointments, created specialized regional prosecutor offices, and worked to set up an Italian FBI and a national-level antimafia super-prosecutor position.

\(^\text{14}\) The lethal combination of being dangerous to the mafia and politically isolated was discussed publicly both by Falcone and Dalla Chiesa before their murders. See Jamieson (2000: xvi, 26).
In the event, the Supreme Court upheld the maxi-trial convictions, evidently a shock to mafia leaders as they had expected Carnevale to ensure no such outcome would occur. But then the eruption of the Tangentopoli (Bribesville) scandal overshadowed these antimafia achievements, and the story that came to dominate national media attention was now the Operation Clean Hands prosecutions led by a small group of magistrates in Milan. The Operation revealed a remarkable amount of political corruption in Italy, and while mafia connections to politicians was part of the story, Tangentopoli was more about the main political parties and many of their most well known members. As a result, Andreotti stepped down and called for elections in April 1992. But as there was no clear winner the result was political gridlock, such as the inability to elect a new president. Meanwhile, Martelli and the judiciary were locked in stalemate over the possible creation of an antimafia super-prosecutor position. Falcone saw the governmental gridlock and the national attention on political infighting as an opening for the mafia, who saw it the same way: in late May, they killed Falcone on one of his weekend trips home to Sicily.

Many people in Palermo had long shown resistance to the magistrates’ efforts, but Falcone’s murder inspired a spectrum of citizens, broader than anything before, to voice support for the antimafia campaign. Besides demonstrations, “a new phenomenon sprang up: people started hanging bedsheets out their windows with slogans of protest or

---

16 Under public pressure, the Italian Supreme Court had removed Carnevale from the case.
17 See Koff and Koff (2000: 175-78); Chapter 8 of McCarthy (1995b); and Burnett and Mantovani (1998).
18 President is a mostly ceremonial position that does come, though, with the power to select a prime minister.
grief.”  Individuals were giving up the anonymous safety of crowds to express their resistance. The state, for its part, passed legislation desired and designed by Falcone, and sent in the army to help with security and free up Sicilian police for investigative work. In this context of government determination, hundreds of mafia turned themselves in, and hundreds more, on the run for years, were finally “found” and arrested – sometimes right in downtown Palermo. It was also at this time that the Pope, for the first time, spoke out extensively and unequivocally against the Cosa Nostra. And continuing public pressure, especially in Sicily, kept Rome from quickly turning away as it had before.

By 1994, the DC and Socialist parties were no more because of the Tangentopoli fallout, Orlando was back as mayor of Palermo, and even the town of Corleone elected a reform slate. As for the legal front, by 1995, more than 6,000 politicians, executives, and civil servants were being investigated for involvement with the mafia. And “in two years, arrests in southern Italy went up by 46 percent and the murder rate in all of Italy went down by 42 percent.” In 2001, Orlando wrote in his memoir:

The Mafia no longer rules us. It is outside our local government now. Palermo is no longer a pariah among cities. When Moody International Certification recently gave us one of its highest issuer ratings, Aa3, the same as Stockholm and

---

21 See Orlando (2001: 175-6). The mafia responded by killing a priest and setting off a bomb near a church in Rome. See Jamieson (2000: 137-8) for the Pope’s stances regarding the mafia. She notes that while he did urge bishops to support the antimafia effort in 1981, when he finally visited Sicily in 1982, he “did not pronounce the words against the Mafia which appeared in the text distributed to journalists.” The Church was largely silent again on the subject until 1991.
Barcelona and higher than New York, it thereby announced that the changes in Palermo over the previous few years were structural and profound.\textsuperscript{24}

**Orthodox explanations for stasis and change**

Understanding this story of change does require a look at the conditions, shocks, trends, and elements of Italian politics. Local and international conditions and developments are important for understanding the events of this case. To generate a brief sketch of what an orthodox approach would use to explain this case, we can use a partial application of toolset one – that is, to understand the initial set of conditions, we can look for dynamics of stability grounded in group characteristics; and to understand the change in those conditions, we can look for shocks and trends.

**Self-reinforcing dynamics**

In Gambetta’s view, the initial *equilibrium* of mafia involvement in Sicilian life was one where conditions, interests, opportunities, and beliefs were wound up together, reproducing the old order and making mafia presence an unquestioned – even unconscious – assumption.\textsuperscript{25} Moreover, even if some held private animosity towards the mafia, social pressures kept them quiet or isolated. Failing that, they could be killed.

\textsuperscript{24} Orlando (2001: 8).
\textsuperscript{25} See Gambetta (1993) for analysis of why the mafia was an accepted part of Sicilian life for so long. A social arrangement is in "equilibrium" when there is no incentive for people involved to deviate from established patterns. In his autobiography, the mayor of Palermo (an epicenter of mafia activity), presents this early stage as built on unconscious assumptions. Moreover, there was for a long time, he claims, no language with which to speak about any distinct "mafia" phenomenon. See Orlando (2001).
The mafia's legitimacy, as a “state-within-a-state,” came in part through its presence in everyday life. Many owed their jobs to its construction companies, even if the projects held little lasting benefit for Sicily. But the mafia was in a sense also literally a state-within-a-state. With a dearth of effective, non-criminal services (e.g., to enforce contracts, collect debts, and resolve litigation), mafia “protection” enabled business – even while the need for protection largely originated from the Cosa Nostra. There was also a kind of economic stimulus: while the mafia extracted huge sums of money through extortion, it channeled profits from the drug trade through otherwise legitimate businesses, bringing wealth to Sicilian cities. In a real sense, then, antimafia campaigns threatened the livelihood of many average Sicilians, along with the social order that they knew.

As suggested in the Short History section above, Rome seldom did much to challenge the mafia’s provision of certain social services in Sicily. Where the federal government did contribute to the social order, instead, was to channel enormous transfer payments into southern Italy. Some of this money went directly into the pockets of politicians or well-connected businessmen or mafia members. But much of it helped maintain the Cosa Nostra’s position because such money was funneled through mafia-owned businesses, further cementing the latter’s legitimacy in the eyes of those they employed.

---

26 These projects included, for example, highways leading nowhere, and factories that never opened.
27 Gambetta (1993) pays particular attention to the economic impact of the protection racket.
Convention

A number of authors also point to characteristics of civil society to understand, in part, the extent of mafia presence. One is “the pervasiveness of distrust in the South [and] its persistent negative influence on social progress and economic development,” distrust partially explained by material factors such as the state’s failure, in the South, to give protection, settle disputes, enforce order, or provide viable alternatives to the DC-mafia nexus.30 Another explanation is how Italians viewed, and often still view, business and government. On one hand, some authors point to pervasive cynicism.31 On the other, so much is decided by connections or membership in a particular group, that many assume this to be the only (or even best) way to get results, instead of through government, courts, merit, training, hard work, and so on.32 The more accurate these views, the more a campaign originating from the state is hampered from the outset – even before considering its complicity with the mafia. As for moral appeals, the biggest potential influence, there, was no foe of the mafia: the Catholic Church had been a tacit, and sometimes not so tacit, ally since the founding of the Italian republic.33

Status quo bias

The role of politics in cementing the mafia’s position was not confined to providing money. It is not uncommon in politics for powerful interest groups develop

30 Gambetta (1993: 77-8). For other comments about low levels of social trust (outside of family and certain kinds of group membership), see McCarthy (2000a: 215), and Koff and Koff (2000: 18). On failures of the state, and how a reputation for violence brought respect, see Chapter 8 of Blok (1988).
31 Allum (2000: 41) speaks of politics being “left behind” even while the economy moves forward, seeing failures for the women’s movement and divisive regional politics. McCarthy (2000a: 216-17) sees public disillusion in the political reforms of the 1990s, and an “unreformed political class”.
32 Ginsborg (2001) argues that understanding the role of the family, and local personal connections, in Italy is crucial for understanding Italian history in general.
ties to members of government, and for both sides to gain from such a relationship. This was true of the mafia, who had direct ties to political parties, primarily the Christian Democrats (DC), who dominated Italian politics from soon after the Second World War through to the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{34} Mafia-owned businesses received government contracts, for example, in exchange for their services in delivering votes. Moreover, some DC politicians turned out to be Cosa Nostra. But the mafia’s ties went further: both the Socialists and Radicals worked to curtail thorny judicial and police powers.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, none of these parties, not even the Communists, were fully independent from the DC, as captured by the term trasformismo which denotes the DC’s ability to transform opposition into support when needed (with money, favors, threats).\textsuperscript{36} Part of that ability to co-opt was owing to backing of the US government as well. Owing to the fear of Communism, the US gave support to the DC, and on occasion even to its relationship with the mafia, which as an organization was quite anti-Communist.

The Cosa Nostra also benefited from the nature of and its relation to the judiciary. The nature of the judiciary favored the mafia because efforts at reform would run up against partisan factionalism where ideological factions were big enough to block significant moves by the other, a seniority-based promotion system that favored the status quo, and a fragmented structure which served as a barrier to broad reform efforts given

\textsuperscript{34} See Jamieson (2000: 52-62) on findings of the 1992-94 sitting of the Antimafia Commission, with respect to the mafia’s involvement with politics, and vice versa. For historical accounts of the DC, and its motivations for linking up with mafia groups, see Ginsborg (1990) and Samuels (2003).
\textsuperscript{35} See Gambetta (1993: 187). Attacks on the Italian judiciary have at times found significant public support. In this light, note Burnett and Mantovani (1998), who accuse magistrates from Milan of executing a political coup by judicial means, in Operation Clean Hands – the anti-political corruption drive of the early 1990s. The antimafia prosecutors I discuss in this chapter also appear in their book, but as a standard of good practices used to make the Milanese judges look even worse.
\textsuperscript{36} On trasformismo, see Ginsborg (1990), Samuels (2003), and Stille (1995).
how little interaction there was between magistrates and police across locales.\textsuperscript{37} The mafia also gained directly from personal relations with high-level members of the judiciary, who were not averse to overturning rulings against Cosa Nostra, or preventing the promotion of antimafia prosecutors.

\textit{Shocks and trends}

In short, a variety of accounts give many reasons to accept Gambetta's reading of the status quo in the old order, that "This is the way things are, and that nothing could be done or was worth doing." There were, in other words, many problems for anyone aspiring to change these social conditions. Some of these problems, however, came under pressure for change because of broad events, of the kind usually considered by the orthodox view. Central among shocks was the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, it was assumed by many that the Christian Democrats were an irreplaceable buttress against the significant communist presence in Italy. Support for the DC from at home and abroad (especially the US) excused, even encouraged, patronage, corruption and mafia ties when perceived to support their hold on government. This rationalization largely evaporated with the fall of the Soviets, and so this event is a partial explanation for another shock: the fall of the Christian Democrats. The more immediate cause of the DC collapse was a massive bribery scandal (known as the Tangentopoli scandal), though one explanation for why the investigations made it to light of day is that with the communist threat gone, the DC was no longer untouchable. With the mafia's primary

\textsuperscript{37}Stille (1995: 333) notes that, "There were 159 judicial districts, each with its own prosecutors and police forces, who frequently tripped over one another moving in ignorance of the others' work. The mafia, by contrast, moved with ease on an increasingly national and international scale."
political partner in so much trouble, then, a successful antimafia campaign seems less remarkable.\textsuperscript{38}

Another relevant shock or trend was the jump in narcotics trade, and the mafia war that came on its heels. The profits involved could be seen as incentive for ambitious criminals to consolidate the industry, and thus resort to gang warfare if necessary. The shakeup within the Sicilian mafia is a partial explanation for why magistrates were able to gain the confidence of prominent mafia members. Before the Corleone takeover, mafia families were generally quiet in operation. The older generation had valued invisibility, with violence used for internal disputes, extortion (though typically it was not needed, threats being sufficient), and enforcing contracts. Prior mafia wars brought unwanted public, political, and legal attention, providing more incentive to preserve the traditional code of silence, or \textit{omertà}. Their success in this regard was a reason why most magistrates in Palermo assumed that prosecution was pointless. But the sky-high profits of the drug trade strained these norms: by the late 1970s, Cosa Nostra was killing policemen and judges on their trail. The new mafia war broke this silence, and strained relations with allies. For example, were it not for the level of violence, and the killing of so many outside the mafia, the tacit support of Catholic Church might have gone on uninterrupted.\textsuperscript{39} The Corleone campaign, in short, damaged some of Cosa Nostra’s self-defense mechanisms, making success for an antimafia campaign more likely.

\textsuperscript{38} For discussion of the impact of the Soviet collapse on DC rule, as well as the role of international politics in Italian party politics, see Ginsborg (1990, 2001) and Samuels (2003).

\textsuperscript{39} See Gambetta (1993: 52).
Growth of the EU is also clearly relevant, given incentives to reshape the domestic economy. Ginsborg argues that DC desires to gain from European cooperation and consolidation put pressure on the Italian system of corruption, even though the DC depended on that system for much of its influence.\textsuperscript{40} After having agreed to follow EU budget and inflation targets, the state could not throw money around as before, for bribes, trasformismo, mafia services, etc. Moreover, to be able to compete in the EU, business demanded more efficient and cost-effective government services, and a less onerous tax burden – all of which would tighten DC purse strings. Similar calls were coming from the general public. Increasing levels of education, especially among women, led greater numbers to demand more professionalization from government.

Furthermore, one of the attractions of the EU for some Italian leaders was the opportunity to gain a seat next to the likes of Germany and France in this new, globally prominent organization. As Samuels shows, there was a desire among some Italian leaders that they become a “normal” nation, when their international reputation was often as a backward one, especially with the poverty and crime in the South.\textsuperscript{41} These leaders did not want Italy to be relegated to the second tier of EU countries. There was pressure, then, to do something about the embarrassment that was the Italian mafia. In this sense, with so many of the problems for antimafia campaigners originating in Rome, they would benefit from this kind of external pressure on the DC to reform not only Italian finances, but society as well.

\textsuperscript{40} Ginsborg (2001).
\textsuperscript{41} Samuels (2003).
One important event, related to public pressure on the DC, was the Martelli nomination and his subsequent support of Falcone. This was a surprise for many on all sides, who expected the minister to use Falcone for PR, but avoid any substantive change. While a common model of political inaction in just about any country, this was especially well established in Italy, over questions of the mafia problem in particular. There are several explanations for why Martelli defied expectations: some cite Falcone’s ability, while others focus on Martelli’s political calculations. With the Soviet collapse and the rise of the EU, concerns with economic growth supplanted fears of communism. Further, the violence and revelations of corruption were embarrassing for an Italy lobbying for a head seat at the EU table. So to distinguish himself from the old order, the argument goes, Martelli hitched his wagon to Falcone.\(^{42}\) The conditions behind the minister’s actions, then, can be used to explain some key antimafia victories.

**Dynamics of instability**

Dynamics of stability and orthodox views of change, in short, are important for understanding the events in the antimafia case. The theory chapters of this dissertation, however, suggest that if we stop there, we may be missing important dynamics, reasons why one set of events occurred over another, and realistic alternative possibilities. That suggestion, however, is primarily based on deductive work. The question considered in this section is whether there is empirical evidence for dynamics of instability and of their political relevance. The approach is a simple one, of trying to find elements of the case that fit into the four categories of dynamics of instability, and noting whether they suggest other possible outcomes for the antimafia campaign case. Ideally, a secondary

benefit of this simple approach is to suggest the analytical practicality of the empirical political theory involved.

**Multifaceted social conditions**

One issue with the Italian case is how a number of observers note ambivalence in “public” views of the mafia, the law, and government. Magistrates, for example, go from being heroes to villains in short order. For a while the Milanese prosecutors in charge of the Tangentopoli investigation were widely praised in the press, and attracted many admirers in the general public. And yet there are also a number of examples of politicians leading successful campaigns against “activist” magistrates, to reduce their power, with recent instances being led by Berlusconi. Another example is how the Socialists and Radicals launched campaigns to reduce the power of the judiciary, especially in Sicily, all this during the first maxi trial: “Pushing the theme of defendants’ rights, the Radical Party openly courted the criminal world, sponsoring membership drives in prisons across Italy.” Both parties did well in 1987, gaining positions in the new coalition government, which quickly cut resources and security for the Palermo antimafia prosecutors, and ignored their calls for legislation to help negotiate with, and protect, mafia witnesses. An implication of this ambivalence, then, is that it is less clear what particular trends and shocks mean to ordinary people, which may help explain why Rome has been so inconsistent in directing resources at the antimafia campaign.

---

More specifically, we can note how the structure of the Italian legal system is multifaceted in politically relevant ways. On one hand, its structure can be used to explain why pressure for change would translate into action against the mafia, and not, for example, be stalled by government checks on the powers of the judiciary. Prosecutors can be elected to government, and serve also as judge. In short, the postwar judicial system evolved into one giving great leeway for activist magistrates. As Samuels argues, "the system of self-governance and the de facto ability of prosecutors to pick and choose targets allowed the magistratura considerable power."\textsuperscript{45} This is one explanation for the form of Operation Clean Hands, the argument being that it was "carried out by a tiny knot of magistrates, almost certainly abetted by certain politicians and economic barons, with the complicity of the print media owned by the latter."\textsuperscript{46} In other words, if we regard the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the EU as convincing certain politicians and businessmen that change was needed, they had a vehicle in a judiciary unfettered by strong checks.

On the other hand, however, there are reasons to expect that the judiciary would block any broad change. Here we can note the combination of a conservative seniority system that rewards tenure, not results, and the fact that magistrates are divided along political lines, with groups keeping each other in check. And, in the event, many efforts to advance the antimafia campaign were blocked this way, in terms of denying promotions and killing reform efforts that would have allowed more inter-jurisdiction

\textsuperscript{46} Burnett and Mantovani (1998: 239).
cooperation, for example. Overall, then, even with the room for activism, the judiciary has had its own status quo bias.

**Societal heterogeneity**

It is also unclear whether trends and events related to the narcotics trade need have been so damaging to the mafia, especially given the extensive connections they held with each other and with many other spheres of Italian life, the state included. For all the attacks from within and without, mafia organizations were never eradicated, and they were never without friends in high places. Moreover, even at the height of the internal mafia war there was continued coordination over how to respond to external threats.\(^{47}\) One question to ask is whether, for example, the removal of threatening individuals from positions of influence (by lethal or non-lethal methods) could have been more effective, especially with respect to Falcone and Orlando. A number of investigations were stopped in this way, and perhaps many more could have gone the same way.

Another indeterminacy of the narcotics trend is the form of mafia response. Internal developments might have gone in a less damaging way, as in keeping down the level of violence. It is not clear that the Corleone family’s effort to topple the traditional ruling families was the dominant alternative. On one hand, their takeover attempt, and its ruthlessness, was driven by a few key actors, whose success depended in part on how different they were from their peers. Their manipulation of mafia norms to, for example, convince members of other families to kill their own boss was unprecedented. In this

\(^{47}\) For example, during the first maxi-trial all killing stopped, and then resumed within hours of the verdict.
sense, at least, conditions provided opportunity to act, but it seems that few others saw such a route as desirable, even if possible.  

On the other hand, there were models of cooperation to draw upon, as built during times of external threat. The sky-high profits from the drug trade could have inspired further development of a cooperative cartel structure, both against external threats and upstarts from within, similar to how there was cooperation in the international drugs trade over elements like supply, processing, and transport. The Corleone rise does indicate that there were incentives to defect from working with other clans, but it could be argued that the mafia had tools to solve such a collective action problem.  

Already existing norms of solidarity and institutions of cooperation offered collective benefits for this kind of industry. In short, other reactions to the change in conditions seem to have been feasible, reactions that may have better protected Cosa Nostra from external threat, again implying indeterminacy.

**Windows of opportunity**

As discussed further in the section on extraordinary differences below, some of the successes of the antimafia campaign are owing to the use of windows of opportunity. So one question to ask is whether these windows could have opened and shut without any change occurring. An initial answer is yes, simply because of the nature of windows, 

---

48 While I do not explore the Corleone case in detail here, the impact of individual members seems important, and could be useful for thinking about how people matter for social processes. This example, though, seems more about unintended consequences than creativity. Early successes are notable, but so is the empowerment of opposition. See Jasper (1997) on how initial successes in some social movements produce, as their primary result, a stronger, better-coordinated opposition, therefore reinforcing the status quo they hoped to change.  

49 See Lichbach (1995) for an extensive discussion of collective action problems and means of solving them.
with how they can open and close quickly without leaving a trace. In the Italian case in particular, sympathy for the antimafia cause tended to come in short bursts related to specific events. If actors like Falcone and Orlando had not been in position to make use of such bursts, then maybe their efforts would have been much less successful.

There is also a question, then, whether their opponents could have made better use of available windows for their own cause, and there is some evidence for this. There were a number of occasions when attention was turned elsewhere or when negative attention was turned on the antimafia campaign, as when a suspect was killed during interrogation. And there were efforts to make use of such windows, as when the Palermo police were targeted by both politicians and the mafia following the interrogation incident, with officers being transferred or killed. Antimafia opponents, however, were not able to eliminate Orlando or Falcone, either by moving them out of positions of influence or killing them, at least not until much damage had been done to the mafia by both men.

**Incomplete victories**

The story of change in the Italian antimafia case is also not as clear-cut as an orthodox approach would imply given the nature of political victories and losses. The case is characterized by much back-and-forth over whether the mafia and their prosecutors had the attention of government, and even over what kind of attention. At times the DC was on the defensive and would then relent to certain demands of the antimafia campaigners; but after waiting for the storm to pass, the DC would then move
to attack and, for example, cut funding to new antimafia programs. A suggestion to
consider, then, is that the collapse of the Christian Democrats may not have been so
inevitable. While scandal and world events were blows, the DC had an extensive set of
resources and network of supporters – perhaps enough to hold on, live to fight another
day, or even to reinvent itself. Better use of delay, and more care in appointments (e.g.
Martelli), may have proven effective countermeasures.

Suggestive of the possibility of DC survival is the fact that a small group of
prosecutors from Milan had an inordinate role in the DC collapse, and that there seems to
be a large audience in Italy for political attacks on such prosecutors. Furthermore, by
some accounts, the second Berlusconi government has in some ways simply taken over
where the DC left off, including with ties to the mafia. With its big business connections,
control of the media, and intimate relations with many of the old DC leaders,
Berlusconi’s coalition is showing many signs of continuing with the practices of the old
order. We can also note, borrowing Samuels’ comparison, the manner in which Japan’s
ruling party weathered a somewhat similar political storm, which also struck in 1993,
further suggesting possibilities for DC survival.

*Incremental change, cascade, and continuity*

As suggested by the Gambetta quotation that inspired this case study, much of this
story of change, especially in Sicily itself, is about change in “government
determination.” It seems accurate to say that many conventions and practices in Sicily
helped keep the mafia firmly in place, along with common views of what to expect – and
especially not expect – from government. There are cascade-like events to note, as with
the reaction to Falcone’s murder, but those were preceded by numerous small events, of
prosecuting previously un-prosecuted crimes, of cleaning up run-down neighborhoods, of
re-opening schools, of public speeches on previously taboo topics, and so on.

At the same time, it is useful to note that such events took place in a context of
much continuity, which suggests there was no necessary one-way trajectory of improving
“government determination.” The story of change is peppered with failures, and while
events did lend support to the antimafia campaign, they also left in place many elements
from the initial equilibrium. Both politics and factionalism remain prominent in the
judiciary. Furthermore, political attacks on the judiciary continue to be, at times, popular,
and they have been taken further by the Berlusconi government. Accounts continue to be
produced about problems of government and bureaucratic effectiveness, along with
extensive cynicism about both.⁵⁰ Even with increased pressure by business for more
competitive conditions, clientilism is extensive, especially in the sense of Italians still
needing family or clan connections to get services, jobs, and so on. In short, there have
been many reasons for people with designs on reform to abandon hope. Add in the
danger of assassination and it is unclear why even favorable conditions would bring forth
agents for change.

Ordinary differences

Even with dynamics of instability in play, however, it could still be that
conditions and patterns considered by the orthodox view are the better explanation of

events. Shocks and trends may simply overwhelm dynamics of instability, even if they are present. In other words, we are in the territory of competing explanations, and as noted in previous chapters a useful strategy is to tighten our loose set of psychological laws, to generate more specific predictions of what we should see at the individual level. In the orthodox approach, the move is to tighten according to similarities, as to see whether groups are moved to act by certain kinds emotions or goals instead of others. In Chapter 4 I suggested that ordinary differences could be politically relevant as well. The role of this section then is to look for empirical evidence of such differences, and whether it seems practical to take account of them when interpreting events in this case.

**Personal differences**

Perhaps the clearest example of ordinary differences that seem politically relevant is within the antimafia camp itself. Antimafia prosecutors in Palermo, for example, were vulnerable because they were poorly supported and poorly protected by the federal government; but they also lacked support within their own department. Prosecutors in Sicily, or anywhere else in Italy for that matter, were not unified against the mafia. If anything, the greater unity was in the more common desire to keep with the status quo. Falcone’s efforts in face of the poor odds inspired few colleagues; more often it made enemies through his challenging the old order, “showing up more senior colleagues, touching on vital economic interests and putting people at risk… It had become more or less accepted truth that it was useless to prosecute the mafia because the evidence would never stick.”51 At the same time, Falcone could not have achieved what he did alone. He depended on the small number of superiors and subordinates who believed in his cause.

There were also a small number of magistrates in other districts who responded to Falcone's requests for cooperation, which on more than one occasion produced significant results in securing evidence and successful prosecutions. If we looked for a dominant similarity that characterized the judiciary, it was the desire to not go after the mafia. That there was sufficient ordinary difference in perception of the possible and desirable within the judiciary meant that Falcone was not completely isolated.

Similarly, to the benefit of Orlando, the common notions of desirable and possible within the DC, and within allied political parties, were not universal. As with Falcone, it is difficult to imagine Orlando achieving what he did without any help, as for example with the mentoring he received from Mattarella early on in his political career. Orlando and Falcone's efforts to change the views and practices of ordinary people (more on this below) also depended on ordinary differences within the Church, within small business, and within the mafia itself. This dependence is more evident if we turn to interpersonal differences.

**Interpersonal differences**

There were significant numbers of ordinary people opposed to the antimafia efforts. For example, after the killing of a mafioso during police interrogation, unemployed workers staged pro-mafia rallies, the local newspaper intensified its support of the mafia and opposition to the magistrates, and the archbishop of Palermo (once an ally) came out against the maxi-trial. Especially early on, Falcone and Orlando needed to find first movers and connectors. Given the high risks involved with, for example, not
paying for protection, there were clearly high thresholds in the way of generating changes in behavior. Moreover, the mafia derived strength from just how well connected it was in politics, in business, and even in the Church. To make any progress – which both Falcone and Orlando did prior to the shocks and trends that would be crucial to an orthodox approach – ordinary differences would be vital.

And in the event there were families who wanted the state to provide services instead of the mafia, there were priests willing to speak out against the mafia (one of these, Ennio Pintacuda, was a mentor for Orlando), there were businessmen willing to stop paying for protection. For example, one rebellious shopkeeper, who “appealed to all the other businessmen of his area to follow his example, reminding them that if they all held firm, if they all stood united in their refusal to pay, the Mafia would be powerless, and they themselves would be less at risk.”$^{52}$ He, like, a number of such individuals were killed for their efforts, but others were found, some of whom seem to have played a “connector” role, as to gather many businesspeople together to cooperate in refusing to pay protection.

**Extraordinary differences**

Do all these ordinary differences really matter though? The pressures of shock and change have to start somewhere, and as such, that change starts with first movers may not be particularly remarkable. In a sense this just moves the question about dynamics of instability one step further – they may be present, but under pressure they

---

$^{52}$ Orlando (2001: 142), emphasis in original. The shopkeeper, Libero Grassi, did inspire others to rebel, leading to a number of arrests for extortion, but that did not stop the mafia from killing him. For more on Grassi, see Jamieson (2000: 35-6).
are overwhelmed by shock and trend during change, and by dynamics of stability otherwise. A first response is to note that certain changes relying on dynamics of instability and ordinary differences took place prior to the shocks and trends taking hold in this case. A counter is to point out that below a certain threshold, we can expect to see actions and events that do not follow the pressures of the status quo, but that these are like random noise. Change will only come once the threshold is reached and it takes shock or trend to get there. The second response then is to consider whether the actions and events contrary to status quo pressures are random. Specific moves of virtuosity and bravery are impressive but do not mean much on side of dynamics of stability – unless we see that such moves are strung together in a pattern.

By examining social dynamics and ordinary differences we can get a sense of the problems facing people working for creative change. If those problems are extraordinary (they should be less so if conditions favor change), and we see individuals repeatedly solving such problems over time, then we would seem to have evidence suggesting controlled agency. In this section I aim to show that it is analytically practical to look for evidence of whether there are such patterns of activity or not.

People like Orlando and Falcone recognized that one of their biggest problems was to coax a critical mass – whether among citizens of Palermo or politicians in Rome – to join the movement. While early funerals of “excellent cadavers” brought daring public
rallies against both the mafia and their political allies, these were a level of magnitude below the campaign of sheets that followed Falcone’s murder.\textsuperscript{53} Orlando puts it this way:

These white flags were not calling for a truce, but for retribution. They meant that the family in that house – whose neighbor might be directly or indirectly tied to the Mafia – was not afraid to indicate publicly which side of the barricade it stood on. At first the sheets were few and far between, but as the days passed, they multiplied – even in Mafia strongholds like Brancaccio.\textsuperscript{54}

The critical mass had to come in the everyday world where people lived and worked, in the streets of Palermo and in houses of justice and government. It is in these locations where a true change in notions of desirable and the possible would come. And given the physical dangers of individually turning against the mafia, refusing on one’s own to pay for protection, any broad change in behavior would almost have to come through some form of cascade, to overwhelm the mafia’s considerable abilities to guard the old order.

\textit{Mindset}

Recall from Chapter 5 that mindsets involve several kinds of willingness, in how some have the motivation to launch a project against the status quo and its defenders, given the likelihood of high personal costs; the resilience to accept setbacks without conceding defeat; the persistence to work on long-term, incremental forms of change; the

\textsuperscript{53} "Excellent cadavers" is the English translation for the phrase used to denote police, lawyers, politicians, etc., killed by the mafia, as well as the title for Stille’s (1995) book. Another translation is “illustrious corpse,” as in Jamieson (2000).

\textsuperscript{54} Orlando (2001: 159).
patience to wait for better opportunities; and the obsession to stay focused on a problem for the long term, but with the self-control that may be necessary, for example, to enable alliance building, and avoid triggering too much counterattack.

Perhaps the biggest problem for the antimafia campaign was the high risk of death involved. For example, one DC politician, Giuseppe Insalaco, came to despise Palermo city council politics and, for example, its refusing to use the word “mafia” in a public statement about the assassination of Falcone’s boss in 1980.\textsuperscript{55} Insalaco became mayor in 1984, and stunned his peers by attacking the council’s mafia-friendly procedures.\textsuperscript{56} He ordered memorial events for La Torre and Dalla Chiesa, publicly criticized the relationship between Cosa Nostra and government, and opened up bidding for municipal contracts.\textsuperscript{57} But his attack on the system was short-lived: death threats prompted a quick exit.\textsuperscript{58} Both Orlando and Falcone, then, were exceptional in their \textit{motivation to launch a project against the status quo and its defenders, given the likelihood of high personal costs.}

From the Short History, we can also note that as with the acquittals and releases of mafia arrested for the first maxi trial, repeated assassinations of important antimafia figures, Falcone’s aborted promotion, Orlando’s targeting by Andreotti, resources for the campaign being withdrawn on several occasions, the fallout from the police killing of a

\textsuperscript{55} Orlando (2001: 64).
\textsuperscript{56} Not only were many politicians friends of the mafia, it later emerged that a number were members.
\textsuperscript{57} Orlando (2001: 82). The usual method was automatic renewal, even though the law required bids, and so particular contracts became the turf of particular mafia businesses.
\textsuperscript{58} See also Stille (1995: 139-40).
mafiosi during interrogation, and so on, both Orlando and Falcone also showed exceptional *resilience to accept setbacks without conceding defeat*.

Not unrelated, they also showed extraordinary *persistence to work on long-term, incremental forms of change*. Falcone, for example, did not share the optimism that broke out among his colleagues upon the mass of arrests that kicked off the first maxi trial. He, correctly, did not believe that this would be enough to win over the Sicilian public, which had up to then shown only limited support of the magistrates, and had more often shown skepticism and animosity.\(^59\) Falcone said, instead, “They’re standing at the window, waiting to see who wins the bullfight.”\(^60\) Both men from the beginning saw their project for political change as long-term, and set out seeing it as their life’s work.

With that kind of devotion, it is not surprising that both men showed remarkable *patience to wait for better opportunities*. Cooperation from important branches of government, the judiciary, and even the Church was seldom forthcoming. In this sense, windows of opportunity – providing momentary gaps in the resistance – were important. Public outcry over killings was often short-lived, as might be important witnesses. Openings sometimes came and went bringing little change, as even when the government did respond, policy innovations were often left to die, or hijacked by opponents of the antimafia campaign. Both men, however, seem to have operated under the assumption that other opportunities would come, they just had to wait and keep working to prepare.

\(^{59}\) For example, the major daily newspaper was against the antimafia prosecutions.

\(^{60}\) As reported by Stille (1995: 157).
Note Falcone’s reasoning in avoiding pursuit of political connections, as recounted by one of his colleagues (who was not in agreement with this approach):

Not only would it ruin the possibility of prosecuting those politicians, but it would damage the credibility of the mafia witnesses and compromise the effectiveness of the whole struggle … He knew that eventually we would have to pursue the political track, but he was convinced that you had to arrive gradually, step by step, until the political conditions permitted us to do more. The old approach of the frontal attack – which had been adopted, in part, in the first maxi-trial – did not pay.\(^{61}\)

Another kind of mindset shared by both men was an obsession to say focused on a problem for the long term. Those who got to know and work with Falcone were typically left with an admiring sense of his determination and capabilities – mafia witnesses included. One Milanese magistrate who collaborated with Falcone (and who previously assumed all Sicilian lawyers inept and corrupt) said: “mafia prosecutions in Sicily changed with Falcone … he was animated by a kind of Sicilian patriotism, the desire to liberate the island from the scourge of the mafia.”\(^{62}\) While he had few direct allies, Falcone built a fiercely loyal, albeit small, team. One explanation for their devotion, in face of so much danger and such poor odds, is that “Falcone was unique, he had a capacity to work that was simply on another level from everyone else’s.”\(^{63}\) His passion evidently inspired his close allies to stay with him even during the rougher times.

\(^{62}\) The quote is from Milanese judge Giuliano Turone, as cited in Stille (1995: 39).
\(^{63}\) The quotation is from a fellow antimafia prosecutor, as cited in Stille (1995: 45).
note also is how both men sacrificed health and time with family to be devoted to their cause. Even given their obsessive devotion to their antimafia work, both also seem to have been able to stop from going overboard. Orlando was prone on occasion to dramatic public acts, but both seem to have been at least somewhat sensitive to the need for self-control necessary to enable alliance building, and avoid triggering too much counterattack. At minimum, this is evident in their willingness to take smaller, more incremental steps towards their goal, instead of always looking for the big score.

*Aptitude*

Recall from Chapter 5 that aptitudes can matter for how some have the open-mindedness to question convention and to look to improve upon it; the intelligence to derive an exceptional understanding of the possible given a set of conditions (including social dynamics and ordinary differences); the expertise to navigate the political order, as to attain and keep a position from which to engineer a project to change that order, the insight to find ways to bypass or turn conventions and institutions (geared to preserving the existing order) towards novel uses; the influence to persuade and coordinate others and keep their attention; and the adaptability to recognize dead ends and shift strategy.

With respect to the exceptional open-mindedness to question convention and to look to improve upon it, this seems to have started early with both Orlando and Falcone. During Orlando’s youth, according to him at least, many members of the upper class in and around Palermo had ties to Cosa Nostra, but his aristocratic parents shunned high society to guard the family from mafia influence. He says that his father, for example,
refused a nomination for the DC from the archbishop of Palermo because it would have meant accepting mafia votes.\textsuperscript{64} One could argue, then, that the idea of a mafia-free life began at home. Another mentor, Jesuit priest Ennio Pintacuda, extended this idea in his work against Sicilian "denial" of the mafia problem: "he was interested in the growth of community and the development of democracy, and he knew that the Mafia stood in the way of both."\textsuperscript{65}

Orlando credits his father and Pintacuda with giving him a jump on other Palermitans in thinking about the desirable and possible, even when as a lawyer he saw the judiciary fail to move against the mafia. To his mind, people needed to see evidence of new possibilities for everyday life. For one, he tells of taking aim at the dependence on family and connections: "Against this notion, it was necessary to show that the city government respected everybody's rights equally and would grant no special favors."\textsuperscript{66} But going through politics was a problem given the DC stranglehold: "the party limited the range of opinion and narrowed the spectrum of the permissible so that it was impossible to incorporate any sort of idealism into the political process it controlled."\textsuperscript{67} And yet clearly Orlando believed otherwise.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{64} Orlando (2001: 25).
\textsuperscript{65} Orlando (2001: 45).
\textsuperscript{66} Orlando (2001: 96).
\textsuperscript{67} Orlando (2001: 46).
\textsuperscript{68} As discussed by Bok (2000), one should be careful thinking about an autobiographer's use of his or her own memories, especially given all the research into how memory recall is not like retrieving a stored document. Findings are that memories are not stored one-by-one in specific places. Instead, they are assembled or constructed or blended much as perceptions are, on the fly out of elements that are stored variously throughout the mind, but based to a great extent on the person's bodily and mental state at the time of recall. Moreover, Orlando, much more than Falcone, is criticized over questions of ego and desire for the limelight, and also, by some, for naivety in his short-lived run at national politics. Nevertheless, for his role as mayor of Palermo, there seems to be relative consensus that his achievements, dedication, innovative ideas, and risk to life have all been exceptional. And his account of events of interest to me is in line with those of observers, albeit spun differently, to be sure.
Falcone, for his part, grew up among the middle class in central Palermo, side-by-side with mafia families; but as with Orlando, his family kept their distance from Cosa Nostra. Falcone, however, was far more exposed to how the old quarters of Palermo crumbled under the mafia’s enforced neglect, what is commonly called the Sack of Palermo. Mafia families owned major construction companies, and made a great deal of money by building cheap concrete apartment blocks in the suburbs of Palermo, getting dwellings within the city condemned so people had to move out to the suburbs, and then tearing down the old buildings in the city to build pour more concrete. Many buildings in and around which Falcone grew up fell to this fate, and like many others, his family had to move out to mafia-built flats in the suburbs.\(^69\) They did, however, maintain a sense of patriotism and optimism about the post-war Italian state that seems to have run strong in Falcone.\(^70\)

Another extraordinary ability shown by both men was an *intelligence to derive an exceptional understanding of the possible given a set of conditions*. Above I noted that they seemed willing to wait for windows of opportunity to occur. This is relevant because both men worked to prepare for contingent moments of opportunity. They became expert in their respective domains of political and law, and could therefore seize chances to reshape mafia-friendly institutions.

---


Falcone, in particular, had an exceptional knowledge of the history and structure of Sicilian mafia families. Prosecutors, both in Italy and the US, marveled at how Falcone used his expertise and overall vision to get what he needed from witnesses: “This was his great ability: to lead the defendant where he wanted, without the other being aware of it.”

It was to a significant extent because of this kind of expertise that Falcone and his colleagues were able to amount the evidence necessary to conduct the mass of arrests for the first maxi trial. Orlando, for his part, was ready to take action when the DC, to shore up public relations given the arrest of some of its members for the maxi trial, nominated him for mayor of Palermo in 1985. Immediately he began using the position to broadcast his support of the prosecutors and opposition to Cosa Nostra, while working to redress the dilapidated state of public transportation, schools, streets, and sewers.

Orlando says: “victory would come about only as the result of an integrated, all-out campaign. So we decided to move on four interrelated fronts at once: the media, the culture, the schools, and the physical condition of the city – all for one objective, the creation of a civic consciousness based on the rule of law.” He puts particular emphasis on the distinction between legal and “cultural” battles against Cosa Nostra:

“The solution to the problem of the Mafia is to make the state work.” This is partly a matter of justice and the rule of law. It is also a question of meeting human needs in the civic realm, from the need for jobs that don’t involve

---

71 The quote is from one of the other pool prosecutors, Ignazio De Francisci. See Stille (1995: 161).
collusion with a criminal conspiracy, to the need for democracy and a culture of freedom.

Given all the problems faced by Orlando and Falcone, another important ability was the **expertise to navigate the political order, to attain and keep a position from which to engineer a project to change that order.** Others who made antimafia statements like Orlando did upon his becoming mayor were quickly chased from office. One reason that threats – not only of death, but also of property damage and character assassination – were so effective was because of the ubiquity of the mafia and its allies. Of note is how both Orlando and Falcone were careful about restricting their social life. Orlando had been brought up in a family that operated this way, and Falcone confined his to a small circle of close friends and colleagues, always concerned to avoid situations where he could be seen with the wrong person. This was not a common practice, as few of his peers took this idea to heart, even those with similar preferences.

Important for keeping a position of influence, it seems, was also an ability to send and receive signals. Note Orlando on this: "The Mafia knows what your position is before you even announce it, but if you shout your opposition loudly, the non-Mafiosi will also know, and they may save your life." For Falcone, "The interpretation of signs ... is one of the principal activities of a 'man of honor' and consequently of the mafia-prosecutor." For both men the battle against the mafia was also one for public opinion,

---

73 The opening quotation is from Paolo Borsellino. As cited in Orlando (2001: 6-7).
and both assumed that Sicilian attitudes on the mafia went deep, whatever their specific shape.

Another important ability for this fight was the insight to find ways to bypass or turn conventions and institutions (geared to preserving the existing order) towards novel uses. With both Orlando and Falcone, much of the effort was in using existing political and legal institutions for new ends, even if those new ends meant simply enforcing existing law: “By bringing the mafia to trial, they proved that the mafia is not invincible. And they did so through the scrupulous use of the legal code. ‘The most revolutionary thing you could do in Sicily,’ Falcone once said, ‘is simply to apply the law and punish the guilty.’” 76 Sometimes this meant bringing in tools from other spheres, as with Falcone’s use of financial strategies. Other times it meant reforming the institutions in the effort to give themselves more effective means of action, such as organizing the antimafia magistrates into a pool.

It took approximately six years worth of these kinds of strategies to bring the mafia to its first big trial. Further examples of this kind of incremental approach include Mattarella and then Orlando leading the effort to overhaul bidding procedures for Palermo’s government contracts. And recall Falcone’s move to Rome – widely expected to be elimination by promotion – to make profound national-level changes in the regulations governing antimafia efforts. Much of what he wanted to change was simply the everyday procedures of prosecution and law enforcement. Bit by bit these would chip away at what he saw as a corrupt system, to where at some point it would collapse. In

other words, actors in the story of change seem to have made use of incremental processes, like the *functional conversion* and *institutional layering* discussed in Chapter 3, towards the end of shifting public and professional opinion.

More specifically, Falcone began his career in finance law, and when he shifted to antimafia work, he quickly set about drawing on this experience to start "a quiet revolution in the prosecution of mafia cases."\(^7^7\) Not only was this financial approach unprecedented, so was any extensive use of documents. Yet by following paper trails, Falcone was able to uncover networks of cooperation between mafia groups in the drug trade. One of his bosses, Antonino Caponetto made an important contribution to this effort in bringing in the magistrate team or "pool" form of organization originally used in prosecuting the Red Brigades. Advantages came both in safety and efficiency: investigations were less reliant on one person, so less vulnerable to assassination; and were also better able to handle the growing quantities of information.

Especially in starting from such marginalized positions, both men showed remarkable ability in their *influence to persuade and coordinate others and to keep their attention*. Both saw a need for extensive work demonstrating and communicating signals of change, in a way trying to teach that different ways of life were desirable and possible.\(^7^8\) They both, for example, regularly visited classrooms to talk to young students. And strong signals of change could, from outside, look quite small. For example, Orlando’s Commissioner for Gardens and Quality of Life, renowned

\(^7^7\) Stille (1995: 33).
\(^7^8\) Both, for example, regularly visited classrooms to talk to young students.
photojournalist Letizia Battaglia, “believed that common access to beautiful civic spaces … was the first step toward building a culture of respect and an appreciation of the city. She believed that if a citizen is offered a well-cared-for park or a pristine beach, he will have a stake in keeping it like that.” Since the mafia wanted Palermo to crumble – to raze the historic parks, plazas, and buildings for more construction projects – a “well-cared-for park” was a significant political achievement. But it was only one achievement. Many of the reformers expected that it would take many of these signals, repeated over a long period of time.

Finally, both men showed evidence of adaptability to recognize dead ends and shift strategy, especially when both men abandoned their positions in Palermo when under heavy attack from the DC and mafia-friendly forces. Orlando took the opportunity to found a national-level political movement and gain more allies for future work in the process, while Falcone was able to work towards changing some of the institutions and procedures in Rome which held the antimafia movement back.

Conclusion

With both Orlando and Falcone there is evidence showing that the way they approached their antimafia goals is in line with an extraordinary capabilities based explanation. They both had extensive expertise in their specific field, Orlando with municipal politics in the epicenter of Sicilian mafia activity, and Falcone with working as a prosecutor in his hometown of Palermo. They developed, it seems, profound expertise in the dynamics of Italian, or at least Sicilian, politics and law. But neither one accepted

---

the rules and norms of their respective field. While the majority of their peers found a comfortable place in the status quo, neither man could focus on much other than how to change that order.80 Further, they both saw their projects of change as being about working over the long term, using incremental means of change to teach enough people that a new way of everyday life was both desirable and possible, with the hope that someday a great number of ordinary Sicilians would turn against Cosa Nostra. Their combination of obsession and capability helps explain the changes behind Gambetta’s observation that, “As soon as all the most important mafiosi ended up in jail, and the government determination became credible enough to reassure Sicilians that the bosses were not only jailed but were likely to stay there for life, the mood shifted dramatically.”

Any process of political change will, however, depend upon conditions. This seems all the more clear in this case when considering what has happened to antimafia prosecutions since Falcone’s death. On one hand, he did leave a legacy of institutional changes and templates for action that have enabled continued success, despite some periods of ebb and flow, against the mafia. On the other hand, his death may also explain why opponents, such as those in the Berlusconi government, have also taken back some of Falcone’s gains. That his shoes have never quite been filled may be a reason why the antimafia movement has at times, in recent years, shown “signs of fatigue.”81 The period of the Corleone-driven mafia war that coincided with Tangentopoli was one where the political establishment was in ruins, allowing the judiciary a relatively free hand. But given its unfriendly relationship with Berlusconi and his financial empire, and adding in

---

80 Here consider their common, and commonly regretted, neglect of close family and of their own health.
his ties to the old regime, it was clear that with his rise, government would again take aim at the judiciary. Furthermore, public attention has drifted away from matters of corruption, perhaps because of everyday economic concerns and weariness of scandal. In the event, Berlusconi’s first election was met with a spike in violence in Sicily: “a sign that the mafia believes it can take advantage of the new situation.”82 The second Berlusconi government has brought with it even more evidence of collusion, including direct mafia testimony about such connections.

There is no question that both the mafia trials and the Tangentopoli scandal failed to bring wholesale change in the practice of Italian politics or in civil society. But authors like Stille, Gambetta, and Ginsborg argue that there has been fundamental change in social attitudes about the mafia, not least of which seem to be different beliefs about the desirable and possible for living with, or without, Cosa Nostra. The town of Corleone, once “the base of the toughest clans of the Mafia” is now the home of a “UN center for the documentation and study of the Mafia;” and its Deputy Mayor Giuseppe Governali argues that, “The really important change is that we can talk about the Mafia openly now.” At the same time, a local parish priest says, “This question of Mafiosita, divides people – it divides the generations. … We have made some advances, but these things are best done quietly.”83 The mafia persists, and has found new avenues of activity, such as trafficking in all manner of materials in the Balkans, including guns and drugs. To speak too much of a new equilibrium and a new order risks missing the

83 Both quotations are from Fox (2001).
fragments left of the old, and the diversity of belief and feeling over present conditions. But enough people have learned new ways of living everyday life without, or with a diminished role for, the mafia that it seems fair to accept Orlando’s reading that, “The Mafia no longer rules us,” and to interpret this case as one of creative change.

---

84 In this sense there is no Kuhnian “paradigm shift” according to a critic like Miller (1996), who argues that Kuhn makes too clean a break with the past, even when restricting the subject matter to “scientific revolutions.”

85 Samuels (2003: 270) similarly argues that by the mid-to-late 1990s, “the Mafia had been put on notice that the rules had changed.”
Chapter Seven
Locating extraordinary differences amid trends: the abolition of the British slave trade

Much of the action in the previous chapter took place in Sicily, and a concern could be that while some of the concepts about individual differences in particular would not travel well to more extensive case studies set in earlier eras. This chapter undertakes a broader example of social change, and one that is also useful for thinking about how structure and agency interact. It is a case where orthodox social science analyses would dwell on conditions and pressure-adjustment forms of change, but it is one where many historians familiar with the events insist that it is also important to note the roles of specific individuals. In other words, it is a case where a social scientist would be more inclined to take a coarse, structural view of events, but where elements of controlled agency might nevertheless be important to consider.

The British Parliament outlawed the slave trade when the sugar plantation economy was very profitable. Anstey, the preeminent historian of the British anti-slavery movement observes:

... over the whole period from 1783-1807, the British slave system enlarged its frontier, its supply of virgin soil, its relative proportion of British trade, its imports and exports, its share of world sugar and coffee production ... and the slave trade was, of course, a major ingredient in the continuing expansion of the slave system

163
... Abolitionism came not on the heels of trends adverse to slavery but in the face of propitious ones.¹

If we make the assumption that financial interests are an important influence on political action especially in a mercantilist society, which Britain was in this era, the timing of the British abolition of the slave trade can seem puzzling. In the early 1800s, the economic returns from both the trade and the West Indies sugar industry (which was heavily reliant on slave labor) were at their peak levels, so that abolition appeared to run counter to economic advantage. Moreover, Britain was not only dominant in both trades, but increasingly so.

Nevertheless, the British abolished the slave trade in 1807. It is a case where, as (social scientists) Kaufmann and Pape (1999) argue, particular conditions in Britain combined with certain shocks along with local and international trends explain for this unusual case of “costly moral action,” to use their phrase. While this unusual case of political change that seems well captured by the orthodox approach, it, nonetheless, offers an opportunity to determine whether a political creativity approach adds value. An application of the three toolsets to this case suggests that the orthodox approach is insufficient for explaining the form and timing of abolition, in part because application of the toolsets suggests that conditions, shocks, and local and international trends were not as determinative of events as an orthodox approach would suggest. Key events do not satisfactorily mesh with the empirical implications of an orthodox approach.

¹ Anstey (1980: 23).
A role of this chapter, then, is to demonstrate how a concern with dynamics of instability, with ordinary differences, and with extraordinary differences can add value even when conditions seem a strong explanation of events. This is not to dismiss the importance of conditions, shocks and trends – all of which have a firm place within the three toolsets framework. Instead, the idea is to refine our use of such elements by combining them with a greater range of social dynamics, and politically relevant individual characteristics. In particular, a focus on the problems in the way of political change, in this case, suggest that the agency involved was more than redundant and unintended. Piecemeal work on reshaping British institutions of government set the stage for abolition in 1807, and for many of the successes in implementation that followed, even when the anti-slavery movement faltered. This case is interesting from a political creativity perspective, in short, because of how the success of a social movement depended on engineered changes to the political order.

**Short history**

In 1805-1806 the value of British West Indian sugar production equaled about 4 percent of the national income of Great Britain. Its efforts to suppress the slave trade sacrificed these interests, brought the country into conflict with the other Atlantic maritime powers, and cost Britain more than five thousand lives as well as an average nearly 2 percent of national income annually for sixty years.²

William Pitt (The Younger) became Prime Minister for the first time in 1783, and while part of the Tory establishment, he had a keen interest in reform. But at that time

the possibility of passing and implementing desired policies depended much on the King George III's support, on distribution of patronage, and on appeals to the national interest. At the beginning, few expected Pitt to survive long as PM because of enmities with more established politicians, and therefore few expected much to come of his desires for economic, and, to a limited extent, political and social reform. But with the King's confidence, missteps by his opponents, and a winning over of many skeptics in the House of Commons, Pitt won a strong victory in the general election of 1784. His early achievements in public finance policy, along with his alliance with the King created an image of a strong Prime Minister who had the run of things. 

But while passionate about reform, Pitt was cautious throughout his time in office. Sensitive to factional differences and the strength of conservatives in the Commons and the bureaucracy, he quickly dropped a number of efforts at change and reform upon signs of opposition. And he never gained enough confidence in his position and capabilities (widely viewed as considerable) to take on the abolition question with any force. His failure to convince the King or Parliament on the issue of Catholic emancipation in 1801 led to his resignation, whereupon his supporters split into several groups. He managed to retake office in 1804, but this time was in a weaker position because of his failure to convince two prominent factions (the Foxites and the Grenvillites) to join him. 

In the meantime abolitionists worked for decades prior to 1807 without any tangible successes in policy change. Outside of government, the building of public pressure against the government was substantial. Abolitionists won the public debate
over the morality of slavery, both on religious and secular Enlightenment grounds, and
did much work to organize public pressure on the government, and to execute campaigns
to publicize both the immorality of slavery in principle, and the grisly details of its
practice. For example, the London Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was
founded in 1787 to coordinate the diverse set of antislavery groups spread across the
country, and across religions. Moreover, often strategies were used only after much
deliberation and caution – this was not an effort to mimic the model supplied by French
revolutionaries, even though for many Dissenters, the old order was an abomination in
the eyes of God.³ Efforts were made to keep calls for abolition distinct from general
ideas of political reform, which were more likely to prompt repression from the
establishment. And while religious Dissenters (Quakers and Methodists) were the
primary backers of the movement, it was Anglicans who were put into the roles of
spokesmen, partly as an effort to seem less of a threat to the social and political order,
though also because there was a convention of political “quietism” among Dissenters.
Nevertheless, on the occasion an abolitionist bill would make it out of the Commons, the
Lords would quickly dispose of it.

Over time, however, while Dissenters were not able to gain access to the halls of
power, reformist evangelical members of the Church of England were, and they gradually
built alliances with high-level members of the Tory establishment with the aim to directly
influence government policy. William Wilberforce took the lead among reform

³ See McAdam and Sewell (2001: 113-16) on how the French Revolution created a “master template” for
political action that shaped many anti-regime movements thereafter.
Anglicans – known as the Saints – in Parliament, and used his position to lobby Pitt, and one of his key advisors (and cousin) William Grenville, in ways that Dissenters could not.

The connection with Grenville became of central importance upon Pitt’s sudden death, in office, in 1806. The Pitt government was replaced by a coalition of three prominent factions, called the Ministry of All the Talents, because of its reputable cast of characters, especially its leader, Lord William Grenville – who had been Speaker of the House of Commons, been elevated to the House representative in the Lords, and held top cabinet posts under Pitt. Grenville was a moderate Tory, but he had refused to join with Pitt in 1804, as unlike Pitt he was unwilling to return to government without a promise by the King to give a freer hand. Instead, Grenville joined with Fox’s Whig faction, in opposition. It was this team, along with support from another Tory faction (those around Addington), which made up the Ministry of All the Talents. Most members of this coalition cabinet were abolitionists, and with suggestions and encouragement from the antislavery lobby, and Wilberforce in particular, Grenville took a leadership role in marshalling support in the Commons and, his specialty, the Lords.

In the event, the abolitionists were able to seize the opening offered by the Ministry of All the Talents. Parliament first, in May 1806, abolished the slave trade to territories seized from the French. Then, Fox’s Whigs made a strong showing in the general elections that November, and used the victory as springboard to pass a general law against British slave trading. British citizens were banned from the trade, and slaves could not be imported to the British West Indies, nor could foreign traders use British
ports. To a significant extent, however, the anti-slavery movement fell apart after the abolition victory. They lost organizational unity, they lost much of the support they had gained among moderate Tories in Parliament, and they failed to prevent plantation owners from responding by organizing a stronger presence in government. More importantly, it took another three decades to make any significant progress towards the ultimate goal which was emancipation of slaves. Moreover, abolition itself made less impact on the trade itself than hoped – some traders simply switched the flags under which they sailed, and other countries took up the slack left by the British.

Nevertheless, two particular achievements of abolition were important for the continuing progress over antislavery. First was the development of a political framework, within Parliament: “support for the diplomatic and naval action [against foreign slave trade] had become institutionalized, a part of received tradition, an attitude which scarcely needed to be argued from parliament to parliament.”⁴ Second was in the formation, in 1819, of a Slave Trade Department in the Foreign Office. The policy of suppressing the foreign slave trade, in short, became a routine and substantial element of British state action. But neither initiative was totally effective, as the trade continued into the 1860s.

**Orthodox explanations for stasis and change**

The death of Pitt was an unpredictable event, and it seems to be an important factor in explaining the timing of abolition. Even though a supporter of abolition, Pitt seems to have been, in effect, a barrier to it. The difference between Pitt’s long tenure as

---

Prime Minster and Grenville's short one is remarkable, especially given that the former was far more committed in his belief in the evils of slavery than the latter. In this sense, one interpretation of the sequence of events is that Pitt's excessive caution over abolition was delaying the inevitable.

**Dynamics of stability**

Since this chapter is much about looking for politically relevant dynamics of instability and ordinary and extraordinary differences amid pressures for change, I am going to lump the dynamics of stability together here in order to move more quickly to shocks and trends. Nonetheless, an orthodox view could begin by noting that there were barriers to abolition in the British case, especially with respect to pressures on government to maintain the trade. For one thing, Britain's global role in general, and its competition with European countries in particular, required resources, as to fund war efforts on the Continent. In the late 1700s Britain was short on such resources, and the Cabinet was acutely concerned with how much money was available. The colonies were a source of much needed revenue, and the slave labor-based plantations were important in this regard. Furthermore, the West Indies in particular were conventionally seen in Britain as a vital yet vulnerable part of the empire, and many in government were loath to do anything to threaten the West Indies' security and prosperity, especially that of the planters.

The organization of the government itself was another barrier to abolition. That the ruling party was so divided, for example, was one reason to lower expectations over
what Pitt could achieve, but so was the character of many of those needing to be convinced in Parliament and the bureaucracy. Some of those most resistant to political and social reform had great clout in Parliament; and while there was some fear of repercussions of acting against popular opinion, as against the slave trade, many in the Commons feared departing from the status quo even more. For example, the French Revolution was a significant setback for the abolition movement in Britain, as well as general calls for political reform. The abolition movement could be and was, in this sense, tarred with the brush wielded against the perceived scourge of chaotic change. There were worries among both the royalty and the ruling class that any political reform would be a major threat to their social position.

At this time, the government had some of the trappings of the Westminster democratic model: political parties, debate over policy, a strong prime minister, and so on. Nevertheless, in practice, there were still few formal channels for actors outside the political establishment – including many of the evangelicals who spearheaded the anti-slavery drive – to have their say in British politics. Parliament was still a bastion of upper class power, and both the House of Lords and King George held, and exercised, veto – typically in favor of conservative causes. Moreover, conservatives also dominated the civil service. At the turn of the century the typical MP was the reform-averse “country gentleman” (and not the reform-friendly middle class businessman who would arise several decades later with the onset of the Industrial Revolution). Moreover, the

---

5 See Anstey (1975: 276-78).
6 This new middle class element is important for understanding the emancipation decision in 1833, but not abolition in 1807. Until the Great Reform Bill of 1832, which expanded the franchise, nearly all MPs were such gentlemen.
Dissenters as of yet had little influence on Parliament. While they would prove a driving force behind emancipation, their role in abolition of the slave trade was largely restricted to influencing public opinion, and the political class – here, an important distinction: “Since the majority of the British public had no direct access to political power, reform causes such as anti-slavery had no hope of legislative success without the support of the party controlling the government.”

**Shocks and trends**

Eighteenth century Britain saw the emergence of a strong antislavery sentiment. Religious activists and moral philosophers convinced many in Britain that slavery was an affront to religion and morality. Religious Dissenters, particularly Quakers but also Methodists, and evangelicals from the Church of England provided two main, proximate ideological forces behind the abolition movement. Moreover, the latter incorporated some of the secular antislavery arguments coming out of the Enlightenment, which also proved popular. By the late 18th century, then, many “British people had come to think of themselves as ‘freeborn’, unlike oppressed continental Europeans, with an instinctive repugnance for slavery and a right to political expression.”

Traditional mercantilism was beginning to give way to Adam Smith, and by the turn of the century, domestic issues were displacing concerns about war and the republican threat to monarchy. The revolutionary threat from France was over, and while

---

7 Kaufmann and Pape (1999: 650).
9 Note the idea that “perceptions of slavery, as much as of anti-slavery, have ironically been yoked, ‘over a broad sweep of time, to notions of human progress’.” As cited in Bolt and Drescher (1980b: 9).
Napoleon was doing well on the Continent, the British global position was only becoming stronger, as with its taking of French colonies and crushing of the French and Spanish navies at Trafalgar in 1805, confirming Britain’s global ascendancy.  

There was no longer, then, a worry of Napoleon invading the British Isles, and if anything, with his reintroduction of slavery in 1802, Napoleon helped the British abolition movement by making the practice look even worse. In short, Britain was now freer to turn its attention inwards, and many in the public demanded it. In this context, abolition became easier for governing elites to swallow, especially on side of other reform demands. Parliamentary reform, for example, was a direct threat to establishment power, and in having such a general target it could seem much more a Pandora’s box than something more issue specific like abolition – which also, perhaps, compared favorably with other single-issue causes. Early efforts to pass abolition sometimes made it through the Commons (to be killed by the Lords), while efforts at Catholic emancipation brought down the government in 1783, 1801, and even the Talents in 1807, not long after the successful abolition drive.

While the government was still a bastion of aristocratic influence, there were concerns at high levels about public legitimacy. In light of events on the Continent, especially the French Revolution, fears of what would happen if reform went too far were accompanied by fears over what would happen if the public was not appeased at all. Hundreds of thousands of people were signing petitions circulated by groups like the London Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and submitted to Parliament. Such loud voicing of opposition was not going unnoticed. Pitt, for one, expressed the

---

concern that blocking all reform could lead to a revolution in Britain. Moreover, the rise of men like Pitt, Grenville, and Wilberforce can be seen as a trend within the political class. As the balance between conservatives and moderates became more even, it became more possible for issue-based activist politicians to tip the balance one way or another.

Economic trends are posited as the explanation for abolition by some authors, one of the more recent examples being Inikori (2002). There was, for example, an issue of economic competition. This was a period of raw materials surplus, and Britain was being undersold in Continental markets by neutral countries who did not have to support war efforts as Britain did, and therefore had fewer costs in protecting transportation, and fewer needs for government revenue (i.e., levies on trade). Britain could use the surplus tropical produce from its colonies to help finance the military, and the primary market was the European continent. James Stephen took advantage of this situation in his 1805 book The War in Disguise, where he made the connection between Britain’s wartime economic disadvantage and the abolition cause. In the course of demanding that Britain stop putting up with the profiteering of neutrals and enemies (who used neutrals’ cargo ships to sell cheaply in Europe), he included cutting supplies to “hostile” colonies. This meant cutting both the supply of slaves to such colonies, and of sugar from such colonies, which would in turn decrease the demand for slaves.

---

12 See Kaufmann and Pape (1999: 652).
13 See Anstey (1972: 316).
Some analysts paint a broader picture of the force of economic conditions. Eltis (1987) probes developments leading to other nations getting out of the trade after 1807, and argues that anti-slavery sentiment was a byproduct of the needs of developing industrialism, specifically the need for domestic free labor. In this light, slave labor abroad flew in the face of the free labor prescriptions being pushed at home.\textsuperscript{14}

Even among scholars who take issue with primarily economic explanations, the counter-claim is that broad moral forces, which swept through the Western system of states, can explain abolition, especially in combination with specific advantages in the British case. British abolitionists were not faced with an obstacle on the order of the French Catholic Church, as seen by the role of evangelicals from within the Church of England. And British abolitionists did not have the structural problems faced by their American counterparts: there was no South, no need for a Constitutional amendment, and the West Indian interests were neither as wealthy nor as politically powerful as the slave interest in the US. Both of these are powerful explanations for why similar movements did not get a similar foothold as their British counterparts. Activists in Britain had advantages that French and Dutch actors did not. Moreover, for those in government sympathetic to the abolition cause, there was a specific advantage to being British, with respect to what one could expect to achieve. With the British navy having taken over mastery of the seas, it was clear that abolition policies could be enforced, at least to a significant degree.

\textsuperscript{14} Eltis (1987). Williams (1944) is another well-known argument that changes in economic conditions explains the end of slavery, and not the moral fervor of activists or social movements. For discussion of Williams, see Anstey (1972), and several essays in Bolt and Drescher (1980a).
Dynamics of instability

A question to ask of an orthodox explanation for the political change that ushered in abolition, however, is whether it is missing some important dynamics. Given the observation that "reform causes such as anti-slavery had no hope of legislative success without the support of the party controlling the government,"\textsuperscript{15} we should be concerned to see whether there were any politically relevant dynamics of instability. There was much activity inside and outside government prior to the passing of abolition legislation in 1806 and 1807. It may be that the window was open for the Ministry of All the Talents, to the extent that it was, because of prior processes of incremental change, on multiple fronts. Moreover, it may have been just that, a window. If there were politically relevant dynamics of instability at work, it may be that barring the unusual circumstances of Pitt's death, conditions for abolition would not have been ripe until several decades later.

This question of \textit{timing} becomes more important if we also question the possibilities of \textit{form}, whether there are indications that the form of such change might have been different (with any significant impact on the shape of British politics). If politically relevant dynamics of instability were at work, then we can expect that if passed at another time by different leaders, abolition could have looked much different.

\textit{Multifaceted social conditions}

While there were plenty of specific interests represented in the Commons ... when a question at issue touched neither a Member's particular concerns nor

\textsuperscript{15} Kaufmann and Pape (1999: 650).
those of his party he could be expected to vote according to his conceptions of "principle" and the national good. In such a situation a humanitarian appeal like that of the abolitionists could be extremely effective even without major interests or large popular support on its side, as long as they could show that abolition would not hurt Britain's overall position or personally affect the majority of M.P.'s. 16

Leading up to the passing of abolition, there remained much ambivalence in Parliament, even in the Commons. Note Lord Ellenborough's explanation for why he could not support Wilberforce in 1802: "I am frightened at the consequences of any innovation upon a long established practice at a period so full of danger as the present." 17 A challenge for abolitionists was to convince enough of the ambivalent, frightened establishment to change its frameworks. In this context, a different way to think about the role of domestic and international conditions is to question whether they were strong enough to move sufficient numbers of MPs, or whether there was enough indeterminacy that it is also possible that abolition in Britain could have been delayed, let us say, for a period on the order of decades.

There were those who while finding the slave trade repugnant nonetheless thought it necessary to maintain as essential to the national interest. In fact, few Members of Parliament in the late 1700s seem to have been strongly for or against slavery. Such ambivalence should have helped the West Indian lobby (planters, many residing in

---

16 Austen and Smith (1969: 72, emphasis added).
17 As cited in Anstey (1972: 324).
England, and sugar importers), especially when Haitian slaves overthrew the establishment in the French-held sugar colony in Hispaniola. This bloody revolt in the early 1790s "seemed to provide terrible proof of the planters' fearful warnings of the consequences of the continuing debate about black freedom."\(^{18}\) Combine this with common fears about departing from the status quo (especially among conservatives), and the sizeable economic interest in keeping the slave trade, and one might expect that the West Indian lobby would succeed in keeping the British government on their side. While the moral climate provided opportunity for activists to broadcast their views, the economic and political conditions gave opportunity for those opposed to prevent implementation.

Instead, it was the anti-slavery side which managed to advance their cause by making connections to the national interest. A central member of the abolition movement, James Stephen, published an influential book, convincing many ambivalent parliamentarians that it was not only morally right but also in the national interest to reduce and then abolish the trade. The idea was that the British slave trade was harming the national interest by supplying enemy colonies with slaves, colonies whose sale of sugar to Europe was forcing down prices and thereby putting a major dent in British revenues:

What Stephen's inspired proposal, mediated by Wilberforce and adopted by Grenville, had done was not merely to divide the twenty-three or so West Indians in the Commons from the African merchants – even when united here was no

formidable cohort – but to persuade the generality of independent members that this was a routine matter of sound policy dictated by wartime necessities and one which they could safely allow to go through.\(^{19}\)

In this light, consider Anstey’s reading of Stephen’s argument for abolition grounded in national interest:

The tactical beauty of the proposal was that it avoided repetition of the appeal to a humanity which had still not melted enough hearts, but, rather, took its stand on the sturdy ground of national interest.\(^{20}\)

Note the element of ambivalence in the claim that “enough hearts” had still not been won over.\(^{21}\) An orthodox response could be to point out that Stephen depended up conditions, of war and economic competition, to perform his “tactical beauty.” Anstey observes, however, that there was no widespread idea that going at the supply of sugar would help British economic performance. The problem, evidently, was thought to be simply the closure of certain European markets to British wares.\(^{22}\) In this sense, Stephen’s move was not an obvious one; it was not clear that this kind of argument could turn enough

\(^{19}\) Anstey (1972: 324-5).
\(^{20}\) Anstey (1972: 318).
\(^{21}\) Note also, “As Wilberforce put it in one of his letters to Grenville ‘the mistaken idea’ had gained currency that the [1806 abolition] bill “rests on general abolition principles or is grounded on justice and humanity, an imputation which”, he added significantly, ‘I am aware would prove fatal to it’. The emphasis of the bill’s promoters was on the national advantage to be gained from refusing any longer to supply enemy colonies with slaves and from prohibiting the further import of slaves into conquered colonies because the capital investment which they represented and the labour which they effected would simply accrue to the enemy’s advantage if those colonies were returned to him at the peace. … The recipe worked like a charm.” As cited in Anstey (1972: 323).
\(^{22}\) Anstey (1972: 318-19).
MPs from ambivalent to convinced. The issues were multifaceted, and he found a useful way to frame them.

One block to abolition had been the makeup of the British administration. It was part of the reason that Pitt did not have the confidence to push the issue: "a strong conservative opposition to abolition amongst most of the more powerful members of Pitt's ministries combined with his relative political weakness and current conventions on the limitations of cabinet unanimity to explain further the absence of any real ministerial backing for abolition."\(^{23}\) Not only was the Lords, the King, and to some degree the Commons a problem, but so was the civil service, as in regards to implementing any policy passed by Parliament. Here too, then, was a resource for those opposing abolition. There is also the matter of resources that the British could bring to bear internationally, that were not inherently for or against abolition:

From the 1790s the constraints that had limited the exercise of Britain's worldwide power for so long finally began to dissolve [one constraint lost was the 13 American colonies in 1776-83]. During the great wars against Revolutionary [1793-1802] and Napoleonic [1803-15] France, Britain took the opportunity of destroying not only the French navy but those of Spain and the Netherlands as well; by 1815 the Royal Navy had as many ships as the rest of the world's navies combined. During the wars Britain's territorial possessions had grown greatly and her hold over the Empire had become much stronger.\(^{24}\)

---
\(^{23}\) Anstey (1972: 313).
\(^{24}\) Lenman (1997: 166).
This naval supremacy could have been turned to consolidating even further Britain’s dominant role in the slave trade. If the argument for preserving the economic national interest in the West Indies had seemed more convincing, here were the means not only to preserve that interest, but to extend it. Furthermore, Bayly suggests that there was a possibility to follow trends on the Continent, and shift to a more repressive stance with respect to domestic politics.²⁵

*Societal heterogeneity*

Significant parts of the abolition story involve groups forming alliances, as with the joining both of different kinds of religious groups and religious with secular groups, and as with certain religious activists trying to get the ear of high-level Tory politicians. In this respect, the organization of the Tories as a party may be important for thinking about the networking possibilities. Political parties did not function as in modern Western democracies. Instead there was a proliferation of political groups.²⁶ Policies were shaped and pushed by personalistic factions more than parties. While one can see signs of one-party rule and one-person hegemony, the reality was more fractious, at least until 1812. While one can point to consistent Tory rule throughout the decades leading up to abolition, for concrete policy decisions, the action was with the factions.

From the perspective of individuals outside of government trying to make connections inside, that the ruling party was divided into factions was both an

²⁶ See Jupp (1985) and Sack (1979).
opportunity and a barrier. On one hand, lobbyists from either side of the debate would not have to work on all members of a faction, just a few of the right members, especially the leader. In this sense, factionalism provided opportunity. On the other hand, factionalism was a barrier to party discipline and so when the main initiators of policy, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, wished to make policy one way or another, factional fights (which did not always have to do with the policy in question) could get in the way.

With respect to the idea that "reform causes such as anti-slavery had no hope of legislative success without the support of the party controlling the government," getting that support was no simple matter. This suggests that the passing of a policy like abolition – which was regarded with ambivalence by so many in the "party controlling the government" – was contingent on dynamics of instability as well as of stability. And one of these dynamics was the organization of the lobbying groups themselves. There is much written on how well the anti-slavery movement found ways to develop grassroots support, and ways to pressure the government – with large-scale petitioning being one of their innovations. One can argue that trends were in their favor, and that the movement would have "emerged" no matter the skill of the movement leaders.

But clearly some conditions favored the West Indian interest as well. With MPs concerned for Britain's overall position, a reasonably organized group of plantation owners and sugar traders should have been able to play on the ambivalence of moderate Tories. Grenville, for one, had a record of putting Britain's financial interests before
more idealistic causes such as reform.\textsuperscript{27} By the 1790s, however, the planters and traders of the West Indies were a poorly organized bunch, which took little effective action other than trying to counter the abolition petitions with some of its own. If anything, they were better at harming their own cause than advancing it. West Indian planters living in England, growing wealthy off profits from their colonial holdings, were losing the public image game, being increasingly seen as corrupt in both morals and behavior.\textsuperscript{28}

\textit{Windows of opportunity}

That the planters could have done more to prevent the events of 1806/7, and that the anti-slavery campaigners could have done less, is suggested by events in the decades between abolition and emancipation. There is evidence that the form and timing of abolition was the grasping of a window of opportunity by anti-slavery activists. Had Pitt continued on, there is reason to believe that a Whig interruption of Tory rule, as in the Ministry of All the Talents, might not have happened for a long time. But while Pitt’s death was an unusual event, it does not seem accurate to consider it a threat to or rupture of the political order.

The Talents Ministry, after all, was led by Grenville, a Tory who had worked hand in hand with Pitt through much of his administration. Nor does the King’s intervention to fill the suddenly vacant leadership of Parliament with the Talents suggest any great change in the political order, as his intervening at an important moment was not out of character. As such, there seems little reason to consider this moment a critical

\textsuperscript{27} See Jupp (1985).
\textsuperscript{28} See Ward (1998).
juncture – social conditions were not dictating that a move to abolition be implemented at this time.

**Incomplete victories**

That abolition was the taking of a window of opportunity and not something larger is suggested by how quickly the defeated came back afterwards. Colonists managed to establish a stronger presence in Parliament, and a number of moderate Tories switched back against the campaign, preventing the passing of further legislation towards the cause of ending slavery. There were also a number of what could be considered policy failures following the passing of the abolition bill, such as the fact that some of Britain’s economic and geo-political competitors were benefiting from the change, taking over from British traders and generating more revenue for themselves. Even with Britain in a strong position at the Vienna peace negotiations, especially given its command of the seas, it failed in its efforts to pressure other signatories to follow suit with abolition.

Moreover, a number British slavers switched to trading under other flags, and no change in treatment of slaves in West Indies was forthcoming. The victory of 1807 had failed, in short, to bring many of the outcomes hoped for by Wilberforce and Stephen. It was not a complete wash, as some efforts at enforcement were producing results, but the failures to bring much change to the existence of slavery alarmed antislavery activists. Similar concerns had helped fuel the massive campaign of petitions leading up to 1807, but as time wore on, especially into the 1820s, the activists were able to perform little in the way of effective action.
There were several reasons for why the antislavery movement lost ground around that time, which are also suggestive for thinking about the form and timing of abolition, and whether the latter were as structurally determined as an orthodox interpretation would suggest. For one thing, the West Indian interest had become more organized, and was better able to exert pressure in the Commons in the 1920s. At the same time, abolitionists had lost a lot of their own Parliamentary support, with fewer MPs committed to their cause. Furthermore, Anstey claims that a major strategic failure for abolitionists was “the inability to harness free trade to the cause of emancipation,” especially among the powerful East Indian lobby.\textsuperscript{29} Here the abolitionists failed to make the kind of economic interest connection that had sped the original abolition effort to its successful conclusion.

Part of the problem was that the movement itself was in disarray, its leaders failing to coordinate the wide range of groups and individuals, over both goals and tactics. Wilberforce, once a guiding light, was still in Parliament in the early 1920s, but was in declining health. And finally, Anstey claims that, “public opinion, though fully seized of the horrors of the slave trade was seemingly not aware of the actual evils of plantation slavery.”\textsuperscript{30} Here, then, seems to be another strategic failure. While abolitionists had done well to mobilize the public for the original abolition cause, they stumbled over emancipation. It seems that this time opposition forces were much better at counter-punching, both in Westminster and in the forum of public opinion.

\textsuperscript{29} Anstey (1980: 25).
\textsuperscript{30} Anstey (1980: 25).
Incremental change, cascade and continuity

An orthodox response to all this talk of instability could be that the victory of 1806/7 robbed some momentum from the anti-slavery cause. The successes, especially more long-lasting ones like the institutions built to carry abolition policy into action, would lead less committed supporters of anti-slavery to focus their attention elsewhere. So it simply took time to gather the support necessary for the push to emancipation. But the fact that it took several decades to rebuild this momentum suggests that maybe the pressure for abolition in the early 1800s was not that great to begin with, or at least that the political victory was more contingent than an orthodox explanation might allow. Then, however, is the question of how many years one should expect it to take.

A more practical response is to focus on the process of change itself, and to try to discern the whether patterns of behavior better fit an orthodox shock/trend model, or something more piecemeal and contingent. As noted, one of the major successes of abolition in 1807 was the creation of institutions dedicated to its maintenance and implementation. But this achievement may have as much or more to do with other reform efforts within government than with the abolition campaign itself. Moreover, this government reform was no sweeping change of the administration. Instead, where there was change, it was an incremental process that varied widely in impact, with some ministries undergoing overhaul, while others remained relatively untouched.
As exemplified by Pitt, some members of the conservative establishment were coming to new views about how best to serve Britain's national interest, under the influence of writers like Adam Smith. One could call this a trend, but at this stage, it was more of a trickle. To be able to execute such changes, as in fiscal and market reform, these moderate reformers needed, themselves, to be able to get by gatekeepers such as the King and the Lords. Often they failed, as with Pitt's efforts for moderate reform of Parliament during the 1780s. Where they did succeed, it seemed less like pressure forcing adjustment than individuals of different mind gradually bringing change in bits and pieces, in fits and starts, and with setbacks. Grenville was unusually successful in this regard.

Given Pitt's difficulties with the administration in the years prior to 1807, it could be argued that the successful institution building that followed abolition was not a foregone conclusion, even with a Whig-dominated coalition of the Talents in charge. More so since that government fell so soon after passing the abolition bill. Given the importance of the form in which abolition was implemented, it is reasonable to speculate that without the Talents, significant changes over slavery may have been delayed until the early 1830s. Without the sudden collapse of the Pitt government, perhaps less moderate conservatives over time could have developed their own strategies to counter antislavery activists. It is possible to argue, in short, that events surrounding abolition suggest a process of change that fits less well with the orthodox view, and more with a piecemeal view of change, characterized by dynamics of instability as well as trends.
Ordinary differences

That the pattern of change looks less orthodox also implies greater room for agency, and so it is useful to look at the extent to which politically relevant ordinary differences were important to this story. Since I treat the abolition case as a difficult one for finding a place for extraordinary differences, I will quickly move through ordinary differences, lumping the personal and interpersonal together.

There were, of course, differences within the ruling party as well as within the civil service. Even moderate Tories could not agree over abolition in particular and political reform in general. And even where they were unified over what was desirable, there were clashes over what was possible. Recall that while Pitt desired abolition, he did not think it politically feasible to proceed towards that end. Part of his reluctance was owing to opposition in the civil service, but as with the antimafia case there were civil servants pushing for reform as well.

As suggested with respect to social network heterogeneity, there were differences over time in how well different interest groups were able to make use of connections and to influence others. Especially given the importance of getting influence in Parliament in this case, it makes sense that successes for both the anti-slavery campaigners and for the planters and traders were associated with how well they organized and found political allies. The attention given to Wilberforce by many historians of the anti-slavery movement seems in part due to his talent for making connections and gaining influence. That personalistic factions were so important to the functioning of party politics only
adds emphasis to the importance of interpersonal differences. The problems for the anti-slavery campaigners following abolition, and the simultaneous successes for the planters and traders, are much about changes in how well these groups organized their networks, and made connections in government.

**Extraordinary differences**

Yet while in Britain abolitionism certainly became a popular cause, to a degree unmatched elsewhere, the fact remains that the decision to end the slave trade was taken by Parliament, where evangelicalism was only a minority sentiment and where practical strategic considerations were paramount.\(^{31}\)

The Italian antimafia case is useful because of the extreme set of problems facing actors like Falcone and Orlando. In this sense, it is a useful case to exhibit the relevance of a wide array of extraordinary differences. Comparatively speaking the abolitionists had much more going for them, so there should be fewer *politically relevant* extraordinary differences. As suggested above, however, there were problems in the way, which is one reason why it took thirty odd years after they first began to organize to see any concrete policy results in 1806/7, and then another thirty years to achieve emancipation. These problems had much to do with the nature of the political order, and as such this is a place to look for politically relevant extraordinary differences. In the early 1800s, there were few reasons to expect that public pressure would make it the last mile to concrete policy and institutional change. As such, it is reasonable to argue that

having someone with extraordinary capabilities was necessary to get by conservative
gatekeepers blocking political change.

The speed with which the Talents Ministry passed abolition legislation, when
compared with previous efforts, suggests that it was an easy maneuver. But this does not
seem to mesh with events as they happened on the ground. According to detailed
accounts, passage proved no simple task, and the amount of work Grenville put in leading
up to the vote was remarkable. Anstey argues that Grenville was “much more prepared”
than Pitt had ever been, and was able to demand support from members in the Commons
and Lords in a way that Pitt had not been.\footnote{Anstey (1972: 328).} In context of the opening quotation of this
section, “that the decision to end the slave trade was taken by Parliament, where
evangelicalism was only a minority sentiment and where practical strategic
considerations were paramount,” Grenville’s initiatives seem significant if not crucial.

\textit{Mindset}

A difference between the abolition case and the antimafia case is that mindset,
relatively speaking, is less important for overcoming problems blocking political change.
Nevertheless, it is not irrelevant. Pitt’s fears of working towards abolition are
informative.

With respect to the motivation to launch a project against the status quo and its
defenders, given the likelihood of high personal costs, Grenville’s rise to the position and
influence he attained was not a usual one. His primary life and career goals were not
about power, but about attaining aristocratic status and financial security. By 1790 he had achieved both aristocratic status and financial security, though Jupp argues that even afterwards, Grenville often continued to worry about his financial security. His efforts to retire, however, were cut short with his cousin Pitt’s request that he help in the war effort. Grenville was reluctant when asked to be Foreign Secretary in Pitt’s government, and he let it be known that he planned to resign if he could find a proper replacement, but he agreed to take the post. When he tried to retire, he was asked back for his skill and knowledge – he was acknowledged by political friends and foes alike as eminently able – and he accepted the invitations.

As shown in the biography by Jupp, while (especially early in his political career) Grenville was typically moving at the behest of others, what was remarkable was how he performed once he agreed to take on a project or position of responsibility. In a sense, his approach was a rough, functional equivalent of being motivated to work for change, because he typically was unhappy with the organization and functioning of the departments he worked at, with the result that he set about overhauling them. And the results in terms of efficiency and effectiveness were, evidently, remarkable. In this sense, despite not setting out to reform government, he nevertheless showed persistence to work on long-term, incremental forms of change. The manner in which he worked on particular policy issues is also indicative of this persistence, though it proved to be a problem when quick decisions were needed. He usually took a long view on policy issues, wanting to cover them from all angles, and making sure to be in a strong position prior to making any big moves. This preference for slow construction of new policy,
which seems appropriately characterized as encompassing patience to wait for better opportunities, was also a detriment during wartime when rapid, decisive decisions were needed.

**Aptitude**

Since many of the barriers to political change were about the nature of the political order and the attitudes of its members, considering the role of aptitudes is of central relevance. The comparison between Pitt and Grenville suggests that ability mattered for the possible in this case given how a powerful, well-placed actor with strong preferences failed where a more capable actor with weaker preferences succeeded. In part, success came with better use of available resources. Pitt was never able to gain a hold of the Lords, on his own, in the way that Grenville did.\(^{33}\) Grenville, through learning to play a number of different roles, had developed deep expertise in dynamics of British politics. He came to learn how to command debate in both the Commons and the Lords, serving for a time as Speaker in the Commons and as Pitt’s representative in the Lords. He had, in short, *the expertise to navigate the political order, to attain and keep a position from which to engineer a project to change that order*. He had an intimate understanding of all phases of politics in Britain, and his capabilities within the government seem to have been without equal in his time.

Along the way he showed the intelligence to derive an exceptional understanding of the possible given a set of conditions. He was not alone in gaining experience in government, as through holding positions such as foreign secretary, which he was for ten

\(^{33}\) In this section I draw a great deal on Jupp’s (1985) biography of Grenville.
years. But in comparison to peers, he seems to have developed a far more keen understanding of how to operate, and operate well, within the bureaucracy. His successful efforts to reform the ministries he worked within showed an open-mindedness to question convention and to look to improve upon it, as well as the insight to find ways to bypass or turn conventions and institutions (geared to preserving the existing order) towards novel uses.

Furthermore, over time Grenville became one of the better-connected individuals in government, and even managed to build a friendship with the King. By 1795, he had largely captured the Lords, regularly winning five-to-one majorities for the policies he tabled. He had, that is, the influence to persuade and coordinate others and keep their attention. Part of this influence came from the practical angle he took to policy issues, rather than the more ideological stance of someone like Wilberforce. The fact that Grenville was neither a strong abolitionist, nor reformer, furthered his ability to help the abolitionist cause. When he stuck his neck out on this issue, it carried a weight that other more ideological MPs could not have carried. Grenville did support a number of specific reform causes, where he saw them as benefiting the prosperity and security of Great Britain, but he remained sufficiently moderate to hold sway with enough ambivalent Tories to carry abolition past the conservative gatekeepers of the old order. Said one MP:

Nobody expected this great question to be carried with so high a hand. I cannot but rejoice at it; but unless one is to suppose that a sudden and complete revolution has taken place in the public mind without any new or assignable cause
upon this subject, and that not confined to one but extended to both Houses of Parliament, it is to one who holds my opinion both disgusting and alarming to observe that the present Administration can do so much more that Pitt could accomplish in the plenitude of his power.\textsuperscript{34}

This quotation could be, as Anstey argues, a bit of an exaggeration. But what seems clearer is that Grenville’s position in Parliament was important for the size of this victory, in a context where the Talents’ Cabinet itself was not unified behind such a measure; particularly important for getting it through the House of Lords; and for ferrying it past a conservative King George III.

The consideration of extraordinary differences, in short, suggests that abolitionists were not only lucky to have the Whig-dominated Talents coalition take over upon Pitt’s death, but that Grenville in particular was in the seat of Prime Minister. Given that Grenville was no strongly committed abolitionist, given his perhaps avoidable split with his cousin Pitt in 1804 to join with Fox’s Whigs, and given that he had never been that interested in political power in the first place, his own role in bringing abolition about was not predetermined, perhaps not even probable.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Grenville was not infallible. It was to a great extent his own fault that the Talents’ government only lasted a year. He and his colleagues made the mistake of trying to sneak concessions to the Irish Catholics through under the King’s nose. This

\textsuperscript{34} As cited in Anstey (1972: 329).
time the gatekeeper would have none of it, and so again the Irish question brought down a British government. Grenville was not a radical regarding what to do with Ireland, but he saw a strong need for some accommodation. His sense was that Britain could only handle France if it were at peace with Ireland. But this proved too much of a divergence from the King's view, especially in the distinctly pro-toleration elements of Grenville's Ireland platform. The argument that success on abolition required strong efforts on multiple fronts may shed some light on this failure, as there was no similar incremental effort to build public and political support. Moreover, political conditions within the government were less ambivalent over the Irish question. Perhaps with more capable allies and a more incremental approach, Grenville may have done better here, but maybe conditions were not ready. The King, for one, was not.

Nevertheless, the timing and form of abolition is better explained through a three toolsets lens than through one focused primarily on discerning the role of domestic and international conditions. The reshaping of existing institutions, in concert with other new means of political action, helped change notions of desirable and possible in the political class, and prepared the way such that when a window of opportunity did open, it could be kept open and exploited. Furthermore, the way abolition was implemented built foundations for later advances in the anti-slavery cause, even when conditions were less ripe. The explanation for this outcome is complex interaction of factors, as we must take into account the shift in public morality, the decline of Tory rule (even if it was not that unified to begin with), and the ambivalence of many in the establishment over the abolition issue in comparison with other reform causes. But these conditions are
indeterminate, especially when considering that such ambivalence could have remained unused. Without someone of Grenville’s capabilities, the opportunity in 1806/7 could have come and gone. Or the ambivalence could have been turned in other directions. The conspicuous failure of the West Indies’ planters and sugar traders to make use of it is suggestive, as, perhaps, are the more repressive directions taken by political regimes on the European mainland.
Chapter Eight
Locating political creativity in the Chinese village council elections project

The phrase “locating political creativity,” as used in the title to Chapter 1, has a double meaning. One idea is that by improving the content and organization of our catalog of analytical tools, we should be better able to locate possibilities for political creativity. Another idea is that with better toolsets, we should be better able to locate and understand real examples of projects for and elements of political creativity – assuming they exist. The Ostpolitik, antimafia, and abolition cases provide some initial evidence that they do exist, but there may be questions about whether such examples are better left as “mystical” cases of agency. Kaufmann and Pape (1999), for example, consider the British effort to abolish slavery as one of the few examples in history of what they term “costly moral action,” where a country sacrifices its national interest, on a large scale, for the purpose of advancing a moral cause. These cases, in other words, may be too remarkable in their uniqueness – too remarkable to be of interest to scholars focused on generalities about the social and political.

To avoid the “mystical” charge, I look at several diverse cases in this dissertation, rather than go deep into one, to suggest the broad applicability of both a 3TSA approach in general, and its use in locating political creativity in particular. In this chapter I use the creation and implementation of Village Council elections in China to support the goal of locating political creativity in both senses of the phrase. On the one hand, we can certainly use better analytical tools for considering political possibilities in country with such a large economic and political “footprint.” While I do not offer a definitive
interpretation of events and conditions in China (a proper consideration would require far
more space), the fact that accounts of events in this case fit well with the 3TSA approach
to locating political creativity adds more support to the validity of the concepts and
methods. In short, one role of this chapter is to show a way in which to think about
political possibilities in China, which in turn points to the broader applicability of the
approach in context of the other cases.

On the other hand, this chapter provides a way to make sense of events on the
ground, especially given the variation in available interpretations. Shi (1999), for
example, points to the efforts of a few low-level bureaucrats to bring more political
autonomy, democratic self-rule, and governmental accountability to the countryside. His
picture is of far-sighted innovation, carefully built and controlled so as to be able to
expand without triggering a clampdown from conservatives. But then there is Kelliher
(1997), who sees these events as a reaction by a central government fearing possible
escalation of peasant unrest, but a reaction designed to let off steam without granting
much in the way of rights or autonomy. In the former view, there is enough room for
controlled agency to allow certain individuals to work on long-term projects. In the latter
view, the pressures of social conditions are forcing the Chinese Communist Party’s hand.

But there is a third possibility: conditions are mixed, with characteristics of order
and disorder, of far-sighted design and knee-jerk reaction. That is, structure and agency
may interacting more than either Shi or Kelliher assume. As discussed in earlier
chapters, where there is controlled agency, it will likely be accompanied by other kinds –
redundant, unintended, bracketed, and perhaps even mystical. The challenge is to find the effects of such individual contributions amid various social dynamics. The case of Village Council elections is a good example of the difficulty involved with this kind of concern, given the complexity involved. But a long-term project like the design and construction of new village level political institutions provides an opportunity to observe the interaction between agency and structure over time.

By taking a three toolsets approach, we can derive a sense of the constraints and opportunities, and then consider if, and if so how, the traits and actions of individuals are relevant for explaining this course of events. Even some who take a more conditions-based view, seeing events and problems as driven by pressures and constraints on the state, and by general characteristics of the population, regard VC elections as an “unexpected” solution.1 Considering the traits and actions of important players may help us understand why this solution was chosen to a problem, and why that problem was perceived and addressed in a particular way, when other alternatives have been chosen to deal with other issues of disorder in China. Moreover, while a change in regime type may, in the end, occur through some shock or collapse, if we can locate possibilities for political creativity within the Chinese political system, we may be able to map other feasible routes. One of these is through the members of the new “Fourth Generation” of CCP leaders, among whom there are very different views about the possibility and desirability of political reform.

1 See Kelliher (1997).
Short history

In November 1987 the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) in China adopted the Organic Law of Village Committees (draft). The law stipulated that the chairman, vice-chairmen, and members of village committees should be directly elected by the residents of the village. Implementation of the Organic Law began in 1989. Although the Tiananmen Incident interrupted the process, the effort survived the criticism of conservatives in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and continued.\(^2\)

Starting in the late 1970s, after the death of Mao and under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, the Chinese Communist Party implemented a number of economic reforms, along with some limited political changes. The CCP moved to reject the Stalinist model of state control over the economy, and Mao's visions of an egalitarian society of unending class struggle. Instead, Deng and his allies looked to shore up legitimacy and power for the Communists by increasing the standard of living. There was new focus on consumer goods, international trade, markets, and decentralization of economic control.\(^3\) There was also a move to make agriculture more efficient and productive, which at first involved giving collectives more autonomy (as in land use) and giving peasants more freedom to sell surplus in rural markets. But these tentative moves were overwhelmed by changes on the ground, as some provincial and local officials went ahead and gave autonomy directly to households. This practice proved popular and spread widely, so much so that, "In 1981 the central government acknowledged reality and officially

\(^3\) See Gittings (1990), Goldman and MacFarquhar (1999a: 4-5), and Shirk (1993: 9).
endorsed the new system, and by 1983 nearly all farm households in China had implemented it."^4

While Deng led the effort to reform the Chinese economy, there was no consensus among Party leaders over the speed and direction of such change, and factional infighting revolved around advocating different policies.\(^5\) This internal Party conflict extended into the realm of the political, especially given the disarray stemming from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which left the CCP in a weakened state, both in terms of organization and legitimacy. Even agricultural reform seems to have been partially driven by Deng’s effort to reshape the political order, and restore the CCP to its proper position of strength:

They [Deng and his allies] intend to break down many old rural administrative units, merging them into new economic zones, under the authority of nearby towns or cities. They aim for a big turnover in the rural cadre force, easing out old line party regulars and bringing in younger specialists whose “problem orientation” will be more technical, less personal, and less political. They are designing new salary and bonus systems to induce rural cadres to behave more

---

^4 Shirk (1993: 38). See also Gittings (1990: 131, 133) about CCP responding to masses regarding agricultural change, rather than leading it. Shirk (1993: 38-9) describes the new system: “The household responsibility system transferred decision-making power from collective production units (communes, brigades, and teams) to the family. Each family was assigned a plot of collective land and was responsible for every stage of cultivation on that land. Farmers signed contracts with the production team, promising to provide a certain amount of crops or services, and retained or sold the rest on their own. Farm households were allowed to invest their profits in farm machinery, trucks, or industrial equipment and to engage in private marketing and manufacturing. Land contracts were for fifteen years and were renewable and transferable by inheritance or lease. Although the land continued to be owned collectively, farmers had the right to use the land as if it were their own. In effect, Chinese farmers became sharecroppers or tenants with the collectives as their landlords.”

like company employees and corporate executives than like guardians of the revolutionary mass line.\textsuperscript{6}

Agricultural reform, in other words, fit with Deng’s broader effort to replace many CCP veterans from various levels of government with technocrats and college graduates – making the “cadre force” a “less political” one was part of Deng’s political strategy to marginalize more conservative members of the Party apparatus. In his call for “socialist democracy” and “socialist legality,” Deng “sought to reestablish the party’s legitimacy by emphasizing collective rule, regularizing procedures, and reforming political institutions.”\textsuperscript{7} He and his allies worked to create some separation between the Party and government, where the former would maintain the dominant role in leading the country and establishing national goals, but where the latter would be given more autonomy to formulate and implement policy.\textsuperscript{8} A central goal in all this was, “To replace an overstaffed, incapable cadre corps with a lean, well-educated, yet politically loyal civil service became the main objective of the administrative reforms.”\textsuperscript{9} According to Shirk, “The party had to trade off a degree of control to gain greater economic efficiency.”\textsuperscript{10}

For a time, Deng also traded off a degree of political control, in part to further marginalize opposing, conservative CCP leaders – not an unprecedented move, as during the Cultural Revolution Mao called for “great democracy,” for the public to “make

\textsuperscript{6} Shue (1988: 77-8).
\textsuperscript{7} Goldman and MacFarquhar (1999a: 11).
\textsuperscript{8} For example, reforms in 1986, including constitutional reforms, reduced CCP oversight of government departments. See Shirk (1993: 63).
\textsuperscript{9} Lü: (2000: 157-8). See also Nathan and Gilley (2002: 39), regarding Deng’s effort starting in 1980 to improve quality of CCP leadership to be, in Deng’s words, “more revolutionary, younger, more knowledgeable, and more specialized.”
\textsuperscript{10} Shirk (1993: 62).
suggestions” for change. This was a way for Mao to use the masses as leverage in his fight against growing bureaucracy, as long as their “suggestions” were the right ones. In a similar vein, Deng allowed more tolerance of critical political views, especially the right ones: those against Maoist excesses, and those against ideas and practices favored by Deng’s more conservative opponents. The height of this opening was the Democracy Wall movement in late 1978, which featured the first public denunciations of Mao. When Deng had consolidated his position vis-à-vis his rivals, and when political discourse in some of the Democracy Wall posters and related journals became overtly anti-government, Deng closed the opening to public dissent. Many reformers and dissidents were jailed, while most of the others ceased lobbying for political change, remaining relatively quiet until the late 1980s. In the meantime, however, Deng’s reforms of the civil service, in giving it more autonomy and making it more professional, was giving a new class of educated technocrats influence on policy.

One of these civil servants was Wang Zhenyao, a villager from a peasant background who entered university not long after Mao’s death. He found a job in what, at the time, was one of the weakest ministries in the Chinese state, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), where he was assigned to be a deputy director of the Department of Grassroots Administration. This small, resource-poor department proved to be the destination for a number of reform-minded civil servants who had been working at the Rural Development Institute, which was shuttered during the crackdown on the

---

13 For more on the Democracy Wall movement, see Goldman (2002).
14 See Wong (1996) for more on the fear generated by state repression of dissent in China.
15 For a profile of Wang, see Mufson (1998).
Democracy Wall movement, given the involvement in the latter of so many Institute members.16 One of their responsibilities, however, was to keep track of Village Committees. In the context of a rise in peasant unrest in the early 1980s, Wang wrote a report to the CCP Central Committee arguing that “by introducing competitive elections, we can gain the peasants’ support and avoid the danger of loss of control in the countryside.”17

That villages should have committees to manage certain local affairs was owing to the inclusion of this concept in the 1982 Constitution, though the central government has been selective in which aspects of the Constitution to implement. Still, it was within the MCA’s authority, and especially Wang’s Department of Grassroots Administration, to develop policy on how these committees should be implemented. The result was the Organic Law of 1987:

Under the Organic Law of Villagers’ Committees (1987, revised 1998), VCs are not part of the state apparatus; rather, they are “autonomous mass organizations” through which villagers manage their own affairs, educate themselves, and meet their own needs (Art. 2). VCs are composed of three to seven members, each of whom is elected for a term of three years. Committees have broad powers and limited but real autonomy from township governments that sit above them. While the committees, for instance, must “help” townships in their work, they are not

---

17 As quoted by Mufson (1998: 1).
subject to top-down “leadership relations” ... and townships are prohibited from meddling in affairs that fall within a VC’s purview.\textsuperscript{18}

Moreover, VC autonomy is meaningful given that the “affairs within purview” include the ownership and management of village land and usually of a significant percentage of overall income: “Although party secretaries usually dominate enterprise management in richer areas, even weak VCs own a village’s land and usually have ‘veto power to decide the general use of village resources – what might be called macro-economic control.’”\textsuperscript{19}

VC elections, however, almost did not get off the ground. The Tiananmen protests occurred two years after the passing of the Organic Law, and in that light, political reforms that gave more voice to ordinary people looked to some in the CCP as a threat to Party rule, especially where such reforms were being driven by the civil service instead of the Party:

When the conservative group within the party leadership strengthened its position after the spring 1989 crackdown on mass protests, there was a clear turnabout in the party’s line on the party-government relationship. ... The party was urged to restore its active leadership over enterprises, local governments, and national government.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} O’Brien (2002: 219-20).
\textsuperscript{19} As cited in O’Brien (2002: 220).
\textsuperscript{20} Shirk (1993: 67).
More specifically with respect to village elections, "In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident, the powerful personnel department of the CCP, in conjunction with some provincial leaders, expressed its opposition to direct village elections. Conservatives within the CCP charged that such elections were "examples of peaceful evolution" and suggested abolishing the plan."\(^{21}\) With the help of some allies relatively high up in the CCP, however, the MCA managed to defend the village level elections project from this attack well enough to hold the first round of elections the same year as Tiananmen.

This first round included many cases of voter indifference and extensive manipulation by local cadres determined to defend their influence. Several reports state that villagers were not enthusiastic about the efforts of the MCA: "Early on, many villagers had scoffed at their voting rights, and in some places they shunned VC elections."\(^{22}\) Nevertheless, some elections in this first round resulted in the expulsion of hated and/or corrupt officials. News of such results spread, and with each following round of elections, participation became more extensive and active, as with more participation in nominating candidates and reporting violations of the Organic Law. In the 1993 round, more than half of all Chinese villages held elections for top positions on their VC. And the voting out of unpopular officials became more common, as did the election of people who were not members of the Communist Party.\(^{23}\)

\(^{21}\) Shi (1999: 393 fn 37).
\(^{23}\) For a number of reports and other resources about VC elections, see the China Village Elections Project, under the Peace Programs section of The Carter Center website: www.cartercenter.org.
The MCA was not unopposed in its project, as with the post-Tiananmen offensive by conservatives. That said, however, some members of the incumbent order, especially at the provincial and local level, did not take the policy seriously at first, or simply did not know about it. By the time they realized the scope of the issue, the Organic Law had become very popular among many villagers, so options like banning elections at the local level could seem potentially dangerous. Conservatives thus turned to manipulating nominations: “When semicompetitive elections became widespread in 1993, electoral manipulation also intensified.” But a number of other local bureaucrats adjusted in a different way: they were surprised at how well peasants responded to VC procedures in some localities, how much more readily they accepted new policies, how they were more willing to pay taxes (and higher taxes at that), and how the elections seemed to encourage a greater sense of community responsibility.

Over time, the MCA has worked to increase the autonomy of Village Committees, to give villagers more say in their operation, and build more checks on manipulation of procedures by local officials. While the sometimes-large population of migrant “floating workers” cannot participate, all registered, adult village residents can vote and run for office. There have been explicit efforts to protect women, as by trying to curb the practice sanctioned in some provinces of household heads voting for the entire household. There have also been efforts to push for more privacy in voting, and for more competition with more candidates and more campaigning and more input on nominations.

---

26 For more on the exclusion of “floating workers,” see Solinger (1999).
And villagers have been making use of procedures made available to report violations of the Organic Law.\textsuperscript{27}

At the same time, authors like Perry and Selden point out that “party secretaries, not village committees, still rule the countryside [and that the] Communist Party retains a monopoly over key instruments of control: propaganda, personnel, military, and police.”\textsuperscript{28} There was also the threat to projects like the VC elections given Jiang Zemin’s consolidation of power in 1997. He had been a relatively weak leader early on in his tenure.\textsuperscript{29} But from 1997 onwards, “The vision he espoused was a neo-authoritarian one, in which the CCP would be a party of modernizing, educated elites who could discern the national interest without recourse to the messy process of democracy.”\textsuperscript{30} In short, Jiang worked to scale back certain political reforms, even some implemented by Deng, as in trying to return more Party oversight to the day-by-day operations of the civil service.

On the eve of the leadership transition from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao, Nathan and Gilley (2002) reported that, “The Party’s grip on power seems more secure when he [Jiang] leaves office than when he took it.”\textsuperscript{31} In such light, the implementation of village elections should not be taken as a wholesale change to the political structure in China. Nevertheless, it is a change, one surprising in form, and therefore potentially informative for considering political possibilities in China, both in terms of its advances and the limits thereto.

\textsuperscript{27} See reports on the China Village Elections Projects at www.cartercenter.org.
\textsuperscript{28} Perry and Selden (2003b: 7).
\textsuperscript{29} See Nathan and Gilley (2002: 149) about how, early on, Jiang had little control over several other top-level leaders (both hardliners and reformers) who were in charge of areas like internal security, Party discipline, organizational affairs, and even propaganda.
\textsuperscript{30} Nathan and Gilley (2002: 165), emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{31} Nathan and Gilley (2002: 171-2).
Orthodox explanation of stasis and change

It is reasonable to be skeptical about Village Council elections. As commonly noted, Wang’s report arguing for elections was presented as a solution to the problem of rural unrest, a solution which could regain legitimacy and control for the Party.\textsuperscript{32} So it is reasonable to see the VC elections project as an effort to quell unrest in the countryside by seeming to give villagers more say, while not actually giving up any significant control. And, if there were too much loss of control, the expectation would be that the elections project would be terminated. In the event, elections have, over time, spread to many more villages, and there have already been several rounds of reforms to make the elections more free and fair. Furthermore, there have already been initial “experiments” in bringing these electoral procedures into more urban settings.\textsuperscript{33} A question, though, is to ask what kind of agency is really involved here.

At first blush, the institution of village level elections seems too different from other policies to be seen as redundant agency: given the common practices of the CCP in maintaining political control (while pursuing economic reform), we would not expect typical civil servants and members of the CCP to have done the same. That said, however, even during Mao’s tenure as leader there was a degree of local-level autonomy (discussed further below), and there were some localities which did hold elections. Moreover, there have been periods in Chinese history where the center has pursued policies of giving greater political autonomy to the local level with the aim of making the

\textsuperscript{32} E.g. Mufson (1998).
\textsuperscript{33} See, e.g., Nathan and Gilley (2002), Ogden (2002), and The Economist (April 5, 2003: 42).
state work better.\textsuperscript{34} Indeed, in the last few years the CCP has begun using some of that history to justify more local autonomy. Nevertheless, it still seems a large step from local autonomy where individual cadres have some leeway to apply Party policy (or not), to elections where voting and running for cadre positions in a majority of villages are open to people not members of the Communist Party.

It could be, then, that this case of change involves \textit{controlled agency}, where certain individuals in the MCA intentionally and effectively guided a form of political change of a scale and duration far beyond what we would expect in China, let alone from Chinese civil servants. But an orthodox response might be to say that at best this is a combination of \textit{unintended} and \textit{redundant agency}. It is unintended because the extent to which individual peasants have input into local affairs is owing to the policy getting out of hand, and the risks involved with backtracking. The idea is that the CCP would never purposefully relinquish much control, and that the plan behind VC elections was just to let off steam, so to speak. Unintended was how enthusiastically the peasants took to the elections, so much so that the CCP feared backlash if it tried to take back the control lost. The agency is also redundant in the sense that conditions were such that \textit{something} had to be done given fears in Beijing about unrest in the countryside.\textsuperscript{35} To see why, we can look to dynamics of stability, and shock and trend patterns of change.

\textsuperscript{34} See, e.g., Ogden (2002). For more on how “social institutions from China’s imperial past are showing vigorous signs of life today,” see Perdue (forthcoming).
\textsuperscript{35} See Gittings (1990: 62) on the long, repeated history of rebellion, of purging corrupt leaders through uprisings from below, especially from peasants.
Social dynamics of stability

As with the previous chapter, I will fold the different kinds of social dynamics of stability together to save space and to get at the issue of change sooner. We can begin, though, by noting some dynamics that would tend to reinforce the status quo. For one thing, under the Communists agriculture in China was, while local, a collective enterprise, with a significant degree of guidance, as well as benefits, coming directly from the Party. While agriculture was officially de-collectivized under Deng, the Party remains centrally concerned with agriculture’s role in the Chinese economy, and maintains a strict regime of price controls.\textsuperscript{36} Much reliance on the Party remains with respect to health care and education, and local frustration with particular corrupt and/or unpopular officials is not necessarily about getting the Party out of rural life.\textsuperscript{37} It is, after all, what people know. At the same time, given the size and reach of the state, there are many people who depend on the state for their livelihood, and so have an interest in keeping things the way they are. These would include Party cadres, and civil servants, but also members of the military and police.

Another aspect of the status quo, however, is the way in which the central government is \textit{constrained} in applying policy in the countryside. Shue describes rural China as a “honeycomb” structure “of a cell-like formation, of a marked quality of boundedness and discreteness in the communities where peasants lived, worked, and

\textsuperscript{36} Shirk (1993: 133) notes that, “the CCP [has] continued to play a more active role in agriculture than in industry, as it has always done. Agricultural policy decisions were made in party bodies whereas industrial reform issues were delegated to the State Council. When a party leadership group committed to raising rural living standards attained dominance, it was able to sustain the agricultural reform drive without any significant bureaucratic opposition.”

\textsuperscript{37} See Ogden (2002) and Oi (1999).
participated in public life.”38 This “cell-like” structure was in part owing to Mao’s effort to make each commune self-sufficient in terms of resources and organization. At the same time, however, part of the issue may simply have been a question of CCP’s limited capability to govern such a large, populous country, and its need to rely on rural cadres for local governance. But as authors like Lü (2000) point out, since the communes were to be self-sufficient, local cadres were largely dependent on local peasants for their livelihood. And since many such cadres were also recruited from the communes they were to serve, there were also personal loyalties to the commune that could override directives from the center.39 In short, CCP dependence on local cadres also meant limits to control over them. The “honeycomb” structure was a block to any extensive project to change political organization of the countryside in general.

Convention also has a place in this story. The official ideology is still Communism, or more specifically Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought with clarifications by Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. The state retains extensive control over media and education, and China scholars note that even opposition discourse is conducted according to this framework.40 One concrete repercussion is that both within the Party and among those opposed to the Party, a general assumption is that political, social, and economic progress is to come from the cities. On the one hand there is the focus in Communist ideology on the role of the workers, but on the other there are expectations among dissidents and reformers that democracy develops in cities. A

38 Shue (1988: 3).
40 See several essays in Goldman and Perry (2002a).
common thread behind both views is a perception of backwardness in the countryside.\textsuperscript{41} Even those working for political reform, in other words, would likely not be looking to bring democracy to peasants.

With respect to political conventions, analysts also point to the general lack of a discourse about rights, and where there are conventional notions on the subject, they tend to be of a limited sort.\textsuperscript{42} The idea of citizenship, for example, has long been conventionally seen – both before and during Communist rule – as something granted by the state, typically granted in order to strengthen the nation, and not to provide individual autonomy.\textsuperscript{43} As such, any rights associated with citizenship can vary based on the “needs” of the state; that is, they can be granted at one time, and revoked soon thereafter. Historically, these rights, when granted, have been primarily about holding certain leaders accountable for failing to fulfill their duties to the state and to the Chinese people, though even these rights have not been seen as perpetual, being granted for limited periods and then revoked – moves made by both Mao and Deng, as discussed above.

In a sense, these are temporary rights to publicly criticize the state, but in general, controls on political speech are the norm, especially in Communist era China. And while

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{41} Urban disdain of the countryside is not unique to China, but it may receive special boost given the low place afforded peasants in Communist ideology.

\textsuperscript{42} See, e.g., Goldman and Perry (2002b). Note also Yang (1994: 192, emphasis in original): “Rather than creating discrete and unified ontological categories of persons each having the same equality of rights, the Chinese subscribe more to a relational construction of persons. That is to say, the autonomy and rights of persons and the sense of personal identity are based on differences in moral and social status and on the moral claims and judgments of others. Chinese personhood and personal identity are not given in the abstract as something intrinsic to and fixed in human nature, but are constantly being created, altered, and dismantled in particular social relationships.”

\textsuperscript{43} Note, e.g., Yang (1994: 55, fn.4): “the Chinese understanding of “law” emphasizes the right and authority of officials and the state and the will of the leadership.”
\end{footnotesize}
official ideology typically includes much about rule for the people, there is little precedent or available principle for rule by the people: "Such elections as there had been in China in the past were not about letting people choose their rulers. Rather, those elections were designed to mobilize people to carry out predetermined party goals, to socialize them into official norms, and to legitimate the rule of the CCP. Electoral reforms adopted in 1979 enlivened elections for local people's congresses but did not signal a change in the official ideology, and neither did the village committee election reform of the following decade."  

Relevant to any effort to give Chinese people more autonomy from the CCP are conventions related to the state dealing with opposition. There is no single, general way in which the Chinese government responds to perceived problems, but there do seem to be some general patterns in the kinds of response used, certain types of government measure the Chinese government officials return to from time to time. An often-discussed cycle in Chinese politics is the vacillation of the central government between opening (fang) allowing greater political freedom, especially of expression; and closing (shou), clamping down hard on the same. One of the more famous examples is the Hundred Flowers Movement and its aftermath, the Anti-Rightist campaign. More recent examples are the Democracy Wall movement and the Tiananmen protests, though the openings and closings are not always of such scale. Since Tiananmen there have been

---

44 Shi (1999: 395). Note also Nathan and Gilley (2002: 29), commenting on the discourse among CCP elites: "Little attention is given to the leaders' relations with constituencies in society, still less to the hopes, demands, and visions of those not at the center of power. The people of China, when they surface at all, appear as groups of suffering peasants and laid-off workers whose problems need to be solved by policymakers, or as the monolithic and lovable "masses"; they are not seen as citizens with a role in guiding the state or as stakeholders whose views should be respected."
several smaller ones where for a time criticisms of the regime are permitted, even encouraged by some Party officials, to be again followed by another closing. Often these swings are among tactics of factional infighting used at high levels of the Communist Party, as when one faction uses the criticisms aired to discredit another. Where it is about factionalism and not efforts at change, then, the openings and closings may bring little in the way of real change.

The structure of the Chinese bureaucracy, especially in its complexity, is also a barrier to change:

... a whole string of mutually reinforcing decisions are [sic] required in order to keep any one initiative on track – and the announcement of a decision in the national media tends to cloak this protracted process. A major decision, in brief, does not by itself ensure that the substance of the decision will be implemented. Relatedly, the search for the timing of a particular decision is often misplaced, for the process of making a decision is protracted, as a consensus for it is built.45

This procedure of decisions by consensus can be a major block to policy change, especially given the importance of rank as, for example, ministries and provinces are roughly equal in rank, and so the latter can block efforts by the former.46 Moreover, the inclusion of more groups in the policy-making process, under Deng’s reforms, has made reaching consensus more difficult: “inviting more groups to the bargaining table

complicates the process of building consensus. Instead of a small stable group of central officials who are willing to trade votes on one issue because they trust others to pay them back on the next issue, there are larger, ad hoc groups that find logrolling and agreement much more problematic.”47 There are also official “antifactionalism” rules where, “Party and government officials are prohibited from coordinating their actions to form blocs in party decision-making.”48

Furthermore, the CCP has checks on bureaucratic activity, where party leaders at each level of government have a say over administration of policies in their region. For bureaucrats, there are party cadres to worry about at every level of policy implementation. So, for example, even while Village Committees are elected, the area party branch is not. One of the primary functions of that branch is to make sure that the VC follows the party line, but that branch is not directly accountable to the villagers. Conservatives within the party, therefore, have avenues through which to counter bureaucratic moves they regard as politically threatening.

Evidence of self-reinforcing dynamics can also be seen more generally with the political organization of the Chinese state. O’Brien speaks of the “current political structure,” and characterizes present Chinese politics as “little more than a slightly softened authoritarianism.”49 Fewsmith adds more material to a sense of stability in his examination of elite level Chinese politics. He notes the basic continuities of elite politics since the last major rupture in 1978, and argues that even the crisis of June 1989

did not change the rules of the game – only some of the players. The general balance of power between conservatives and reformers, especially over anything to do with significant change to political conditions, is decidedly in favor of conservatives.

*Shocks and trends*

There are, in short, a number of barriers to any significant political reform, so when we see a change like the implementation of VC elections, a first place to look is for pressures for such an adjustment. With respect to the countryside in particular, the central government did have to face a number of significant changes and pressures, especially in having to adjust to the death of Mao, the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, and Deng’s efforts to modernize the Chinese economy and Party apparatus. Shirk argues that, “The strong link between policy and power in communist systems means that succession struggles create opportunities for policy innovation,” and that it was, in part, Deng’s effort to defeat Hua Guofeng in the post-Mao transition goes some way to explaining the political change that occurred. A major element of the latter was the choice to bring an end to people’s communes. While benefits in productivity followed, this move also changed political relations in the countryside. For example, previously, local party cadres had been in charge of distributing resources to villagers, especially peasants, and so the latter were dependent on party officials. But with the elimination of the commune structure, especially where the village economy was based on agriculture, the local administration now depended much more on farmers for its resources.

---

50 See Fewsmith (1999).
52 Shi (1999: 392) speaks of a “power vacuum” being left by de-collectivization.
Over time, in many areas, peasants began to show frustration – sometimes violently – with how local cadres managed the village economy, and how they demanded taxes and used and, especially, misused those resources. There has also been a marked drop in the quality and availability of rural health care, with much of it no longer being free, as well as deterioration in schooling.\textsuperscript{53} These developments were reasons why a growing concern for the central government in Beijing was a fear of instability in the countryside. Moreover, there was the added pressure of skyrocketing population and widespread poverty, both daunting problems for any central government. Lü (2000) notes some other trends which have weakened Party control over the countryside, with special focus on the resurgence of traditional, personalistic forms of social relations. He describes as a revival of patriarchal clan and kinship organizations, and argues that these have challenged state power in many villages, and changed cadre behavior. He notes that much of the violence in the countryside is not so much anti-state, but inter-clan, though this speaks to state power given that clans sometimes prevent law enforcement agents from intervening: “Many such violent clan clashes were organized and instigated by party members and village officials, who were simultaneously village heads or township directors and clan chiefs. ... Some village officials served concurrently as clan chiefs and refused to follow state policies unless they advanced clan interests.”\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{53} See Nathan and Gilley (2002: 184-5).
\textsuperscript{54} Lü (2000: 186). See also Goldman and MacFarquhar (1999a: 8), who say that, “As their interests diverged from those of the central government, local political authorities and nonstate entrepreneurs gradually formed a united front against the center’s commands.
Thinking in terms of system dynamics, the end of the Cultural Revolution and especially of the commune structure was a kind of shock or critical juncture which set in motion a trend pushing towards political change. The diminished ability of the party to control peasant life broke the old equilibrium, with a shift in the balance of power between villagers and local party cadres. Especially since the CCP had much less control over the countryside than the cities, one might expect trends towards political change to emerge in the villages rather than the cities. Moreover, the fact of early success for the agricultural reforms (per capita rural income averages better than 9 percent growth per year from 1978-88) served to disarm, to some extent, more conservative leaders of the CCP.  

This success helped make the case for those advocating market reforms, which involved some amount of political decentralization. So indirectly, the success of agricultural reform was a pressure for political change.

There were other pressures on the state following from the end of the Cultural Revolution, as many of the urban workers, officials, and intellectuals who were sent down to work with peasants returned with different ideas about where politics in China should go. Interpretations of post-Mao dissident and reform movements often include discussion of how the Cultural Revolution shaped the views of those involved. There seem to be a couple of dynamics at play here. One is simply the passing of the CCP old guard, especially upon Deng’s purge, leaving room for people with possibly different ideas to gradually fill in their places. But another dynamic, suggested by some authors, is

56 See Goldman and MacFarquhar (1999a: 9).
57 For an eyewitness account, from someone "sent down," see Wong (1996).
58 See Goldman (2002), and Polunbaum (2002).
that the experience of the Cultural Revolution made many members of the younger
generations more inclined to more liberal ideas.\textsuperscript{59} While generational change alone does
not mean a change in politics, overall, it seems reasonable to point to a trend of more
reformers gaining positions of influence in the Chinese state, especially the bureaucracy.
A result, so the argument goes, has been expanding space for intellectual debate, as for
increasing the separation between Party and government.\textsuperscript{60}

Influences on political actors in China, on those either inside or outside of
government, are not restricted to domestic trends, conventions, and institutions. There is
also the issue of international conditions. For example, some members of the generation
of technocrats and especially college graduates brought into the party upon Deng’s
initiative had access to Western writings on economics, politics, and society.\textsuperscript{61} While the
public was kept in the dark with respect to news about events like the Solidarity
movement in Poland, many people in government knew about it.\textsuperscript{62} At the same time,
though, conservatives were also looking abroad for cues for political action. The collapse
of the Soviet Union, for example, seems to have confirmed views that the CCP could not
relinquish political control in the way that Gorbachev and Yeltsin did. Given the focus
on economic growth with Deng and his allies (as well as several more recent leaders),
another international factor has to do with business: “Whenever the reforms appeared
jeopardized by bureaucratic recentralization, reformist leaders could argue that policy

\textsuperscript{59} Note, e.g., Gittings (1990: 151): “More profound politicization followed the ‘sending down’ to the
countryside of twelve million young Chinese. The reality of hard rural life and the experience at first hand
of oppressive and ignorant cadres led to disillusion with the Party and often with Mao himself, mixed in
retrospect with a certain pride at having survived.”
\textsuperscript{60} See, e.g., Gittings (1990: 205).
\textsuperscript{61} See Shi (1999).
\textsuperscript{62} See, e.g., Gittings (1990) and Lü (2000: 142) about how officials were able to view restricted materials.
changes would cause foreign investors to lose confidence in China. In this way, foreign corporations and governments became part of Deng Xiaoping's reform coalition.\footnote{Shirk (1993: 50). Shirk (1993: 48) also says that the successes in some "special economic zones" produced more reformers because of the envy generated in officials who were not a part of those zones.}

**Dynamics of instability**

This review of system dynamics in the Chinese case presents several possible explanations for the "surprising outcome" of VC elections and the extent to which they have spread and provided local autonomy. One possibility is that the benefits to peasants in this case are unintended consequences. Perhaps here was a policy given the ok because it seemed to be something non-threatening, that could be used to palliate without making much in the way of real change. But once it was implemented, it took on a life of its own, giving the peasants more in the way of real say in their lives. Or perhaps it was fear of rural unrest that drove the central government to accept a policy, and a relinquishing of some control. Or perhaps in the complicated political system, conservatives in the central government had too many other problems to distract them from the machinations of a few bureaucrats in a marginal ministry. Or perhaps it was some combination of these, if not all of them. An orthodox analysis does provide general ways to grasp the events involved, and we must make sure to keep track of dynamics of stability, along with pressure-adjustment dynamics of change, when trying to make sense of this case. Nonetheless, it is difficult to see which dynamics were or were not in play, or at least which ones were more important than others. This is why it is useful to next turn to dynamics of instability.
Multifaceted social conditions

Besides having many barriers to change, the Chinese state is also one that provides some room for movement, albeit rather restricted kinds. Some of this room comes out of the way in which the state is fragmented. Not only are there many levels of government, where higher levels often have a difficult time monitoring the lower ones, and where cadres at different levels may be in competition over resources and influence, but there are multiple spheres of influence within each level.

As discussed above, both the CCP and the bureaucracy have a somewhat independent presence at each level, and while the Party is to have the final say, in this complicated context, bureaucrats can sometimes retain a degree of independence to implement policy. At the same time, an individual bureaucrat may be pulled in a number of directions, including those of the ministry, those of the central government, those of the provincial government, and more local and personal interest. This kind of complexity resembles the “crosscutting cleavages” idea included in the societal heterogeneity section of our catalog of social dynamics, where the interaction and interference of different institutions and influences may prompt or make room for innovation, in trying to reconcile them. At the very least, with so many different political forces in play, it may be possible to persuade certain lower-level officials to change their behavior, it may not take too much to change their incentives.

64 See Lieberthal and Oksenberg (1988).
65 Note, e.g., how Shi (1999: 398) says that, “personal and bureaucratic interests of those bureaucrats are usually nonidentical.” Note also Shirk (1993: 67): “The ambiguity of formal authority relations among local party committees, governments, and people’s congresses (according to the constitution of the PRC, both the party and the people’s congress have the authority to lead the work of the government) caused constant squabbling.”
Of note is that while the government is fragmented, there are incentives for each fragment to work concertedly towards goals. One view is that, “The CCP has intentionally created bureaucratic career incentives designed to reinforce organizational allegiances. Officials rise up the career ladder within one ministry or province. Only the top elite are transferred from one province to another or from one ministerial portfolio to another ... Most officials spend their entire careers in one organization, absorbing and serving the particular ideology of that organization.” 66 Moreover, major ideological campaigns are largely a thing of the past, where political repression is now more in response to acts by specific public protestors, intellectuals, certain religions and ethnic groups, and to party elites at odds with those in power. Bureaucrats are not immune, and the more their actions directly impinge on the political order the more susceptible they should be to attack. But recall that the punishment for some of the civil servants who joined the Democracy Wall movement involved simply being moved to a resource-poor ministry.

A relevant consideration for thinking about latitude for reform-minded civil servants is how the CCP deals with other threats to the political order, for peasant unrest is not the only unrest confronting the Chinese state. Two others are unrest among workers (especially in state-owned firms) and among minority ethnic groups (the Uighurs, for example). Both groups have resorted to violence, as have peasants. In the case of ethnic groups, sometimes the response is repression, it is dilution of the troublesome ethnic group by encouraging large-scale Han Chinese migration to the

66 Shirk (1993: 100).
problem area, sometimes a bit of both. There have also been a few projects to build cooperative relations with certain ethnic groups, with some success.⁶⁷

With respect to worker unrest, the issue of what the government will do with the millions of state-owned firm workers who are out of work (or soon to be) is portrayed by observers as one of the most crucial problems facing the CCP in the next few years. And analysts see this problem as one that the government consciously took into calculation when deciding to take major steps towards becoming a capitalist market economy.⁶⁸ But as with the problems with ethnic groups, there have been several kinds of response to worker unrest, ranging from repression to capitulation. With respect to the latter, in some cases of worker revolt, the central government has simply stepped in to pay long-owed back wages, and to remove corrupt managers (a seemingly dangerous precedent given the scale of the problem).

In these situations of ordinary people making demands on the state, the issue of expectations is relevant. As discussed above, while views of citizenship and rights would seem to limit demands on the state to fulfilling its “duty” (e.g. as opposed to relinquishing power), there is a conventional view that people have a right to respond to abuse of power by leaders. This view comes bundled with conventions that could support requests for autonomy at the local, though not individual, level. For example, one could point to the traditional use by locals of government rhetoric against the

---

⁶⁷ This paragraph draws on several essays in Goldman and MacFarquhar (1999b) and Goldman and Perry (2002a).
⁶⁸ See the essays, especially in sections 1 and 2, of Goldman and MacFarquhar (1999b). See also Perry and Selden (2003a).
government, to demand more in the way of resources and services.\textsuperscript{69} Moreover, there are historical examples of the central Chinese government seeking more effective rule by granting more autonomy at the local level.\textsuperscript{70}

There is also some flexibility in Communist ideology, especially given the disagreement among top-level leaders over its meaning and application: “Socialism changed its meaning … no less than seven times between 1949 and 1989.”\textsuperscript{71} Some of these meanings were more revolutionary, as leading into 1949, and during campaigns like the Great Leap Forward, and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, but others were more gradual, as following upon the Korean War, and following Deng’s takeover – both periods characterized by gradualism and economic reform.\textsuperscript{72} And there is, after all, frequent use of the word “democracy” in China, primarily through Deng’s phrase “socialist democracy,” and MCA officials have gone out of their way to frame their project in that manner. At the same time, they have also drawn inspiration from the Fabian Society version of socialism, which is also more about gradual rather than revolutionary implementation of socialism.\textsuperscript{73} There is also the issue of how ordinary Chinese view Communism. One view is that, “Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought continue to be invoked, but few still believe in them and even fewer act upon

\textsuperscript{69} See O’Brien (2002).
\textsuperscript{70} I owe this observation to Peter Perdue.
\textsuperscript{71} Gittings (1990: 42), who goes on to argue that because of this frequent change in official ideology, socialism “became increasingly less credible to the majority of the Chinese people.”
\textsuperscript{72} Note, for example, Shirk (1993: 129-30, emphasis in original): Chinese reform was \textit{gradual and piecemeal}. Instead of rushing ahead with a comprehensive, radical transformation of the entire system that would threaten the vested interests of many groups, Deng Xiaoping and his reformist lieutenants were extremely cautious, “taking one step forward and looking around before taking another” (author’s interviews). The party leaders did not impose a big-bang transformation from above but instead incorporated bureaucratic groups in the design of reforms and thereby prolonged the period of transition.
\textsuperscript{73} For more on the use of Fabianism, see quotation on pages 232-33 below.
them. Chinese society has become pluralistic and its culture diverse. For the first time since 1949, individuals and groups voice their own views and pursue their own interests rather than echo and follow the dictates of the party-state.\textsuperscript{74}

\textit{Societal heterogeneity}

One way to view this "pluralistic" and "diverse" culture is as holding potential to spread new ideas and practices. While Lü (2000) focuses on how personalistic and kinship ties are connected with issues of corruption and state breakdown at the local level, they may be useful for reformers trying to effect change.\textsuperscript{75} Social conditions that may bar the way from some central directives may provide opportunities to initiate new policy, and may provide channels to spread new ideas and practices. There are a couple of points to note about the presence and use of social networks in this case. On the one hand, although there were numerous party officials (especially at the local level) who were opposed to VC elections policy, they were largely unprepared and/or unaware about what was about to happen. Clearly they had allies, and even up to top levels of the CCP, a number of whom knew about the Organic Law and MCA plans to implement it. But there was a failure to communicate and to coordinate.

On the other hand, from the outset the MCA looked to make and take advantage of connections wherever they could, at different levels of government, and in different regions. They were by no means universally successful, as officials in a number of places had no interest in, or were hostile to, the VC elections idea. But where the MCA

\textsuperscript{74} Goldman and MacFarquhar (1999a: 6-7).
\textsuperscript{75} See also Yang (1994: 76) about the importance of personalistic ties for accessing goods and services in the countryside.
officials were able to make contacts, they worked to make good use of them.\textsuperscript{76} And, in a sense, the revival of kinship in the countryside (a form of societal heterogeneity, given the variation in presence and influence of clans), has helped spread VC elections as some clans have used village committees to expand their own influence, at the expense of the central state.\textsuperscript{77}

\textit{Windows of opportunity}

With respect to windows, there were several for both supporters and opponents of VC elections policy, as through the pattern of periodic openings and closings. The latter in particular were an advantage for opponents, with Tiananmen crackdown providing perhaps the best as opportunity to kill the MCA project. Other windows included the cooling off of agricultural growth tied to Deng’s reforms, which coincided with a resurgence by conservatives led by Chen Yun against reformers following Deng, like Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang.\textsuperscript{78} In general, “Inflation and corruption provided ammunition for the conservative elites to strengthen their position and defeat the reformists in CCP power struggles.”\textsuperscript{79} Events in other socialist states provided windows for reactionaries, as did the political disruption caused by workers in Poland in 1981, which led to the rolling back of plans to give workers more autonomy in China.\textsuperscript{80}

For their part, the officials working to implement village level elections, they seem to have tried to make good use of whatever opportunity was available. Much of

\textsuperscript{76} See Shi (1999).
\textsuperscript{77} See Lü (2000: 185-6).
\textsuperscript{78} See Shirk (1993: 42).
\textsuperscript{79} Shirk (1993: 18).
\textsuperscript{80} See Shirk (1993: 46).
this was about spin. Following incidents of violence when local officials tried to manipulate election procedures, the MCA argued that further safeguards were needed. When foreign governments pressured China on its human rights record, the MCA lobbied for more support in Beijing, framing their project as a way to respond to foreign criticism (that was still proper "socialist democracy," of course).

**Incomplete victories**

The pattern of opening and closing has resulted in some reformers being silenced, as through long-term imprisonment, exile, or simply fear. Or, in the case of reform-minded leaders in the CCP, the result was marginalization, as with Zhao Ziyang. Both the Democracy Wall and, especially, the Tiananmen crackdowns ended the careers of some prominent reformers inside and outside the CCP. But many returned to fight other battles, as can be seen in efforts to make the National People's Congress less of a rubber stamp and make it more a representative body with some teeth.⁸¹ Even Deng Xiaoping's career went according to this pattern of being defeated by rivals and then exiled, only to return later on to bring reform when the factional balance of power shifted again. The relevance is that even after periodic crackdowns, there remain individuals in influential positions with sympathies to projects like that of the MCA. And over the years, with efforts such as Deng's to make the civil service more professional, and give individual departments more autonomy, "Bureaucrats undoubtedly feel freer to assert departmental points of view in meetings today than they did when Mao Zedong reigned."⁸²

---

Moreover, some argue that a legacy of events like the Cultural Revolution has not been a unifying of views (as around Deng’s reforms) given the widespread traumatic experiences of those times, but increased separation among different points of view: “The breakdown of formal institutions and existing norms during the early phase of the Cultural Revolution gave rise to new configurations of organizational and social relations. Among them, political struggle participated in by cadres at various levels created a deeply divisive factionalism.”\(^{83}\) And both before and after such events, state penetration into the countryside was both incomplete and inconsistent.\(^{84}\)

**Incremental change and cascade**

Overall, the creation and implementation has not been a big bang process. While some scholars make a comparison between VC elections and the establishing of elections in Iran (comparable because it is another authoritarian regime, heavily influenced by a particular ideology), a clear difference is how in China it has been a process of steps.\(^{85}\) Iran, instead, went from no local elections to universal local elections overnight. The point is to note the pattern of change in China, and how it has piecemeal characteristics, along with moments of cascade, and significant continuities. Following extensive study of amenable locations to hold local elections, the MCA began by holding elections in a limited number of places, with little effort to make sure the elections were clean of manipulation by local officials. The CCP likely would not have allowed the MCA to

---

\(^{83}\) Liu (2000: 134).

\(^{84}\) Shue (1988: 5) argues that “state penetration and control of rural society under Mao was more uneven and less complete than is often imagined by scholars – or for that matter by Mao Zedong’s political friends and enemies.” See also Liu (2000: 227) about the clash between state and local political organizations, which blocks efforts to root out corruption.

\(^{85}\) Personal communication from Kian Tajbakhsh. For some examples of his work on local government in Iran, see Tajbakhsh (2000; 2003).
hold nation-wide elections anyway, but judging by their pattern of work, it is
questionable whether the MCA would have taken such opportunity. Over time, with each
new round of elections, more locations have been added, along with more efforts to make
elections clean and representative.\footnote{See Shi (1999).}

We should note that there is precedent for gradualist reform efforts, especially
under the stewardship of Deng Xiaoping. Though gradualism in a context of a
fragmented bureaucracy with blocks to state control at the local level does not necessarily
imply controlled reform. Lü (2000) argues that the “Gradualism and piecemeal reforms
in administrative and political systems” has allowed traditional, local, personalistic forms
of social organization to persist, and therefore prevent much of the civil service and Party
organization from developing efficient, centralized, standardize, “rational-legal”
practices.\footnote{Lü (2000: 222-23).} Moreover, recall that in some ways, Deng’s agricultural reform followed
changes on the ground, and that the change was relatively sudden, as the “household
responsibility” system cascaded through much of the countryside. In this sense, the
spread of VC elections may be more driven by developments in the countryside than by
planners in Beijing.

It is unclear, in short, just what processes of political change in operation, as there
is evidence of several kinds. With the presence of dynamics of instability, there is more
potential for controlled agency, but it is only potential. A next step, then, is to go further,
to see if the make-up of relevant groups gave room to move.
Ordinary differences

A notable feature of this case is how differences within political groups seem important for the story. Especially with the leaking of internal party documents over the last several years, which included documents about Party deliberation over Tiananmen, it is clear that members of the old guard were not and are not unified in views of desirable and possible. But neither are members of the new generation of bureaucrats and officials, nor are reformers and "liberals" either inside or outside of the state. Even those with similar goals, as for bringing more democratic accountability into the structure of Chinese politics, differed in how they perceived conditions and learned from events, with implications for how they went about understanding and trying to solve problems with the political order.

Premier Zhao Ziyang, for the most part, rejected the idea of giving peasants more political influence, as he believed this would mean a loss of control in the countryside, and therefore of the ability to bring reform and collect taxes.\footnote{Nathan and Gilley (2002).} He saw a need for local cadres to retain control fearing a collapse into disorder without them. He instead favored a greater party presence at the local level, through implementing village administrative offices.\footnote{Shi (1999: 387, fn 15). See also Li and O’Brien (1999).} Many provincial Party leaders favored Zhao’s plan over the MCA plan.\footnote{Shi (1999: 392).} Some among the recently installed “Fourth Generation” of CCP leaders also take a more economic approach to keeping order in the countryside, which was neglected to some degree by Jiang Zemin. Wen Jiabao, for example, has been pushing for greater
investment in rural infrastructure, while trying to find alternatives to improve healthcare and retirement benefits for peasants.\textsuperscript{91} And while Jiang, and other more conservative CCP leaders have increased the use of certain tools of repression, as with the large spike in executions of criminals and political enemies since 1998, others among the new leadership “are willing to subject the regime to scrutiny by people outside the Party.”\textsuperscript{92} More generally,

Members of the Fourth Generation are split into two camps about how to address the problems of the Party. One group … believes in strengthening internal Party mechanisms to rectify the behavior and quality of cadres. Another group … believes in expanding external mechanisms such as competitive elections and a free media. Both sides believe that their preferred methods would improve the quality of governance offered by the CCP and thus its popularity among the people.\textsuperscript{93}

The former group focuses on the recruitment and training, along with using more in the way of competitive elections within the Party, as a way to bring more consensus into the promotion of cadres and leaders to higher positions. The latter group agrees with these ideas, but wants to go further in wanting to make CCP cadres and leaders more

\textsuperscript{91} Nathan and Gilley (2002: 117).
\textsuperscript{92} Nathan and Gilley (2002: 192). At a meeting with security officials, one of the Fourth Generation leaders Luo Gan (who was in charge of the increased use of executions) “called for vigilance against a variety of political enemies, including dissidents at home and abroad, critics of Beijing’s bid to host the 2008 Olympics, overseas supporters of Chinese worker demonstrations, officially unauthorized religious groups, and critics of the government’s position on the 1989 Tiananmen incident.” See Nathan and Gilley (2002: 191).
\textsuperscript{93} Nathan and Gilley (2002: 194).
accountable for their actions, more open to public scrutiny, and more subject to limits on their powers:

Those … who advocate external mechanisms draw on classic instruments of democracy like competitive elections, a free press, and independent courts. However, they conceive of these instruments not as ways to challenge or constrain the regime itself, but as forms of “supervision” … of cadres that supplement the Party’s internal systems of competition, control, and discipline.94

Differences in perception of conditions are also present among local bureaucrats. Some clearly opposed the VC reform project, fearing both possible instability as well as the threat to their control and livelihood, and so worked to minimize voter influence, as by manipulating nomination procedures.95 MCA officials, however, were able to find others willing to cooperate. Over time, other local bureaucrats “gradually realized that they could no longer rely on the traditional way of governing. Although elections may not have been their preferred choice, many came to see it as the only way to cope with new problems arising in villages.”96

Differences between political leaders at the provincial level have also been important for the introduction and spread of VC elections. That some provincial leaders were either indifferent or outright in favor of village level democracy provided an opening for the MCA plan, though still often depending on conditions at the local level:

95 Shi (1999).
96 Shi (1999: 393).
"As in implementing other government policies, in provinces where the major leaders supported the reforms, officials at the bureau tended to push hard for rural elections. In provinces where major leaders were indifferent, the attitudes of the officials at the BCA would become critical for the implementation of the Organic Law. In provinces where major leaders were hostile to the Organic Law, the BCA officials could scarcely carry out their mission."97 As discussed above, the initial stage of VC policy implementation involved holding elections in a limited number of locations, in part to demonstrate to senior Party officials that they were not a threat to order in the countryside. This stage required that there be some provincial leaders amenable to the idea, that is, it required some who varied from their more conservative peers.

**Extraordinary differences**

The presence of dynamics of instability suggests that there was opportunity for controlled agency. But the orthodox view has much to say about this case as well: there were significant barriers to any reforms which would decrease CCP political power, but pressures to do something about unrest in the countryside. It is difficult to see, in short, which conditions *explain* the origins and development of VC elections. This difficulty is exacerbated when we apply the tool set for ordinary differences, for it suggests that the conditions and forces are not simply feeding strong inter-group dynamics, but intra-group dynamics as well. The social environment is perceived in markedly different ways *among* reformers, conservatives, bureaucrats, and party officials at many, if not all, levels of government and society. The *problems* presented by the complexity involved in this case suggests that while we could expect to see *some* effort at reducing unrest in the

97 Shi (1999: 400 fn 66).
countryside, in the form of a reaction to pressures on the political system. We should not expect to see much in the way of controlled agency.

Nevertheless, we find an example of political reform that seems to have primarily originated not from factional competition at the highest level, or from a knee-jerk reaction by Central Committee members, but from a project for creative change designed and launched by a few technocrats in a marginal ministry. If controlled agency is involved, we should see evidence of extraordinary capabilities dealing with extraordinary problems, repeatedly over time. If, however, conditions “overdetermine” this kind of outcome, the application of toolsets of social dynamics and ordinary differences (working properly) should show that problems were not extraordinary, and that therefore the agency involved is more likely redundant than controlled.

**Mindset**

With respect to *motivation to launch a project against the status quo and its defenders, given the likelihood of high personal costs*, the issue of personal costs is not as acute in this case as in the antimafia one. Nevertheless, given the sensitivity in the CCP to giving up political control, the VC elections project seems a dangerous one, given the periodic crackdowns on political reform, though the crackdown may be more against one’s work and livelihood than one’s person. Moreover, the allies needed, especially in high places, may face personal costs given the persistence of factional battles at senior levels of the Party (as with the long-term house arrest of Zhao Ziyang after Tiananmen).
In this light, considering mindset is relevant to considering the roles of Peng Zhen and Bo Yibo, in sticking their necks out to get the Organic Law through the NPC.98

Since the MCA officials set out with the assumption that there would be problems such as electoral manipulation and fraud it seems reasonable to speak of resilience to accept setbacks without conceding defeat. In this vein, note Shue on limits to reform projects: "The more we studied policy formation and implementation, the more it seemed central leaders operated under many constraints, often failing to get their way; even more often, getting part of what they wanted but having, then, to cope with numerous unintended outcomes as well."99

Even more evident, though, is persistence to work on long-term, incremental forms of change, as their approach to implementing Village Committee elections was designed to occur in stages, to gradually expand in geographic reach, as well as in the degree to which elections run according to procedure. The MCA has kept with its project through periodic closings and factional shifts in Party leadership, while other efforts to address problems of order have been spotty and inconsistent:

Static comparison of the balance of power led officials in the MCA to believe that dramatic reform in China is impossible. To overcome resistance to the reforms, reformers in China embarked on a strategy of deliberately manipulating a crucial but usually neglected variable – time. When I first contacted Wang’s colleagues

98 See Li and O’Brien (1999), as well as Nathan and Gilley (2002).
in early 1989, they told me that an “incremental, or Fabian approach” would be the ideal model for China. “According to Huntington,” they argued, “the foot-in-the-door approach of concealing aims, separating the reforms from each other, and pushing for only one change at a time” was the only way to bring any meaningful political change to China.100

These initiatives were to push BCA officials to take a more active role defending the peasants’ new electoral rights against violations by local cadres, to work with provincial governments on amending province-specific regulations that made it easier for electoral manipulation, to educate peasants on how to monitor and report such manipulation, and to work on redesigning nomination procedures to allow and encourage more people to run for VC positions.

Given the complexity of the Chinese political system, combined with how quickly a step forward for political reform can turn into several steps back, perhaps one of the most extraordinary mindset elements evident in this case is how the MCA officials showed obsession to stay focused on a problem for the long term, but with the self-control necessary to enable alliance building and avoid triggering too much counterattack.

Aptitude

Regarding open-mindedness to question convention and to look to improve upon it, this seems to be relevant for understanding the actions of several key actors in the

100 Shi (1999: 396).
story. That Peng Zhen and Bo Yibo carried the Organic Law through strong opposition in the NPC is remarkable. More so, however, is how the MCA officials began work on designing policies to apply intuitions that Wang developed while working as a peasant during the Cultural Revolution. By Shi’s (1999) account, Wang developed the idea that the countryside offered more room to build democratic institutions than the cities, especially because of the economic autonomy granted with the elimination of the communes. Moreover, through his peasant background and his work with peasants during the Cultural Revolution, he came to believe that peasants were more than capable of making good use of opportunities for more political participation. These intuitions were contrary to core assumptions among reformers and dissidents (inside and outside of China), that democracy springs from modernizing cities, and that peasants were either incapable of using, or were an outright barrier to, democratic institutions.

If Shi is accurate in his account of events, a major element of the story is how MCA officials had the intelligence to derive an exceptional understanding of the possible given a set of conditions. With the aim to give peasants more political autonomy, the officials had to deal with local-level party presence as well as that at the provincial and national level. The civil servants directly responsible for implementing MCA plans (the BCA officials) could be blocked if the provincial and local governments were not on board, making for a difficult balancing act between local political interests and MCA efforts at reform. Since political officials had direct control over the livelihood of local BCA bureaucrats, it was not a given that the latter would necessarily work to implement
MCA policies.\textsuperscript{101} The MCA, then, needed to be aware of the incentives of local bureaucrats. Furthermore, “the same zone of local politics that staved off state interference and superexploitation made it harder for the state to intervene to protect citizens when those who held power locally abused it.”\textsuperscript{102} More generally, as discussed above, the policy process is extensive and complicated, requiring negotiation and persuasion at multiple points in time, and in multiple spheres of the state system.

MCA bureaucrats seem to have been aware of such complications, and able to operate in the different relevant venues over time. For example, even though the MCA had a small budget for this project, it regularly paid for provincial leaders and local BCA officials to travel abroad for “study trips”, a privilege more often reserved for higher level officials and/or those working on economic and military matters. Even though these trips were about learning how to run electoral institutions, they were sometimes used to reward those officials who oversaw elections that met MCA standards.\textsuperscript{103} The MCA also worked to lobby less cooperative provincial governments, and were near constant in their effort to seek out ways in which local officials were circumventing VC elections procedures, and to redress these problems with further policy, changes in administration and enforcement procedures, and so on.

It appears that from the beginning the MCA team had an incremental form of progress in mind, with much of their effort directed at preparation for the next step, and

\textsuperscript{101} “While outright opposition is dangerous, bureaucrats can engage in covert resistance to policies they do not like. Two frequently used techniques are making requests for special treatment or individual exemptions and formally implementing policies but covertly subverting their intent.” Shi (1999: 396).
\textsuperscript{102} Shue (1988: 113).
\textsuperscript{103} See Shi (1999: 400).
the next opportunity. Their initial goal was simply to get local officials to conduct elections, no matter how much those elections were manipulated or poorly attended. This was to be their foothold, and it was designed as a way to prepare the stage for future action. They believed that once peasants got a taste for making local officials directly accountable for their behavior, it would be difficult for reactionaries to eliminate elections, for fear of the same rural unrest used to buttress the case for VC elections in the first place.

With respect to expertise to navigate the political order, so as to attain and keep a position from which to engineer a project to change that order, we could point to how at crucial moments the MCA worked with people in other parts of government. Finding allies at high levels of the CCP was important, especially at moments like the attempt to get VC election legislation through the National People’s Congress, despite the fact that lead reformer Zhao Ziyang was vocally against the legislation. Peng Zhen, the leader of the NPC when the Organic Law came up for vote, however, saw matters differently from Zhao, and pushed for the policy of direct elections.\textsuperscript{104} Peng, along with Bo Yibo, was also important when village level democracy came under fire from conservatives after the Tiananmen crackdown. The relationship with Peng and Bo specifically, and the NPC in general, could also be connected with influence to persuade and coordinate others and keep their attention.

Another important element with respect to negotiating the political order seems to be the framing of projects. At the beginning, MCA officials were careful not to call the

\textsuperscript{104} See Li and O’Brien (1999).
Chinese political system itself into question, but instead focus on the pragmatic benefits, as in keeping order, that VC elections would bring. Further, they “understood the constraints created by the official ideology. Waving the banner of such Western ideas as liberty and democracy in that political environment would only provoke conservatives and provide them with an opportunity to defeat reform.”105 While this perhaps seems an obvious lesson, evidence related to toolset two shows that reformers, either inside or outside of government, were by no means uniform in learning this lesson, especially in the more general sense of being careful in how hard to push for change when.

Conclusion

In the last few years, a series of documents have been published, which according to some China scholars are leaks of secret, internal CCP documents. Nathan and Gilley (2002) translate and summarize some of the purported dossiers about the new “Fourth Generation” of leaders to take over from Jiang Zemin and his cohort. If these documents are the genuine item, they are suggestive for thinking about the politically possible in China under these new leaders:

They are competent managers with wide experience in China’s complex party-state bureaucracy, and pragmatic technocrats who are capable of keeping order and promoting development in the world’s most populous country. Some of them are willing to subject the ruling Chinese Communist Party to more political competition and to trust the state-controlled Chinese media, including the press,

105 Shi (1999: 397). In this sense they followed Deng’s early tactics in bringing economic and some political reform not long after Mao’s passing. Deng emphasized “Chinese characteristics” and “socialist democracy”, in trying to avoid a showdown with more conservative Party members.
radio, and television, with more freedom to criticize the performance of lower-level officials.\footnote{106}

At the same time, however, these are “men who believe in authoritarian rule as a precondition for pushing their country through the turbulent passage to modernization. They believe in stopping dissent against Communist rule before it gets started and in deterring crime by widespread use of the death penalty.”\footnote{107} Yet these are not a group of men united by similar mindsets: “they disagree on some important questions, including the pace and scope of both economic and political reforms…. Conservatives favor stronger ideological and social restrictions in order to prevent challenges to the Party’s power. Those identified as liberals or reformers believe that the Party will gain more popular acceptance, be more informed about changes in society, and extract better work from its own “cadres” — the standard term for Party and state officials — if it tolerates freer expression.”\footnote{108} Moreover, “In the relations between Party and society there are disagreements over how much leeway to allow the media in making constructive criticism, especially of local and regional officials, and how rapidly to promote competitive elections for Party and state offices.”\footnote{109}

What does this all mean for the politically possible? Note that, “One result of this institutionalized process is that the new leadership is more balanced among factions and interests than any preceding ruling constellation. … Lacking a dominant figure, the new

\footnote{106} Nathan and Gilley (2002: 4).  
\footnote{107} Nathan and Gilley (2002: 5).  
\footnote{109} Nathan and Gilley (2002: 23).
leadership needs to work by consensus if it can, even though its members are divided both by ambitions and to some extent by policy preferences. The new leading group thus begins in a state of fractured unity, held together by the balance of forces that created it.110 Given the technocratic nature of this group of leaders, and the general sensitivity of the CCP with respect to maintaining political control, and it becomes reasonable to assume that any moves towards more widespread use of elections in China will have to be based on reams of evidence that such political change is for the benefit of Party and country. Yet that evidence, and agreement over it, may be difficult to come by. Recall problems for controlled policy change generated by things such as the complexity of the Chinese bureaucracy, the “honeycomb” structure of rural autonomy (or at least its remnants), the rise of clans as local power base, the pressures of population growth and economic change, and so on. Social conditions, in other words, provide plenty of reasons to be skeptical that the Fourth Generation will ultimately take major steps towards making the Party, let alone the country, more democratic. If, however, the MCA is able to keep control over the development of electoral institutions in the countryside, CCP leaders more inclined to political reform may then have the evidence to back their policy preferences.

Perhaps unusually for a policy meant to address an issue of civil unrest (given the common use of repression when issues of order arise), the VC elections policy looks to have been implemented in a slow, gradual fashion. By some accounts, early stages of the process were characterized by long-term planning, limited goals, and caution in what elements were or were not pressed forward, and how they were framed. While certain

conditions and trends favored the VC elections project, events and conditions also
generated problems. Moreover, conditions were not as clear-cut as an orthodox view
would suggest. The range of different policy responses to other instances of unrest
suggests that a project like that of the MCA was not the only possibility. Furthermore,
that other policy responses have been of the knee-jerk, or at least case-by-case variety –
not to mention the gridlock created by a “honeycomb” social structure, bureaucratic
fragmentation, and consensus decision-making rules – suggests that the MCA project was
unlikely. This seems confirmed by the presence of a series of extraordinary differences,
politically relevant in how they relate to problems faced by the MCA. A political
creativity interpretation of this case, then, may help make sense of evidence like the
following:

Li Ruihuan [one of the Fourth Generation] suggests immediately extending the
direct competitive election of government leaders (so far limited to the village
level) to the 50,000-odd township … governments. (Such elections have so far
been limited to about a dozen townships that carried them out as experiments
without approval from higher levels.) Three to five years later, Li says, direct
elections should be expanded to counties and cities, and later to entire
provinces.\footnote{Nathan and Gilley (2002: 198)}

Of note is that Li is the head of the National People’s Congress, and therefore will have a
say in whether changes like this are to happen.
The more, and more objective, evidence we have about the behavior about civil servants and Party cadres and leaders – as well as about conditions on this case and in China more generally – the more certain we can be in judging such accounts. What the three toolsets provide is a way to guide our search for and assembly of evidence. If more empirical research were to reveal that ordinary differences are not present to the extent suggested here, that the balance of social dynamics is more one-sided (in a way pushing for something like VC elections), and that there are other reformers behaving less “extraordinarily” and yet achieving similar results, then we should change how we think about the primary causes behind this case. Instead of being, to a significant extent, about political creativity, this case would instead be explained primarily by social dynamics.

As it stands, however, the evidence surveyed here suggests that the conditions and complexities of this case made for an indeterminate situation of opportunity, but of opportunity plagued with problems for controlled change of the political environment. That there are, in some accounts of the events, patterns of behavior over time that match those of the toolset for extraordinary differences suggests that a political creativity interpretation of events is plausible. We may, in short, have located a case of political creativity. Moreover, given the divides within the Fourth Generation, if it is a case of political creativity, this VC elections case may help us locate further possibilities for political change, with a possible more general spreading of voting as a meaningful political action in China.
Chapter Nine
Applying the 3TSA to cases of failure: political reform in Iran

The 3TSA does not necessitate finding politically relevant individual differences; it can accommodate evidence showing that a particular set of events was owing to social dynamics, and not at all to controlled agency. None of the cases discussed in this thesis are wholesale successes for the actors working on projects for creative change. As discussed in the Preface, even where there are cases of controlled agency, we should expect to see it mixed with other kinds (unintended, redundant, etc.). Nevertheless, a concern may be that the project-based case study approach is too limited in the kinds of phenomena it can cover, and too orientated to finding political creativity. This chapter is intended to suggest otherwise. With respect to the goal of figuring out how better to integrate agency with structure, the point is to show that our understanding of events and conditions in a particular case can be informed by a consideration of the presence and absence of politically relevant traits. The interpretation of success and failure will benefit from looking at conditions in concert with the set of relevant actor characteristics.

A salient contemporary case of potential political change, where particular leaders have been the focus of much interest and criticism, is the effort by Khatami and his allies to make the Iranian Islamic Republic more republican.¹ That is, some of their central aims have been to create more and safer space for the open expression of ideas and especially dissent, and to give freer reign to elected officials to make and implement policy. Both aims have a zero-sum element to them, as they would require a reduced

political role for the high-level, unelected clerics who sit on the Council of Guardians, and run much of the state apparatus, as well as for the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamanei. And herein lies the problem, because the clerical leaders and their followers are not inclined to give up political power. Indeed, if anything, some of their behavior indicates that they would prefer more control, and a rolling back of the gains that reformers have already made, as with the shuttering of many newspapers that sprung up after Khatami’s election as president, and as with recent disqualification of sitting members of Parliament from running in the February 2004 round of elections.²

Especially in the late 1990s, the fact that Khatami and his allies were able to bring some level of reform to the political system, and that had such broad public support, led some observers to pin high hopes on Khatami, and to predict that major political changes were about to come.³ In the last couple of years, however, commentary about Khatami and his movement has become much more negative, focusing on how little has changed.⁴ Some fault Khatami for insufficient courage and leadership, some question whether his pronouncements about liberal change were genuine, and some note that given conditions, it was unrealistic to expect that hardline conservative clerics would relinquish sufficient control to allow liberal reforms.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how a political creativity approach using the three toolsets can help us make sense of events, at least with respect to thinking about

⁴ See, e.g., Bellaigue (2002), Fathi (2003), Tajbakhsh (2003), and The Economist (March 8, 2003: 46-7).
what was and was not possible. I do not present a definitive explanation of events and political possibilities in modern Iran. While I offer some suggestions along those lines, the goal (as with the other empirical chapters of this dissertation) is more to show how to derive a definitive explanation. I present a short history to sketch out the kinds of problems facing projects for political reform in Iran, in order to show how considering extraordinary differences can be of use.

Short History

... the quest for democracy and pluralism in the Islamic Republic of Iran has had less to do with the creation of a culturally ‘authentic’ Islamic interpretation of democracy than it has with the struggle to make religious and modern notions of political community coexist. 5

The movement that overthrew the Shah in Iran was prominently led by Islamists who were rallied around Ayatollah Khomeini, but the movement was also an alliance that included many who, for example, were more interested in political and economic reform. The latter were marginalized when events began to settle down some after the victory of the Revolution. But as suggested by the quotation above, this was not a case of complete victory for the religious over the secular. Khomeini is a major reason for this, as his tenure as leader of Iran was marked by vacillation between emphasis on the need for a great spiritual leader to guide Iranians, and for an effective secular state apparatus to

5 Brumberg (2001: 249.)
ensure political order, which could operate on its own after he was gone. Both strains are present in the Constitution for the Second Republic that followed his death.\(^6\)

Moreover, it was Khomeini who gave the Majles, the elected assembly, a strong role in governing Iran. For example, he gave it a primary place in resolving the American hostages crisis, and also (after elections in April 1980), said that, "[t]he center of all law and power is the Majlis. It guides all and it should do so."\(^7\) Thereafter, the Majles was to become a focal point for political battles in Iran. Khomeini generally avoided supporting any one faction in the Majles, even though it became a forum for radicals to attack the economic policies of Khomeini’s appointed president, Rafsanjani. Khomeini gave further influence to the Majles through creating the Expediency Discernment Council. This body was given the power to resolve disputes between the Council of Guardians and the Majles, with a notable instrument being the ability to override a Council of Guardians veto. Important, then, was the makeup of the Expediency Discernment Council: 6 from the Guardians, 6 from Majles, plus the minister in charge of the piece of legislation involved. This format made for a shift in power towards the politicians. Further, Khomeini publicly backed policy-oriented candidates (versus more religious ones) during elections for the Third Majles, and in one of his speeches (his January 1988 edict) he argued for the separation of religion and politics.\(^8\)

During the transition from First to Second Republic, there were two main schools at odds over how a post-Khomeini world should look, one more oriented to continuing

\(^7\) As cited by Brumberg (2001: 118).
\(^8\) See Ansari (2003) and Brumberg (2001).
the Revolution, the other more to developing an effective state.\textsuperscript{9} It was a chaotic period with many social groups vying for influence at the center. In the event, the team of Khamenei as Supreme Leader (or faqih) and Rafsanjani as president emerged winners, to a great extent because they had been able to stay close to Khomeini in the time leading up to his death, whereas other candidates fell out of favor. Earlier, for example, it was Montazeri (who is discussed further below) and not Khamanei who was in line to follow Khomeini as Supreme Leader.

Khamenei and Rafsanjani were able to implement “pragmatism” in economic and foreign policy in face of significant opposition to such moves.\textsuperscript{10} And they were able to consolidate clerical power where there were still groups interested and able to present challenges to the regime, especially given that many of the groups that were party to the revolution wanted, for example, more democracy, more devolution to regional governments, and generally more political reform. The team was able to unite otherwise-bickering clerical forces together against perceived threats to the stability of the whole regime. This was especially true after the end of the Iran-Iraq War, as well as during the crises that followed immediately upon the Khomeini’s death, with respect to competition over the political order between Radical Islamists and Leftists. That the war, along with the cutting of ties to the West that came with the Revolution, had left the Iranian economy in such bad shape put Rafsanjani in a good position to justify more focus on the economy. After his election in July 1989, he put together a cabinet populated with technocrats, many of them Western-educated:

\textsuperscript{9} See Buchta (2000).
\textsuperscript{10} See Ehteshami (1995).
To the dismay of the radical members, these individuals sought to revive the private sector and enlarge the role of Western investment in the nation's overall economic development (with the exception of funds from the United States).\textsuperscript{11}

There was, though, a problem. Because the president was directly elected by the people, there was opportunity for him to claim broad mandate to enact particular policy. But this could be seen as a threat to the role of the Supreme Leader. The problem could be solved, though, if the two leaders cooperated, which Rafsanjani and Khamanei did to a great extent. Another problem, though, was that the Majles provided the radical opposition a forum to attack Rafsanjani in particular, especially over economic issues.\textsuperscript{12} This only served to reinforce the alliance between Rafsanjani and Khamanei.

Early in the Second Republic, opposition pressure prompted increasingly harsh responses from conservative reactionaries. The Council of Guardians became much more involved in disqualifying candidates (this was not an issue within the purview of the Expediency Discernment Council). There were widespread purges of radical Islamists (the ones pushing for a return to outright Revolution, and Khomeini-like charismatic rule) from parliament in 1991-92. But this left Rafsanjani with conservatives who were not amenable to his ideas helping the economy by opening more to the West.

\textsuperscript{11} Brumberg, 2001: 151. \textsuperscript{12} It would have been even more difficult to pass political reforms, presumably, though even with Rafsanjani's pragmatic streak, it is not clear that he was that keen on political reform. For example, his appointment for Information Minister Ali Fallahian was evidently controversial, and in the event Fallahian presided over a Ministry which conducted the torture and killing of political dissidents. See Bellaigue (2001).
In the meantime, the repression of opposition was leading to talk about rights, freedom, and pluralism, even among radical Leftists who had previously dismissed such concepts as part of Western moral corruption. More moderate calls for reform were becoming more numerous, which resonated well with the post-Revolution generation, as through efforts to use the Khomeini’s legacy more for uplift: “to promote reform and joy, rather than revolution and collective rage.”\textsuperscript{13} Khatami and Soroush were some reformers of note. They had served under Khomeini, but became disillusioned with the extremes to which the conservative leadership went to dealt with dissent. Conservatives fought efforts at change by both Khatami and Soroush, with the latter causing a particularly harsh crackdown, through his publication of work calling for the de-coupling of religion and politics. A consequence of such measures was the further unification of a diverse opposition around issues of reform and freedom, which received yet more impetus because of economic problems in 1995, as with the decline in oil prices.\textsuperscript{14}

In this context, the 1996 elections for the Majles brought a major victory for a new coalition of Islamic Leftist reformers, businesspeople, and technocrats, based on a platform of political liberalization. This eliminated the conservatives’ ability to keep policymaking tight to their agenda, and freed Rafsanjani from having to depend on them. His last term as president about to expire, he was now free to back someone more sympathetic to his interest in economic, and to a limited extent political, reform. When Rafsanjani’s first choice declined to run, he turned to one of his advisors, Khatami. A

\textsuperscript{13} Brumberg (2001: 186).
\textsuperscript{14} See Ehteshami (1995).
problem was that some of Khatami’s allies got carried away, publishing inflammatory articles which went so far as to question the authority of the Supreme Leader. This led to yet another backlash, and this time Khamenei waded in as well, not only to assert the importance of the Supreme Leader in maintaining social stability, but to endorse Khatami’s opponent. Nevertheless, Khatami won the May 23, 1997 election in a landslide.

Important changes soon followed, especially in terms of public discussion:

The previous government had tolerated ten national newspapers, only one of them wholeheartedly reformist in orientation. Khatami, on the other hand, encouraged just about everybody to start publishing news. There was an explosion of reporting and opinion – twenty-odd new dailies, weeklies and periodicals appeared – and the great majority of the new publications, favored to the great majority of Iranians, were pro-Khatami. They printed what had never been printed before, and they goaded each other into an increasingly grave traffic of truths.\footnote{Bellaigue (2001: 140).}

Clerics got into the act of airing their disagreements in public as well, with Ayatollahs Qomi and Montazeri, for example, directly criticizing Khamenei. This kind of high-level dissent further encouraged others, like student groups, to become more assertive in their own criticisms and demands. Of course, conservatives fired back, and all this put Khatami in a bind, because while he agreed with some of the demands of liberalization
being made, he did not want to make direct claims on the authority of the Supreme Leader either. He therefore took a more moderate line of defending the place of a faqih in Iranian society, but also pushing the authority of the Constitution, which in a sense was an indirect way of saying there were limits to what the faqih should do.

Nevertheless, Khatami could not stop his supporters from taking direct aim at the office of Supreme Leader. Given Khomeini’s mixed legacy of supporting both a powerful Supreme Leader and a relative autonomous state, it could be argued, Khamanei was in a difficult position of wanting to stop the assault on his office by certain reformers, and yet still allowing the president and the Majles sufficient independence. In the event, Khamanei did not go after Khatami specifically, but criticized some of his ideas of opening Iran to more cooperative relations with the West. The result was that hardliners took this as free reign to attack reformers, which included closing newspapers, imprisonments, and even assassinations.\textsuperscript{16} This evidently was much more than Khamanei wanted, as he then moved to work more closely with Khatami, and show support for the president. Khatami did the same in return, no doubt in part as an effort to protect his followers, and diffuse the conservative attack.\textsuperscript{17}

In short, the February 2000 election for the Majles occurred in a context of open dissent, open conflict, and rapprochement between Khatami and Khamanei. The

\textsuperscript{16} See Bellaigue (2001), an account of the assassinations of one political reformer, Dariush Forouhar and his wife. He served in the provisional government following the Revolution, but later argued for the separation of religion and politics, and for limits to capital punishment. His assassination sparked widespread anger, broadcast loudly by all the new media outlets. In the event, an unprecedented move, the Information Ministry admitted that some of its own members had conducted the assassination.

\textsuperscript{17} See Moslem (2002).
reformers looked to be in a commanding position to sweep the election. As such, the conservatives tried to pull the rug out, and avoid their mistake of 1997 when they seem note to have taken Khatami seriously. They closed down reformist newspapers, arrested prominent reformers who were likely to run for election, and the Council of Guardians disqualified more than six hundred candidates. The reformers parried: they presented the Guardians with a new list of candidates that was difficult to challenge given the sheer number of candidates to vet, and given that it was headed by candidates that included Khatami’s brother, whose wife is granddaughter to Ayatollah Khomeini.\textsuperscript{18} Seventy seven percent of the electorate voted in this election, giving the reformers a firm majority in the Majles.

Rafsanjani barely got enough votes for a seat. In the lead-up to the election he along with some of his ministers had been publicly accused in the press of involvement in the targeted killings of dissidents, which may have added momentum to the reformist cause.\textsuperscript{19} But, predictably perhaps, the election and such inflammatory statements about conservative leaders were followed by a yet another counter-offensive, including the attempted assassination of Khatami’s chief advisor. The Council of Guardians began disqualifying nominees for the Majles after their election, making claims about electoral fraud. Khamenei, however, intervened to stop the reactionary response, and confirmed the reformers’ victory of the election

\textsuperscript{18} While at that moment it may have seemed difficult to disqualify candidates like Khatami’s brother, it should be noted that he has been disqualified from the February 2004 elections, as has his wife (the granddaughter of Ayatollah Khomeini) who was also running for office. See Sciolino (2004).

\textsuperscript{19} See Bellaigue (2001).
The battle over the future direction of the Islamic state continues to this day. Now, however, the reformers have lost much of their momentum. In the West, President Khatami is known both for his liberal ideals, and his failure to get very far with them. And he is publicly criticized as a failure by reformers in his own country. Even with parts of the constitution talking about freedom and liberty, and even with a population widely supportive of such changes, he has not been able to get by the hardliners who control many levers of power in the Iranian state. And this is his final term as President of the Islamic Republic. For their part, the conservatives have been able to adapt to various pressures on their control of politics in Iran, and continue to keep their hold.

Problems of constraint and opportunity

Where political reforms involve compromising conservative control, there seems little incentive for them to allow liberalization. Moreover, in Iran, conservatives are able and willing to use repression to defend their position, while reformers and liberal elements of the general population seem generally unwilling to use violence to advance their cause.\(^{20}\) In this context, it does not seem surprising that while reformers have often done well in popular elections, they have not achieved much in the way of concrete political change. It would seem that for political liberalization within Iran, the conditions that have allowed for some amount of liberalization in economic and foreign policy spheres (at least when compared to the First Republic) do not hold for the political sphere.

\(^{20}\) See Bellaigue (2002).
There are some conditions and social dynamics that do not favor the conservatives, that are either ambiguous or clearly in favor of reformers. Should we just dismiss them as insufficient to overcome the entrenched position of conservatives; that is, are constraints on political reform too strong? Or should we pay more attention to the opportunities as well? An earlier case of political reform suggests we could. The transition from Khomeini’s revolutionary regime to a more “pragmatic” one (in normalizing, to a degree, economic and foreign policy, as well as the functioning of the state) following his death can be seen as a surprising transition.\textsuperscript{21} It was surprising in how orderly it was given the heated competition of conflicting visions and demands, at high levels, over the direction of the Second Republic, and given the relatively conventional use of violence as a political tool. Some were calling for more liberalization, but some of were demanding an extension of the Revolution, or even a full-scale re-launching of it.\textsuperscript{22}

The explanation for the orderly outcome seems, in part, to be that certain actors (Rafsanjani and Khamanei in particular) were able to forge an effective alliance against opponents across multiple dimensions of the religion-politics nexus, and were able to make use of conditions during Khomeini’s regime in order to prepare the way for transition. This explanation, in short, suggests that opportunities were available, but unlikely to be used without appropriate activities by well-placed individuals. Moreover, this explanation suggests that we revisit the other project for political change, and take

\footnote{21 See Ehteshami (1995). \footnote{22 See Brumberg (2001) and Moslem (2002).}
another look at the conditions, and at whether the traits and actions of individuals involved are important for why one set of events has occurred and not another.

Even under Khomeini, the clerics in Iran have never been unified, especially over their role in politics, and this continues unabated, even at very high levels. There seems to be agreement that high-level clerics should provide guidance, but just how much and how directly is where the disagreement begins, especially as historically Shi’ism involved political quietism.\(^{23}\)

With respect to problems of political constraint and opportunity, demographics are clearly important in the case of Iran. The population has expanded by tens of millions since the Revolution, with roughly half born afterwards, making for a very young population, in a country where the voting age is sixteen. There have also been jumps in literacy and education, along with a large number of people living in the cities, but there has not been a corresponding rise in employment opportunities. Many make the point that this is a very politically aware population that can mobilize relatively easily.\(^{24}\)

For external pressures generating political constraints and opportunities, we could also look to world trends of democratization in particular, and globalization in general. Both reformers and conservatives point to these trends to buttress their cases. The former point to anachronism and self-inflicted damage (e.g., constraining creativity) caused by Iran not better adapting to modernity. The latter point to these trends as all the more


reason to redouble reactionary efforts – these trends are threats to the Iranian Islamic state. More specifically, Iranian leaders have gleaned lessons about possibilities for political liberalization from the chaos following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and from ways the Chinese Communist Party works to keep a handle on political order.\textsuperscript{25} And despite the state-sponsored anti-Westernism, the Council for the Reappraisal of the Constitution looked to Western documents for models. In that vein:

As Khatami put it in a January 1998 interview with CNN, the roots of American civilization went back to the Puritans, a people whose vision was “in harmony with republicanism, democracy and freedom.” Recalling Alexis de Tocqueville’s \textit{Democracy in America}, Khatami noted that the French statesman had attributed the admirable nature of American democracy to the “fact that liberty found religion as a cradle for its growth, and religion found protection of liberty as its divine calling.” This unique relationship, he argued, was precisely what made America so appealing to Iranians. “We feel that what we seek is what the founders of American civilization were also pursuing four centuries ago.”\textsuperscript{26}

As with the other empirical cases in this dissertation, political conditions in Iran are not unambiguously for or against a particular position. Conservatives do have significant means with which to preserve their control, but there are pressures working against them, they are by no means unified, nor is their control as pervasive as in the past, as argued by authors like Wright and Sciolino who document the degree to which

\textsuperscript{25} I owe this point to Kian Tajbakhsh.
\textsuperscript{26} Brumberg (2001: 234).
ordinary life goes contrary to the wishes of conservative rulers. There is, in short, room
for opposition to move, though similar to the Chinese case, that space expands and
contracts over time. It is unclear, however, what that room implies with respect to
feasible political alternatives.

**Extraordinary differences**

To consider what else might have been possible we can look at individuals near
the levels of political power who made moves to change the structure of politics. Given
the interaction of politics and religion in Iran, it is useful to choose actors in both spheres.
This is all the more relevant given that an important element of the transition from the
First to the Second Republic was the cooperation between Rafsanjani on the political side
and Khamanei on the religious side.\(^\text{27}\) The closest parallels among those arguing for
political liberalization are Khatami in politics, and Montazeri among the high level
clerics. Especially in a context of significant factional differences over ideology at even
high levels of power, having allies who can take effective action in their spheres of
influence and expertise seems crucial. In this sense, teamwork or alliance could be given
as a significant reason for why there was so much success in the first case, whereas the
lack of a similar reform alliance may help explain the failures of the reform effort.

To say a few words about Ayatollah Montazeri, he is one of the few remaining
Grand Ayatollahs (the top rank of cleric). For a time, Montazeri was Khomeini’s chosen
successor, and but for a falling out between the two, Montazeri might be the Supreme
Leader to this day instead of Khamanei, who ranked below Montazeri as a cleric. But by

\(^\text{27}\) See Brumberg (2001) and Ehteshami (1995).
the late 1980s, Montazeri was criticizing the regime in which he served for its repression of dissidents and lack of democracy. He argued that the government should be more lenient towards the people, and that society should be more pluralistic. This angered Khomeini, who chastised Montazeri for being "liberal," with the end result that Montazeri resigned from his position among ruling clerics soon after the incident, in 1989. During the Second Republic, Montazeri has periodically and publicly criticized clerical rule, and Supreme Leader Khamanei in particular. Montazeri has been part of a movement of dissident clerics which argues for a much reduced political role for the Supreme Leader, and that Islam needs to be saved by being taking out of the ruling clerics' hands. Despite his stature as a Grand Ayatollah, Montazeri's words have brought the ransacking of his house by unknown assailants, and eventually he was put under house arrest.28

Khatami is one of the prime examples of a cleric who served the Revolution, but who became moderate as time progressed. He had been at the heart of Khomeini's regime, but as early as 1987 began to call for more cultural openness. These views led to him being marginalized following Khomeini's death, and he spent much of this time writing, "producing a series of books that sought to bridge the 'civilizational' gap between the East and the West."29 Rafsanjani tapped Khatami to help in his effort to distance policy from conservatives, with Khatami working with Rafsanjani's brother to open up the cultural sphere some, particularly with film, television and radio. But this

28 See Bellaigue (2002).
prompted a reactionary response, and Khatami was forced to resign. Nevertheless, Khatami stayed on as advisor, which led to his nomination as president.

Mindset

Given that physical intimidation, arrest, and murder are among the tools used by conservative reactionaries against reformers, then it is relevant to consider motivation to launch a project against the status quo and its defenders, given the likelihood of high personal costs.\textsuperscript{30} So, with respect to motivation, this case looks a lot more like the anti-mafia case than the abolition one. The fact that Khatami has taken on this project of reform, even when some of his allies have been killed, maimed, and/or imprisoned for their role, does indicate an exceptional trait. But Khatami also seems to have shown some tendencies reminiscent of Pitt in the abolition case of Chapter 7, in perhaps being too risk-averse. Being a senior cleric would seem to offer him some amount of personal protection, though likely not absolute protection. And whether fair or not, critics have accused him of not taking sufficient advantage of his strengths, and of backing down too quickly in face of conservative threats.\textsuperscript{31}

Montazeri may enjoy some degree of immunity as a Grand Ayatollah, but given how he has been assaulted and imprisoned, and given the level of violence involved with conservative action against opposition, the issue of motivation may be relevant for thinking about Montazeri as well. His criticizing the regime under Khomeini seems suggestive.

\textsuperscript{30} Bellaigue (2001: 139) gives a rough estimate that dissidents have been disappearing at a rate of one a month since the beginning of the 1990s.
\textsuperscript{31} I owe this point to Kian Tajbakhsh.
There does seem something to be said for Khatami with respect to resilience to accept setbacks without conceding defeat, as there have been many setbacks and yet he has continued to work for change. Though there is debate over this. Some critics argue that Khatami has, instead, eased off the reform effort because of setbacks at the hands of conservatives. At the same time, however, it is useful to note how other reformers have shown this kind of resilience, as with some of those who work in the press and publishing.\footnote{See, e.g., Bellaigue (2001), Lyden (2000), and The Economist (December 9, 2000: 51).} Despite the fact that some of these individuals have been imprisoned or had their publications shut down, they have returned to the fight later.

With respect to persistence to work on long-term, incremental forms of change, that Khatami has been involved with politics for a number of years does not mean that he shows exceptional persistence. For one thing he has changed his approach to politics over the years, from being a close follower of Khomeini to being a reformer. Nevertheless, that transformation did occur a number of years ago. There does not, however, seem to be much evidence of a concerted, long-term project. He worked briefly under Rafsanjani to open up the cultural sphere, but then resigned that post after a conservative backlash. With Montazeri, the evidence sees to be that he did not have the mindset for a long-term, incremental project. Instead, he has been prone to periodic outbursts to demand immediate, large-scale change. At the same time, then, Montazeri has not exhibited patience to wait for better opportunities. Khatami, for his part, does seem to be well-characterized as patient, though as will be suggested below, this trait can be negated by his inability to influence allies to be similarly patient.
Montazeri conspicuously failed to show the *self-control that may be necessary to enable alliance building, and avoid triggering too much counterattack*. Khatami, however, has exhibited a great deal of this, as he seems to have spent much effort in trying to balance reform demands with conservative concerns. Nevertheless, mindset alone will not achieve results – it needs to be matched with aptitude.

*Aptitude*

Montazeri has shown, years earlier than Khatami did, *open-mindedness to question convention and to look to improve upon it*, with his calls for change during the First Republic. Khatami, of course, is famous for arguing for reform of the Second Republic, though it should be noted that Khatami is not about complete transformation of regime, which is a moderate position compared to some dissidents who demand a complete separation of church from state. Montazeri is also more radical over the issue of separation. Khatami is still interested in keeping much of Khomeini's legacy, but it is fair to say that he is open-minded to reform.

Political conditions, however, do not present a clear path for Khatami to follow. As such, relevant is the element of *intelligence to derive an exceptional understanding of the possible given a set of conditions*. As suggested in the Italian antimafia case, within complex conditions, the incremental use of political tools, including institutions, can be important for establishing leverage against powerful dynamics that reinforce the status quo. Moreover, given the means with which conservatives can counter-attack in Iran,

---

33 See Brumberg (2001).
single decisive victories for reformers seem unlikely, which again suggests that incremental routes are more feasible with respect to controlled agency. If political change is to be controlled, in a situation characterized by significant problems of overcoming constraint and making use of opportunity, long-term multifaceted projects seem a more likely route.

For example, one of Khatami's central problems has been to balance demands of different groups. On the one hand there are demands for tangible change from students, women, intellectuals, and businesspeople. On the other hand, there is the challenge of convincing enough of the right clerics and conservatives that certain changes are for the good. Assuming this is an accurate way to portray the problem facing Khatami, the idea of finding some "big bang" solution that could take care of all elements at once seems incomprehensible. Suggestive is how the engineers of the Polish Ostpolitik took a long-term, multifaceted approach to building better relations among ethnic groups.

With respect to an incremental approach to political problem solving, the Iranian case is mixed. Khatami has often preached caution with respect to reform demands, though in part this seems to be an effect of his limited view of reform, in arguing that Iran remain an Islamic Republic with a political role for clerics. Nevertheless, reforms he has advocated are a significant departure from the existing order, and his moves to open the press, for example, did bring significant change. But the reason that the Iranian case is mixed with respect to incremental change is that some of the political reforms
implemented under Khatami have been more “big bang” than incremental in form, especially in comparison to the Chinese Village Council elections example.

Iran has its own form of local council government reform which was universally implemented in 1999. When Khatami was first elected, there was a major push for political reform, and one plank was to make local councils elected (for the first time), and without the Council of Guardians vetting candidates. With approximately 35,000 local councils, there were suddenly somewhere around 150,000 new elected officials. Participation in the first round of elections, especially outside of Tehran, was massive, and evidently expectations were quite high, in part because this was part of Khatami’s sweep into office. But the fact was that these councils have very limited roles, with most issues of planning and spending still being run by the central bureaucracy. The second round of elections was in 2003, with a large drop in both participation and interest. The implementation of elected local councils is not insignificant, especially with it having brought hundreds of thousands of Iranians into politics, who are more informed about the workings of the state. Nevertheless, it seems indicative of the general pattern of reform under Khatami, which has been for spectacular individual events that fail to meet expectations, and/or are rolled back by conservatives.

In short, some of the reform shortfalls do seem attributable to failures of “intelligence,” so to speak. At the same time, however, another problem can be found with respect to expertise to navigate the political order, to attain and keep a position

---

34 For more on local elections in Iran, see Tajbakhsh (2000) and (2003).
35 There were a further 60-70,000 reserve officials who were not on the councils, as they had lost in the elections, but who nevertheless attended meetings in the event that elected officials had to step down.
from which to engineer a project to change that order. Holding the office of president and having a majority in the Majles is insufficient. Gaining the ability to make reforms in Iran also requires working with clerics and with state ministries often dominated by conservatives. Put simply, this is an issue of alliance building.\textsuperscript{36} Given fears among high-level clerics about reform leading to their demise (recall fears of Tories in the abolition case), an issue for reformers is to try to convince enough of them that things would be worse without reform (as by noting population pressure issues). The presence of individuals like Montazeri, and the way in which factionalism has according to Moslem (2002) steadily increased since the Revolution, suggests that possibilities for more effective alliance-building may have been present, at least earlier on in the Second Republic.

Relevant to improving the odds of such alliance building would be if relevant individuals had insight to find ways to bypass or turn conventions and institutions (geared to preserving the existing order) towards novel uses. Here we could note here extensive efforts by Khatami and his allies to make use of Khomeini’s legacy by focusing on his words about building a stable Iranian state by having a strong Majles and government.\textsuperscript{37}

More important, however, seems to be a key failure of Khatami’s regarding the influence to persuade and coordinate others and keep their attention. Upon his initial election to the office of president, Khatami commanded wide support in many different

\textsuperscript{36} For more on this point, see Bellaigue (2002).
\textsuperscript{37} See Brumberg (2001).
circles. There were members of the old guard, as with Montazeri; there were people who
came of age during the Revolution, as with radical Leftists and more liberal nationalists
who were marginalized by the clerics; and then there was the youth, as with the student
protestors. There was much persuasion here and coordination on some issues, like
support for election; but Khatami has not been able to generate and maintain support
around his effort to balance between reform demands and conservative fears. Often his
supporters have gone beyond what Khatami has been willing to do and say, with the
result of triggering reactionary backlash.

Conclusion

In the case of the Iranian reformers, the 3TSA leads us to look at the inability of
promising high-level actors to work together, their inability to incrementally reshape
institutions to prepare the way for further change, as well as, more generally, their failure
to make use of broad popular support, to extend economic and social reforms into the
political realm, to use openings in the constitution that seem to leave room for more
liberalization, and to take better advantage of elements of Khomeini’s legacy that favor
political reform. A suggestion, then, is that where change seems unlikely because of
conditions, the presence of individual diversity may provide avenues for innovation.
Where we see failed projects we should look to conditions, but also to the presence and
absence of characteristics in those involved.
Chapter Ten
Conclusion

The general approach to social science presented in this thesis is one of cataloging analytical tools, concepts and findings about the nature of social dynamics and related human characteristics, that guide and inform our efforts to sift through historical events. Part of this cataloging view is the argument that we should work to refine the catalog elements, to improve our ability to discern indicators of when they are present and important, as best we can. And there are two general ways to go about this improvement: to refine the quality of the catalog elements (analytical tools) themselves, and of the ways in which we select and use those elements. Regarding the first, I see the increasing emphasis on causal mechanisms as a way to improve quality of the elements, and to generate more accurate ways to search for and read indicators. Regarding the second, the selection and use of catalog elements, there are tradeoffs involved with any research program, and these should be easier to understand if we have a sense of other available tools. But if our catalog is unwieldy, such awareness may be difficult to achieve. The 3TSA offers a way to organize our catalog (and cataloging) of tools.

The analytical approach to political creativity presented in this dissertation does not deny the powerful effects of social conditions, or the many ways that actors fail or prove ineffective in their endeavors. It is meant to use the strengths of the orthodox view as springboard to considering what is possible at particular moments in the human experience, and to it enriching our understanding of that experience, with a fuller sense of social dynamics and politically relevant individual characteristics.
On the social side, a richer sense of social dynamics emerges, suggesting that politics is more malleable, and at a greater scale, than more structural or institutional work allows. On the cognitive and psychological side, a richer sense of how people do things differently and do things well suggests that there is more to know about political behavior than maximizing gains relative to the constraints and incentives of a particular context. Combining the two sides provides insight into how a particular set of actors can make a difference – can, that is, intentionally grasp the malleable elements of social conditions to fashion different political possibilities. There are exceptional actors who if willing and able can have disproportionate effect in bringing change, on side of any efforts by ordinary actors. In this thesis, my goal was to locate political creativity in a dual sense: to locate analytical tools for studying creativity within social science; and thereby enable analysts to more precisely and systematically locate creativity, and possibilities for it, in political history.

By developing and bringing together toolsets for analyzing social dynamics and individual diversity, and then applying these in several case studies, I aim to show how social science analysis of political history can be strengthened. The ultimate goal is a better grasp of the constraints and opportunities at play in the flow of events, and of how people can use them to effect creative political change. So rather than focus on specific decisions, for example, I advocate the study of long-term projects to change one broad element of a particular political system – at least in the early stages of developing concepts and theory about political creativity specifically, along with the 3TSA in
general. In tracing through the history of a case, the sets provide ways to judge events. If we are satisfied that the sets for social dynamics and ordinary differences have provided a reasonable picture of the kinds of problems facing reformers, and if those problems are sizeable, we could look for the presence or absence of potentially relevant extraordinary differences that would lead us to expect the presence or absence of creative solutions. An examination of social dynamics and ordinary differences may, however, simply back up a more orthodox interpretation – that it is social conditions driving events. The flexibility to capture different balances of structure and agency is of central importance if the 3TSA is to shed light on questions such as whether political creativity is possible, and if so how.

**Case study conclusions**

Projects like those of Orlando and Falcone suggest a view of politics more open to possibility than the orthodox view. Even where one group dominates, there can be room for opposing groups within existing institutions. And that room can allow some actors to contribute towards political change, slow or fast. Understanding political change in a case like the antimafia one requires more than knowledge about relevant conditions and social processes – without a grasp on the contributions of key actors, structural explanations (even if more nuanced) can remain indeterminate.¹

With respect to mindset, it seems difficult to understand the actions of reformers willing to work against the mafia in Italy and hardline clerics in Iran without reference to motivation, given that physical violence and assassination have been common tools of

---

¹ Ginsborg (2001) argues that political change in late 20th century Italy requires this kind of multi-level analysis, from shocks and generational changes down to certain influential actors.
reactionaries. Thinking about mindset could similarly help us understand the persistence of certain abolitionists when conditions turned against them. And it seems also to clarify how antimafia campaigners in Italy and architects of village level democracy in China persisted in their projects despite setbacks, especially with shifting political factions and clampdowns on reform. In both these cases, along with the Poles and Britons, reformers envisioned decades-long processes of incremental change, and they had the patience and commitment to stay with their project as long as possible.

Mindset also seems relevant for explaining the ways in which the particular Poles, Chinese, Italians, Iranians, and Britons resisted the force of conventional ideas and practices, and remained open-minded to other possibilities, when so many peers remained wedded to status quo beliefs. Moreover, while reformers in Italy, Poland, China, and Britain were passionate about their hate for the existing order and desire for a different one, they also took pains to restrain that passion, to avoid overextending when in a position of limited influence, and to rein in more reckless members of their teams. One can find similar efforts among political reformers in Iran, but key failures came via premature, overbold attacks on the status quo.

Regarding aptitude, it is difficult to understand the actions of reformers in Poland building peaceful ethnic relations prior to the end of the Soviet Union without reference to exceptional grasp of multiple dimensions of the problem. Thinking about aptitude similarly helps us understand how Chinese reformers navigated multiple levels of government, and endured the clampdowns that tended to follow any political openings.
And aptitude helps explain how abolitionists and antimafia campaigners dealt with issue multidimensionality by cooperatively working across political, legal, economic, and cultural spheres. In these cases, it is also of note how reformers understood the force of conventional ideas and practices, but how they did not internalize them, and instead looked for ways to change them. More generally, aptitude helps us think about actors using incremental change to redirect existing institutions, as antimafia prosecutors did in using financial law against organized crime; and about training others in different social practices, as abolitionists did in the innovation of pamphlet and petition campaigns.

Aptitude also helps us think about how reformers, like antimafia campaigners, got and kept positions of influence, and dodged attacks in contexts where defenders of the old order had many available tools of action. Further, aptitude leads us to look at how the Poles, for example, were able to locate those within other ethnic groups, as well as their own, who would be amenable to trying the new practices, and new ideas about nationalism, they prescribed. One route to this sort of persuasion and coordination is where reformers are able to use some conventional beliefs against others, to reframe issues, as abolitionists worked to do in casting an end to the slave trade as an issue of national interest, instead of a moral cause, to address conservative concerns. A similar move was central to the Polish effort, in reframing nationalism away from historical grievances and towards future prosperity and security. Aptitude in framing issues and persuading others may also explain the extent to which political actors can retain, or serially regain, public attention for their issue. British abolitionists excelled in this aspect, as did the Poles, especially given the chaotic aftermath of the Soviet collapse.
How the Poles prepared for that collapse exemplifies another important element of aptitude in that some reformers are able to manipulate conditions during stable times such that they gain a strong position to handle, adapt to, and even use shocks. Along these lines, antimafia campaigners used incremental means to reform institutions and to establish influence, enabling them to respond quickly to sudden, short moments of opportunity, as well as of setback. The peaceful transition from the First to the Second Republic in Iran also saw extensive preparations for the event in advance. In this light, failures of aptitude seem relevant for understanding the inability of dissenters to go further in working for political liberalization in Iran.

Structure versus agency revisited

While any one example, in the cases above, of an extraordinary difference being relevant to solving a particular problem likely cannot – indeed should not – convince more structurally oriented social scientists (who focus on the effects of conditions) to give up their “orthodox” approach to analysis. It is doubtful that any one example will have either the scale or duration necessary to be of much relevance to structurally oriented questions. Moreover, even where a solution to a particular problem does prove to be of great scale and duration, the structurally oriented scholar could reasonably set that example aside as mystical, or at least bracketed agency.

What should be clear from the quick summary of the cases above, however, is that there are cases where an individual, or small group, repeated confronts and solves
problems over a long period of time, when working towards changing the social environment. Such cases may be more about redundant agency, but there is also the possibility that controlled agency involved. Given the magnitude of social problems that exist, like ethnic conflict, it is reasonable to argue that we neglect a normative duty as social scientists to ignore possibilities for controlled agency in general, and political creativity in particular. A fundamental goal of this dissertation is to provide the foundations for just this kind of analysis.

But they are only foundations. This is a work of theory, and the empirical cases involved are to help in the building and clarification of that theory; to show that the foundations provided are plausible, and that their application to real-world examples is feasible. This thesis, in other words, is a stepping stone, where a next one would be extensive testing of the theory, which would involve at least two general improvements. One is that work can be done on case selection and on depth of analysis. While several cases were rejected for consideration in this thesis because they did not sufficient fit with a project view, the goal was more to find a set of cases diverse enough to help flesh out concepts, and show applicability of the theory and method. For testing, more effort should be spent in the locating of examples of long-term projects working to change conditions in unfavorable circumstances, where there are extensive sources of information on conditions and on the actions and beliefs of individuals involved. Then a true application of the 3TSA could be attempted.
A second improvement for proper testing would be to expend effort on finding comparable cases, to try to avoid problems of comparing apples and oranges. The 3TSA can help guide comparison, and set up alternative hypotheses, given that it is a catalog of many types of social dynamic and individual characteristic. At the same time, tracing through different cases of different projects should help refine the 3TSA, in alerting us to what else is needed. In this sense, a fuller testing of the 3TSA could result in the development of the cataloging schemes. The development of this approach, in short, should be considered a long-term project, with the next step being proper theory testing.

A 3TSA curriculum

The 3TSA is designed to encourage consideration of kinds of social dynamics and individual characteristics that may not come to mind when a social scientist turns her gaze to political history; though it is not designed to replace consideration of more orthodox concerns. The focus on ordinary differences is meant to complement much useful work based on "psychological laws" about individual similarities, with extraordinary differences similarly connected to research about human biases and limits. But neither contribution is intended merely as an add-on to existing social science either. Each set of analytical tools - social dynamics, ordinary differences, and extraordinary ones - is meant to inform the development of the other. Our understanding of social dynamics, and related similarities in how people are social and human beings, should inform consideration of what individual differences matter and how. But insight into differences should, in return, inform how we think about social dynamics and individual similarities.
So, from time to time we need to upgrade the toolkits we have for assembling the “loose sets of psychological laws,” which we use to underpin our notions of the social world in particular case studies. In this sense, if we are to take the 3TSA seriously as a way to do social science, we may need to reconsider the curriculum of training in our particular field of study. To effectively apply a 3TSA to a phenomenon of interest, we may need to check up on the available research on the origins of belief, the manipulation of belief, and how some beliefs and not others become salient at specific times. Few social scientists are trained to do this.

The analytical toolsets presented in this dissertation are intended to go a long way in addressing the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological gaps in the discipline that I see. But they do not and cannot go all the way. They should all be taken as open-ended, as should the conclusions of the case studies – open-ended to the cumulation of knowledge. As we learn more about the nature of social dynamics and of human nature, we can develop more broadly applicable methods, and so have more to contribute in knowledge about processes and the possible in the social and political world. But if we limit our thinking and training to orthodox, structural assumptions about the interaction of social structure and individual agency, I would argue, we deny ourselves the ability to speak with authority about possibilities for creative political change.
References

-------- (February 15, 2004). Iran dissident says reform at end. BBC News Online.

-------- (December 9, 2000). Iran's killing machine. The Economist, p. 51.

-------- (June 2, 2001). Baltasar Garzon. The Economist, p. 54.


284


287


Ostrom, E. and M. A. Janssen (2002). Beliefs, Multi-Level Governance, and Development. Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA.


