Rethinking Agency and Structure in the Study of Regime Change

James Mabone and Richard Snyder

The oscillation of the study of political regime change between voluntarist and structural approaches has increasingly led scholars to seek research strategies for synthesizing the two approaches. This article addresses the conceptual and practical difficulties of achieving such a synthesis by evaluating several strategies for integrating voluntarist and structural factors in the analysis of regime change. It examines competing ways of conceptualizing agency and structure and assesses the varied consequences that different conceptualizations have for explaining regime transformation. The article also analyzes three distinct strategies for integrating agency and structure: the funnel, path-dependent, and eclectic strategies. Each integrative strategy is anchored by a different conceptual base and has characteristic strengths and limitations. The conclusion explores future directions for developing integrative strategies.

Recent analyses describe the evolution of the study of political regime change in terms of a paradigm shift between two approaches with distinct modes of explanation (see Levine 1988, Bermeo 1990, Karl 1990, Remmer 1991, Kitschelt 1993, and Munck 1994). According to these analyses, an initial phase of the study of regime change was dominated by structural approaches, which relied on factors such as class, sector, and world-systemic political economy features to account for political regimes. In a subsequent phase, structural approaches were supplanted by voluntarist approaches, which emphasized the choices and strategies of the key actors involved in processes of regime transition.

These analyses are united by their prescription that the next stage in the study of regime change should synthesize the two divergent approaches. The structural approaches which characterized the “first generation” of work on regime transfor-

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Integration and the voluntarist approaches which characterized the second must now be integrated. The goal of the third generation of studies should be to analyze regime change in a way that links structures to the shaping of contingent actor choice. Karl and Schmitter (1991, 270-71) use the rubric “from contingent choice to structured contingency” to describe this integrative agenda which requires striking a balance between the structural and agential factors that shape regime transformations.

This article seeks to advance this integrative agenda by addressing two important barriers to its implementation. First, advocates of integrative approaches have said little about what empirical analyses of regime change that employ these approaches should look like. Nor have they offered guidelines for constructing theories that integrate structural and voluntarist approaches.

Second, their injunction to combine structural and agential factors forces a confrontation with one of the most longstanding and intractable problems of social science: how to resolve 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” (Dessler 1989, 443). This persistent stumbling block, frequently called the “agent-structure problem,” poses serious difficulties for developing integrative approaches to the study of regime change. These difficulties have not been satisfactorily addressed. Until these impediments are acknowledged and efforts are made to overcome them, we will continue to lack a firm base for constructing integrative theories of regime change that recognize the causal effects of both social structure and human agency.

We argue that laying the groundwork for the next generation of studies of regime change requires two steps that move us toward integration of structural and voluntarist approaches. First, problems of theory construction involved in developing integrative approaches should be addressed. We do so by disaggregating structural and voluntarist approaches both in terms of their divergent underlying conceptions of human agency and social structure and in terms of their methodological and theoretical components. This disaggregation helps identify the trouble points that pose the strongest impediments to developing integrative approaches. It also establishes a clear baseline for classifying a particular approach as structural, voluntarist, or integrative.

The second step toward promoting empirical work that integrates structural and voluntarist approaches is to identify strategies for overcoming the difficulties revealed by the first, disaggregative step. To this end, we provide a menu of strategies for integrating agency and structure in the study of regime change. We probe the strengths and limitations of the strategies and analyze exemplary applications of each. The conclusion considers directions for future research strategies.

**Structuralist Thesis, Voluntarist Antithesis: Components of Voluntarist and Structural Approaches**

Despite the recent proliferation of calls for synthesis of voluntarist and structural approaches, advocates of integrative approaches to the study of regime change have not addressed important differences in how voluntarist and structural ap-
approaches conceptualize agency and structure as causal variables. In this section, we introduce criteria for differentiating these approaches in terms of their conceptual “bases” and their methodological and theoretical “superstructures.”

The Metatheoretical Base: Conceptualizing Agency and Structure

In their conceptions of agency, voluntarist and structural approaches are distinguished by the extent to which human action is understood as a consequence of social relations. Voluntarist approaches have an “undersocialized” conception of agency; structural approaches, by contrast, have an “oversocialized” conception.\(^5\) In terms of structure, both approaches recognize a potential causal role for social structures. However, voluntarist approaches conceptualize structures as external constraints, which actors may or may not encounter as they pursue their goals. Structural approaches, on the other hand, conceive structures as omnipresent, “generative” relations that define the identities and interests of actors.\(^6\)

Undersocialized and Oversocialized Conceptions of Human Agency. Voluntarist approaches conceive human behavior as underdetermined by social structures. In this view, actors’ identities and interests during regime transformations cannot be explained by social or economic roles. Human action is understood as a force external to and disengaged from “objective” social relations. According to O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 4), to explain transitions to democracy one cannot “rely on relatively stable economic, social, cultural, and partisan categories to identify, analyze, and evaluate identities and strategies of those defending the status quo and those struggling to reform or transform it....[I]t is almost impossible to specify ex ante which classes, sectors, institutions, and other groups will take what role, opt for what issues or support what alternative.”

Structural approaches, by contrast, treat the identities and interests of actors as defined by positions within social structures and view choices and actions as results of these positions. In the study of regime change, class and culture have been used in conjunction with this oversocialized conception of agency. In O’Donnell’s (1973) structural account of the origins of bureaucratic-authoritarianism, for example, actors’ interests are defined mainly in terms of class position, and class-based groups are understood to ally or oppose one another depending on material incentives.

The undersocialized conception of agency characterizing voluntarist approaches highlights how ongoing interactions between purposeful actors shape regime change. Yet this conception de-emphasizes the possibility that these interactions may be affected by pre-existing social relations which shape actors’ interests and capabilities. Consequently, voluntarist approaches overemphasize immediate, short-term processes, choices, and political crafting, while ignoring the extent to which “the possible” is conditioned by social structures.

The oversocialized conception of agency underlying structural approaches suffers from the converse problem. Although structural approaches regard human behavior as socially grounded, they exclude how actors sustain and, during transitions, transform political regime structures. This conception of agency creates a strong bias for emphasizing long-term, impersonal processes and for overlooking the possibility that actors may have margins of maneuverability during periods of regime change.
Constraint and Generative Models of Social Structure. At first glance, it may seem that voluntarist approaches deny the existence of structural factors altogether. However, as O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 5) remark, to emphasize the role of agency “is not to deny that the macrostructural factors are still ‘there.’” Rather, voluntarist studies assume that during regime transformations “those [structural] mediations are looser, their impacts more indeterminate, than in normal circumstances” (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 5). From this perspective, regime transitions are special times when the causal impact of structural factors is temporarily relaxed.

This idea that the causal impact of structures varies across historical junctures depends on a conception of structures as contingent constraints that potentially (rather than necessarily) limit the ability of actors to achieve their goals. This constraint model of structure assumes that actors “pre-exist” structures in that they have interests and identities prior to encountering structural constraints. Structural factors are treated as barriers external to actors which may or may not stand between them and the achievement of their autonomous goals and interests.

Structural approaches, by contrast, conceive structures as generative forces that define actors’ interests and directly determine their behavior. Structures are understood not as contingent relations that pre-existing actors may or may not encounter, but as necessary relations internalized by actors and from which their interests, identities, and goals derive. These generative structures are assumed to exist prior to actors since they constitute the very properties (e.g., interests and identities) that define actors and motivate their behavior.

Voluntarist and Structuralist Conceptual Bases. There is a necessary affinity between the generative model of structure and the oversocialized conception of agency, just as there is between the constraint model of structure and the undersocialized conception of agency. If social structures are viewed as generating the essential properties of agents, then agency is necessarily conceived in an oversocialized manner. Likewise, if structures are viewed as contingent constraints external to actors, then agency is necessarily understood in an undersocialized manner. These affinities allow us to identify two distinct “conceptual bases” formed by models of how agency and structure interrelate (see Figure 1). The combination of the oversocialized conception of agency with the generative model of structure

**FIGURE 1**
Conceptions of Agency and Structure in Voluntarist and Structural Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voluntarist Conceptual Base</th>
<th>Structuralist Conceptual Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conception of Agency</td>
<td>Undersocialized</td>
<td>Oversocialized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conception of Structure</td>
<td>Constraint Model</td>
<td>Generative Model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
forms a "structuralist conceptual base." The combination of the undersocialized conception of agency with the constraint model of structure forms a "voluntarist conceptual base." 

Methodological and Theoretical Superstructure: Building Blocks of Voluntarist, Structural, and Integrative Approaches

The differences between voluntarist and structural approaches can be clarified by distinguishing these approaches according to four criteria: primary explanatory

FIGURE 2
Building Blocks of Voluntarist, Structural, and Integrative Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Explanatory Variable</th>
<th>Voluntarist Approach</th>
<th>Structural Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjective States of Actors</td>
<td>Objective Conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporally Proximate Causes</td>
<td>Temporally Remote Causes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Comparison</td>
<td>Idiographic Method</td>
<td>Nomothetic Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Analysis</td>
<td>Micro Analysis</td>
<td>Macro Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
variable, temporal focus, use of comparison, and level of analysis. Voluntarist and structural approaches are defined by the polar ends of these four dimensions (see Figure 2). An integrative approach needs to combine these polar alternatives with reference to all four components.

**Primary Explanatory Variable.** The subjective evaluations of the key actors who "make" transitions serve as the primary explanatory variable in voluntarist approaches. Voluntarist approaches are based on the assumption that during regime transitions, actors are socially disemodied in the strong sense that they encounter virtually no structural constraints. This assumption, combined with the denial of structurally-determined identities and interests, leads to an understanding of human agency as the consequence of actors' subjective evaluations of uncertain objective conditions. Thus, O'Donnell and Schmitter divide the military into "soft-liners" and "hard-liners" based on differences in subjective goals of actors who occupy the same institutional position. Likewise, they separate opposition to the incumbent authoritarian regime into "minimalist" and "maximalist" camps according to actors' subjective goals, which may or may not correspond to their "objective" socioeconomic positions (1986, 15-17, 63).

Structural approaches, by contrast, rely on objective conditions as the principal explanatory variable. This prioritization of objective conditions stems from the assumption that actors are defined by social relations and, hence, their subjective evaluations are epiphenomenal consequences of membership in social collectivities.

**Temporal Focus.** A second distinction between structural and voluntarist approaches concerns how far back in history to extend the analysis to identify causes of regime change. Structural approaches emphasize long-range, temporally remote causes. This long-range temporal focus stems from the assumption that human agency is generated by pre-existing social relations. Hence, explanations of regime change must locate causes in social structures that temporally precede the actors who carry out the transformation. And the social structures understood to cause regime change often exist long before the actual transformation that is the target of analysis. For example, in Barrington Moore's (1966) account of the origins of modern democratic and totalitarian regimes, these outcomes are treated as structural legacies of historically-remote patterns of preindustrial agrarian class relations.

Voluntarist approaches, by contrast, focus on short-term, temporally proximate causes. This short-range temporal focus stems from the assumption that pre-existing social relations cannot explain the behavior of actors. A focus on historically remote social structures is therefore unnecessary. Because agents are understood to exist prior to structures, a temporal frame that captures their interactions during the moment of transition seems appropriate. According to O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 48), for example, analyses of transitions from authoritarianism should begin by focusing on how incumbent elites create political openings. When historical factors are utilized in voluntarist approaches, they play the causally insignificant role of providing a contextual back-drop for temporally proximate processes which actually do the explanatory work.

**Use of Comparison.** Social science theory-building involves tension between seeking causal generalizations true across many cases and capturing each case's distinctive features. This tension has fueled much debate over the merits of idio-
graphic analysis, which is sensitive to the uniqueness of cases, as opposed to nomothetic analysis, which develops generalizations that account for several or even all instances of a phenomenon (Collier 1993).

Voluntarist approaches have an affinity with the idiographic comparative method. This affinity is rooted in the conception of regime transformations as contingent, "underdetermined" events for which actors' subjective perceptions are the principal explanation. Hence, each transition is unique because "the unexpected and the possible are as important as the usual and the probable," and the "normal social science" quest for generalizations and predictions is rejected in favor of idiographic explanations that emphasize chance and contingency (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 3-5).

Structural approaches, by contrast, have an affinity with the nomothetic comparative method. Social structures, unlike undersocialized agents, are impersonal, non-contingent, and have causal properties that are relatively uniform across time and space (Manicas 1980). The impersonality and non-contingency of social structures orient structural approaches toward developing causal generalizations which explain, for example, why countries with similar structural features experience similar regime transformations.

Level of Analysis. Structural and voluntarist approaches differ in terms of the level of analysis at which they explain regime change. Like students of international relations, students of regime change face a "level of analysis problem" created by the difficulty "of assessing the relative importance of causal factors at different levels of aggregation" (Wendt 1991, 387; see also Singer 1961). In the study of regime change, different underlying conceptions of agency and structure contribute to the prioritization of causal factors at different levels of analysis. Structural approaches emphasize macro-level variables. Voluntarist approaches, by contrast, emphasize micro-level variables.9

Five levels of analysis are commonly employed in studies of regime change: macro-structural, domestic-structural, institutional, social group, and leadership (see Figure 3). The macro-structural level consists of variables that operate at the international systemic and nation-state levels, such as world-system position, degree of national economic development, and national culture. The domestic-structural level encompasses "objective" social groups defined by factors such as socioeconomic position. Domestic classes and functional role groups are domestic-structural variables. The institutional level comprises formal domestic organizations and their rules and procedures. Political parties, military organizations, state bureaucracies, and regime components, such as constitutional or legislative rules and procedures, are institutional variables. The final two levels of analysis—the social group and leadership levels—encompass subjectively-defined groups and specific political leaders, respectively. Social movements, ideological factions within the military, regime hard-liners and soft-liners, and moderate and maximalist oppositions are social group variables. Individuals who lead subjectively-defined social groups or institutional-level organizations, such as political parties, governments, and militaries, are leadership factors.

Structural approaches use variables from the macro-structural and domestic-structural levels. Variables from the domestic-structural level are usually subordinated to variables from the macro-structural level and treated as intervening causes.
FIGURE 3
Levels of Analysis in the Study of Regime Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic Approach</th>
<th>Level of Analysis</th>
<th>Examples of Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Macro-Structural</td>
<td>World System Position; National Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic-Structural</td>
<td>Bourgeoisie; Middle and Working Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntarist</td>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Party Systems; Military; Constitutional Rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Group</td>
<td>Military Factions; Social Movements; Ethnic Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Government, Party, and Military Leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And regardless of the balance of explanatory power between these two macro levels, the “explanatory buck” of structural approaches stops at the domestic-structural level. It does not travel to the social group or leadership levels because the conceptual premises of structural approaches deny autonomous causal roles to factors at these levels.

By contrast, voluntarist approaches use variables from the social group and leadership levels. Their voluntarist conceptual base, which treats actors as isolated from social structures, creates a blind-spot to the potential causal role of macro-level factors. From this perspective, only micro-level social group and leadership factors seem necessary to explain regime change.

Criteria for Integrative Approaches. The criteria for integrative approaches follow from the components of voluntarist and structural approaches: an integrative approach should employ the methodological and theoretical building blocks of both. Integrative approaches are defined by use of both subjective evaluations of actors and objective conditions as primary causal variables; a focus on temporally
proximate and remote factors; a methodological concern with case-specific and general causes of regime change; and an emphasis on multi-level explanations that span micro and macro levels of analysis.

Attempts at Synthesis: Integrative Strategies

This section evaluates strategies for integrating voluntarist and structural approaches. We first consider the “funnel” strategy, which integrates agency and structure by combining variables from multiple levels of analysis. Next we examine the “path-dependent” strategy, which links antecedent historical-structural factors to subsequent actor choice during periods of regime change. Finally, we consider “eclectic” strategies, which achieve integration at the expense of theoretical parsimony. Figure 4 serves as a guide to the discussion that follows.

FIGURE 4

Strategies for Integrating Voluntarist and Structural Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Base</th>
<th>Funnel Strategy</th>
<th>Path-Dependent Strategy</th>
<th>Eclectic Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntarist</td>
<td>Structuralist</td>
<td>No Consistent Conception</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vector Model</td>
<td>Evolutionary Model</td>
<td>Correlational Model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Privileges Agency Through One-way Causality

Privileges Structure Through Path-determinism

Not Parsimonious; Indiscriminately Privileges both Agency and Structure

Linz & Stepan; Almond, Flanagan, & Mundt

Collier & Collier; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, & Stephens

Diamond, Linz & Lipset; Huntington
Constructing a Funnel of Causality: The Funnel Strategy

One integrative strategy is to construct an explanation using systematic, unidirectional jumps across the five levels of analysis in Figure 3. These jumps consist of the sequential introduction of variables from new levels of analysis after the explanatory power of variables at already-examined levels has been exhausted. Variables at a particular level of analysis are understood to explain part of a regime outcome; hence, one must consider variables from all levels to approximate a “full” explanation.

Movement across levels of analysis is systematic because it is guided by the analyst’s judgment that variables at a particular level cannot contribute further to the explanation (i.e., that they are necessary but not sufficient causes). This judgment justifies moving to a different level in order to find additional necessary causal factors. These jumps across levels are unidirectional because causation is treated as non-reciprocal between levels. Once the analyst decides that the explanatory power of a level has been exhausted and shifts to a lower level, it is not necessary to return to the “exhausted” level, because it has already made its full contribution to explaining the regime outcome. In general, these jumps follow the hierarchical ordering of levels of analysis as presented in Figure 3, moving vertically down from the macro-structural toward the leadership level.

In the process of bridging micro and macro levels, this strategy combines the other components of voluntarist and structural approaches. Analyzing the macro-structural and domestic-structural levels incorporates structural explanatory variables, temporally remote causes, and stimulates broadly comparative generalizations. Analyzing the social-group and leadership levels incorporates actors’ subjective evaluations, temporally proximate causes, and the specific features of cases.

We call this method for integrating voluntarist and structural approaches the “funnel strategy.” The funnel metaphor describes the process through which more causes are accounted for as the analysis descends from higher to lower levels of aggregation. The macro-structural level can be considered the “top” of the funnel because it is the most aggregated level, and the range of possible outcomes compatible with variables at this level is broadest. As the analysis shifts downward, the range of possible outcomes contracts as the explanatory force of increasingly more variables is exhausted. The leadership level can be considered the “bottom” of the funnel because it is the lowest level of aggregation and the range of possible outcomes is narrowest.

A Vector Model of Causation. The funnel strategy relies on a model of causation in which variables from different levels of analysis are treated as independent vectors with distinct forces and directions. The “directions” of these variables are their tendency to favor certain types of regime outcomes over others. The “forces” of these variables are the relative intensities with which they favor the outcomes toward which they are directed. This model of causation leads to an understanding of explanation as the resolution of vectors: regime outcomes are explained by summing forces and directions of variables.

This conception of explanation as the resolution of vectors is the source of the funnel strategy’s power to integrate voluntarist and structural approaches. The prob-
lem of combining different types of variables into a single explanation is solved by using vectors as a common denominator to which these different types can be reduced. Thus, world-system conditions, institutional factors, leadership choices, and so forth become equivalents for the purpose of explanation because they are all converted into directional forces contributing to the regime outcome. Converting different types of variables into vectors transforms the difficult problem of bridging levels of analysis into a simple question of adding the explanatory weights of vectors.

*Limitations of the Funnel Strategy.* Although the funnel strategy satisfies the criteria for an integrative approach, it has important limitations. First, the strategy relies on a voluntarist conceptual base: structural and agental factors can be converted to discrete, independent vectors only if actors and structures are conceived as mutually isolated. This voluntarist conceptual base creates a built-in bias to privilege agency in explaining regime change.

Macro-structural and domestic-structural factors are understood to filter down the funnel of causality, thereby constraining social groups and political leaders. Because structures are conceived as disengaged from these undersocialized actors, however, they cannot explain actors’ identities or interests and, hence, can only partially explain their behavior. This assumption that structural factors cannot be sufficient causes of human action fosters the perception by the analyst that a margin of actor maneuverability always exists among the crevices of structural constraints, a situation that is understood to create opportunities for actors to avert regime outcomes strongly favored by structural forces. Consequently, although structural factors are recognized as contributing to regime change, the “strains” these factors place on a regime “have to be brought to a crisis point by actors” (Stepan 1978, 120). And since actors are understood to exist independently of structures, it follows that they always have the opportunity not to bring structural pressures to a crisis point. In sum, structural variables are weights that are necessary, but never sufficient, for “breaking the regime’s back.” Only the privileged “straw” of leadership can catalyze regime transformation.

A second limitation of the funnel strategy concerns its insensitivity to interactive causation across levels of analysis. Because the analyst cannot move back up the funnel after a level’s explanatory power has been exhausted, causation becomes a “one-way street.” This one-way causality inhibits consideration of how, for example, micro-level factors may influence the force and direction of macro-level factors.

*Exemplary Applications of the Funnel Strategy.* Several contributors to *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (1978), edited by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, use the funnel strategy to combine voluntarist and structural approaches. Although the volume’s emphasis on political leadership has often led scholars to label it a voluntarist work (Bermeo 1990; O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 19), the project’s participants sought explicitly to introduce human agency into the explanation of regime change without denying the importance of structural factors. Thus, in the project’s theoretical volume, Linz (1978, 100) writes: “Leadership is, for our purposes, a residual variable that ultimately...cannot be ignored; but it should not be introduced before the explanatory power of other [i.e., structural] variables has been exhausted.” Stepan’s (1978) analysis of the breakdown of democracy in Bra-
zil in 1964 offers an especially vivid example of how the funnel strategy can be used to construct an integrative explanation.\textsuperscript{13}

Stepan constructs a funnel of causality by separating explanatory variables into two levels of analysis: macro-political and micro-political. The macro-political level, which encompasses macro-structural, domestic-structural, and institutional variables, forms the top of Stepan’s funnel because he exhausts the explanatory power of these variables first. The micro-political level, which encompasses social group and leadership variables, forms the bottom of Stepan’s funnel because he incorporates these variables only after exhausting the explanatory power of macro-political variables.

Withdrawal of foreign investment and aid to Brazil is the most important macro-structural variable. This withdrawal strongly constrained the ability of regime incumbents to carry out policy programs. Stepan also considers demographic shifts and decline in economic growth, which he understands to have placed severe “loads” on the political system, predisposing it to collapse. Finally, at the institutional level, Stepan argues that the increasingly fragmented structure of the Brazilian party system weakened the regime’s capacity to cope with growing macro-structural and domestic-structural pressures.

Stepan concludes that these structural and institutional factors were necessary but not sufficient causes of regime collapse because they left a “small margin of maneuverability” within which micro-political factors could have averted the regime breakdown (1978, 122, 133–34). By claiming to have exhausted the explanatory power of macro-political variables yet fallen short of a full explanation for regime breakdown, Stepan justifies a downward jump to the micro-political level. The remainder of the analysis focuses on social groups and leaders, showing how poor leadership squandered the opportunity to avert regime breakdown offered by the small margin of maneuverability.

At the social group level, Stepan considers the subjective evaluations of opposition groups and military factions, who he argues perceived the regime as illegitimate. However, Stepan focuses mainly on leadership, especially the actions of the chief executive, President João Goulart. According to Stepan (1978, 133), “Combined with the structural weaknesses in the regime, Goulart’s political acts, strategies and styles paved the way for the final breakdown.”

Despite its successful use of the funnel strategy to construct an integrative explanation, Stepan’s analysis has limitations stemming from the strategy’s reliance on a vector model of causation. Goulart’s decisions are treated as a discrete causal vector that is separate from other explanatory factors, such as demographic, economic, and institutional variables. Consequently, as suggested by Stepan’s description of Goulart’s causal role as the “realm of the non-inevitable,” Goulart is conceived as an undersocialized actor stripped from his social moorings. Stepan’s commitment to a voluntarist conceptual base leads him to exclude questions about why Goulart acted as he did, mentioning such questions only in the conclusion as a promising area for future research (1978, 132–33).

Gabriel Almond, Scott Flanagan, and Robert Mundt’s (1973) edited volume, \textit{Crisis, Choice, and Change}, also exemplifies the use of a funnel strategy. In his introductory chapter, Almond (1973, 28–30) outlines a funnel of causality by separating macro-structural factors, which he considers “necessary but not sufficient”
causes of regime change, from micro-level elite choices, which he considers necessary for a full explanation. Macro-level variables, which comprise the top portion of this explanatory funnel, include factors "exogenous" to the political system, such as international military pressures and economic constraints, global demonstration effects, domestic socioeconomic structures, levels of social mobilization, and ethnic cleavages. The macro level also includes "endogenous" factors within the political system, such as its "structural and cultural features," which may predispose it to crisis and transformation (Almond 1973, 31-33). Almond et al. understand these macro-level factors as "constraints, pressures, and opportunities" that are necessary but not sufficient to explain regime change. They thus justify a downward shift toward the leadership level: "We move from the necessary conditions of change to the sufficient ones, from constraining conditions to choice" (Almond and Mundt 1973, 630).14

In his analysis of India during the mid-1960s, published in the Almond, Flanagan, and Mundt volume, Thomas Headrick (1973) makes innovative use of the funnel strategy to explain the absence of regime change in a case where an analysis limited to structural factors would have predicted it. Headrick first analyzes how socioeconomic pressures, ethnic cleavages, and international instability caused a political crisis between 1964 and 1967 which predisposed the regime to collapse. Despite these pressures the "basic structure of the Indian political system remained unaltered." Headrick argues that the principal causes for the absence of regime breakdown were micro-level factors of political leadership and elite "style." According to Headrick (1973, 600), "The leadership showed resilience and creativity. It constantly redefined issues to narrow the areas of disagreement and to increase the incentives for compromise."

Headrick's (1973, 560, emphasis added) description of his case as a "period offering the potential for the development of serious crisis [in which] a crisis did not occur" raises intriguing contrasts with Stepan's analysis of Brazil, where the potential for crisis became reality. As analyzed by Headrick and Stepan, India in 1967 and Brazil in 1964 are cases where similar structural conditions led to different regime outcomes because of variations in incumbents' leadership styles. Juxtaposing Headrick's and Stepan's analyses allows us to make explicit the implicit counterfactual assumptions on which each author bases his claim that leadership was the decisive cause of the regime outcome: Had Goulart acted in a more "mediatory and reconstructive" manner, like his Indian counterparts, regime breakdown would not have occurred in Brazil; and, conversely, had the Indian leadership acted in a more inflammatory and reckless manner, like Goulart, regime collapse would have occurred in India.15

The funnel of causality employed in the Almond, Flanagan, and Mundt volume, like that used in the Linz and Stepan volume, is prone to privilege leadership. This tendency is perhaps most obvious in Wayne Cornelius's (1973, 395) emphasis of the "skill factor" to explain the dramatic transformation of the Mexican political system in the 1930s during Lázaro Cárdenas's presidency. According to Cornelius, Cárdenas's leadership skills were so potent that he was able to "override" structural constraints and "choose outside the structurally predicted set of outcomes" (Almond and Mundt 1973, 635). This view of Cárdenas as an actor with "suprastructural" abilities reflects the voluntarist conceptual base undergirding the
funnel strategy—Cárdenas is treated as an undersocialized actor disengaged from and, hence, potentially unencumbered by structural constraints.

Almond et al., like Linz and Stepan, regard leadership as a “black box” variable. Thus, Almond and Mundt conclude in the volume’s final chapter that “sketching in the leadership variable goes beyond the data base of our program...What ranges of freedom of choice there may have been in historical contexts, or may be in contemporary situations, and how leadership and choice qualities may affect the exploitation of these opportunities, are the problems of future research” (1973, 641). Almond and Mundt make explicit the voluntarist assumptions underlying their integrative approach by acknowledging the participants’ “bias for hope” and emphasizing that one of their main goals is to “rehabilitate the role of human choice and creativity in developmental problemsolving” (1973, 642). The funnel strategy would seem to have special appeal for those who have this bias for hope, yet seek integrative (rather than voluntarist) explanations of regime change. Scholars with this normative commitment will find comfort in the assumption underpinning the funnel strategy that, even in the most structurally-constrained contexts, astute leaders can find margins for maneuver.

Constructing a Causal Pathway: The Path-Dependent Strategy

A second integrative strategy uses historical sequences to establish a causal link between regime transformations and temporally-remote events. The historical events that interest those who employ this path-dependent strategy are foundational moments, or “critical junctures,” when political action created structures that had persistent causal effects which shaped subsequent trajectories of political change. The path-dependent strategy also focuses on temporally intermediate processes that carry forward the structural legacies of historical junctures and ultimately connect past critical junctures to subsequent regime change. These intermediate processes constitute an historical trajectory, or “path,” which situates the choices that actors make during subsequent regime transformations in the context of long-term structural effects of prior critical junctures.

The path-dependent strategy is premised on the assumption that “history binds”—events at a given point in time limit future outcomes—and that consequently regime change cannot be explained without attention to long-term effects of past events. The strategy shares this “anti-presentist” commitment with structural, “destined pathways” strategies exemplified by the works of Barrington Moore (1966), Guillermo O’Donnell (1973), and Gregory Luebbert (1991). In our view, however, it is important to distinguish integrative, path-dependent strategies from these non-integrative, structural strategies. Our goal is to highlight how the path-dependent strategy can transcend the structuralism of such destined pathways analyses by combining voluntarist and structural approaches.

The analyst seeking to use the path-dependent strategy to construct an integrative explanation has two overarching objectives (see Aminzade 1992, Krasner 1988, and Collier and Collier 1991). The first is to account for the genesis during historical junctures of structures and institutions hypothesized to have critically shaped subsequent political trajectories. The integrative challenge is to avoid treating events during critical junctures as pre-determined by antecedent structural factors. Rather,
explanations for the genesis of structures during these junctures should rely on choice and contingency.

The second objective is to account for the enduring effects of these structures up to the moment of regime change. Linking past constraints created during critical junctures to future regime outcomes is achieved through a “process tracing” procedure that uses historical narrative to trace the interaction of agency and structure over time (George and McKeown 1985). Here the integrative challenge is to avoid treating the developmental path linking historical junctures and subsequent regime change as the “deliverer of the inevitable”: capturing the enduring effects of past structures must be balanced against allowing room for actors to play autonomous causal roles in subsequent regime transformations.19

In path-dependent analyses, critical junctures are periods of political institutional formation.20 Political institutions serve as “carriers of the past”; they embody choices and decisions that actors make during critical junctures and transmit their effects forward to future periods of regime change. This emphasis on the formation and effects of political institutions differentiates path-dependent analyses from structural and voluntarist analyses, which typically ignore the institutional level of analysis (see Snyder and Mahoney 1999). A focus on institutions also helps overcome the two integrative challenges described above.

Political institutions are meso-structures that stand between actors and macro-level structures. The causal impact of human actors on institutions and the causal impact of institutions on human actors are unmediated by intervening levels of analysis. This “closeness” of institutions to agency makes them a powerful optic for analyzing the role of human design both in creating institutional structures during critical junctures and in sustaining those structures after junctures.21

The use of historical narrative to analyze how institutions created during critical junctures affect subsequent political trajectories helps overcome the integrative challenge of avoiding teleological argumentation. The “path” of path-dependent explanations is analyzed through “temporally ordered, sequential, unfolding and open-ended ‘stories’ fraught with conjunctures and contingency” (Griffin 1992, 405). These narratives reveal how institutional reproduction and change depend on the purposive, contingent behavior of social groups and individuals. Historical narrative also helps tease out contingencies and probe counterfactuals in order to pinpoint alternative paths that were not taken (Mahoney 1999).

An Evolutionary Model of Causation. Path-dependent analyses rely on an evolutionary model of causation that treats institutions created during critical junctures as enduring “genetic stock” that delimits a range of possible trajectories of political change (Krasner 1988). These trajectories are viewed as latent potentialities contained by the institutional genetic material created during the critical juncture. Although these institutional “genes” do not by themselves determine which trajectory from the range of possibilities is “selected,” the evolution of a political system is understood as a process of activation and unfolding of potentialities defined by foundational institutions.

This evolutionary model corresponds to the “punctuated equilibrium” model prominent in the field of evolutionary biology (Eldredge 1985, Gould 1982). Like evolutionary biologists who employ the punctuated equilibrium model, students of regime change who use the path-dependent strategy study foundational events
that break with the past and have a decisive impact on future change. This causal model contrasts with “gradualist” evolutionary models which assume constant, incremental change.

A punctuated model of change appeals to scholars seeking to combine agency and structure because it makes it easier to differentiate moments characterized by plasticity and contingency from moments when political processes are more structurally determined. “Punctuations” correspond to periods when structural factors are least determining and when actors have the greatest degree of freedom to shape subsequent change. Conversely, “equilibria” correspond to periods when structural factors are primary and actors have the least ability to influence subsequent change. Gradualist evolutionary models, by contrast, assume “constant causes” and thus offer no mechanisms for distinguishing periods when voluntarist factors dominate from those when structural factors dominate.22

Limitations of the Path-Dependent Strategy. The path-dependent strategy’s commitment to capturing long-term effects of past events creates a strong tendency to privilege structure over agency. This structuralist bias stems from the difficulty of combining an appreciation for historical continuities and enduring institutions with a sensitivity to the dynamism of human agency. The punctuated evolutionary model of causation reinforces this bias: the advantages the model offers for differentiating periods when agency is primary from periods when structure is primary are purchased at the price of confining agency to moments of punctuation (i.e., to critical junctures). Confining human agency to such junctures obscures the dynamic interaction of agency and institutional structures across time and encourages a reliance on structural explanations for the origins of junctures.

As noted above, the emphasis on political institutions mitigates these structuralist tendencies, an advantage that enables path-dependent analyses to integrate agency and structure better than do destined-pathways analyses. Focusing on institutions, however, does not completely eliminate structuralist biases. Because it encourages confinement of agency to critical junctures, the punctuated-equilibrium model contributes to a perception of institutions created during junctures as frozen structures which “lock in” a future trajectory of change, determining a particular path rather than delimiting a range of possible paths. This static conceptualization of institutions obscures their proximity to agency, reducing them to rigid carriers of past constraints. Such a conceptualization, while not necessarily denying the role of human agency in institutional creation during junctures, leads to an institutional determinism that strips from post-juncture actors the ability to alter inherited institutional structures.23

Path-dependent analyses may also tend toward determinism in explaining the origins of critical junctures. If institutions are conceived as frozen constraints, then endogenous, agent-centered causes of the loosening of these constraints are excluded. Hence, to theorists who use the path-dependent strategy, only extra-institutional, exogenous factors may seem relevant for explaining origins of critical junctures. These theorists usually point to exogenous, “generative” cleavages or crises—typically shocks from changes in macro-structures such as the global economy—as causes of critical junctures.24 This focus on generative cleavages creates the risk of reducing institutions formed during critical junctures to products of temporally-prior structural forces. Rather than representing key choice
points, then, critical junctures may be treated as events determined by antecedent macro-structures.

*Exemplary Applications of the Path-Dependent Strategy.* Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier’s *Shaping the Political Arena* (1991) is an important comparative regime study that uses the path-dependent strategy to integrate structural and voluntarist approaches. Collier and Collier analyze a critical juncture experienced in eight Latin American countries: the incorporation of labor into the national political arena. Different types of labor incorporation are argued to have set cases on developmental paths that ultimately led to four regime outcomes: multiparty polarizing systems in Brazil and Chile, electoral stability and social conflict in Colombia and Uruguay, stalemate party systems in Argentina and Peru, and integrative party systems in Mexico and Venezuela.

Collier and Collier’s analysis of labor incorporation during critical juncture periods is sensitive to both agency and structure. In terms of structural factors, labor incorporation is understood as a process caused by a socioeconomic cleavage experienced in all eight cases: a dramatic increase in working class strength and protest resulting from sustained national economic growth in the early twentieth century. This structural cleavage led political leaders to recognize that previous repressive responses to labor mobilization were no longer adequate and that new institutional arrangements were needed to manage industrial relations. Regarding human agency, the choices of social groups and political leaders are treated as important factors differentiating types of labor incorporation. According to the authors (1991, 50), “If one wishes to explain why the incorporation periods took the specific form they did in each country, the answer will focus... on the dynamics of intraelite politics and choices by actors within the state.” In fact, the start of a critical juncture often coincides with the timing of a specific leader’s reform agenda.

The analysis of historical paths linking critical junctures to subsequent regime outcomes also integrates agency and structure. Institutions established during critical junctures are understood to have triggered complex sequences of political reactions and counter-reactions that culminated in distinct regimes. On the one hand, these reactions are products of institutions created during critical junctures and are thus outcomes of antecedent meso-structural causes. For example, in Brazil and Chile, labor incorporation was carried out under authoritarian regimes, which triggered anti-authoritarian opposition that restored competitive, electoral regimes (Collier and Collier 1991, 353). On the other hand, the analysis of post-juncture paths also emphasizes human agency. The reproduction of institutional legacies is analyzed through historical narrative that highlights subjective decisions by leaders and social groups. For example, the authors (479-83) explore counterfactual “paths not taken” by suggesting that Peru might have followed a different trajectory had it not been for a strategic blunder by the leadership of a major political party regarding its choice of alliance partners.

However, as characterizes even integrative path-dependent analyses, *Shaping the Political Arena* nevertheless tends to privilege structure over agency in analyzing both the genesis of critical junctures and the paths that link these junctures to subsequent regime outcomes. Collier and Collier’s ultimate explanation for types of labor incorporation is domestic class structure. The oligarchy’s political strength and power relative to middle sector reformers define the coalitional alternatives
available to these reformers and tend to determine their choices during critical junctures. For example, in Brazil and Chile, where the oligarchy was quite strong at the onset of labor incorporation periods, the authors argue that middle sectors did not have the option of mobilizing the working class and, consequently, were forced to pursue a strategy aimed at controlling the labor movement.

Although Collier and Collier do explore counterfactual “paths not taken,” institutions created during critical junctures tend to lock in a future trajectory of change, leaving actors with little or no ability to act against meso-structural imperatives. The authors’ critique of Stepan’s analysis of the breakdown of democracy in Brazil in 1964 illustrates this tendency to privilege structure:

> the present analysis would emphasize the structural context of polarization and policy immobilism in Brazil. Some analysts, such as Stepan, have pointed to Goulart’s deficient leadership in analyzing the collapse of his government. Whatever these deficiencies may have been, it is the present argument that polarization, as the outcome of a process that can be traced back to the nature of the incorporation period, was already well advanced by the time Goulart stepped into the presidency. In this context, the political space for a centrist coalition was fast disappearing. (Collier and Collier 1991, 539)

Hence, for Collier and Collier, the causes of the regime outcome are found in enduring institutional genetic stock created during Brazil’s labor incorporation period, not in Goulart’s actions.

While it is important to recognize these structural tendencies, Collier and Collier’s work nonetheless qualifies as an integrative path-dependent analysis because it successfully combines the components of voluntarist and structural approaches. Its sensitivity to the role of human agency is far greater than that of structural, destined-pathways analyses.

In *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John Stephens (1992) also use the path-dependent strategy to analyze regime change. The authors set out “to construct a framework that is in principle equally well attuned to the study of process [i.e., voluntarist factors] and to the recognition of structural constraints.” Yet they also “entertain serious reservations about the voluntaristic bias” of much of the literature on democratic transitions and react against this bias, noting that their “interests do center on the structural conditions of democracy rather than on a process analysis of regime transitions” (p. 33). Hence, as Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens themselves suggest, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* employs an integrative strategy with voluntarist biases. In fact, their analysis often conforms closely to the structural, destined pathways approach exemplified by the work of Barrington Moore.25

Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens seek to explain the emergence and subsequent stabilization or breakdown of democratic regimes in thirty-eight cases from several world regions. They frame their analysis around the long-term development of socioeconomic classes and the forging of class coalitions.26 The historical episodes when these class coalitions formed are treated as critical junctures, and the balances of class power and patterns of class alli-
ances characterizing each case are argued to have crucially influenced the likelihood of future democratization. Specifically, the authors argue that the well-established correlation between capitalist development and democracy exists because capitalist development strengthens pro-democratic subordinate classes, especially the working class, and weakens anti-democratic landed upper classes.

This “relative class power” model illuminates the roles that agency and structure play in the formation of class alliances for or against democracy. Although the authors assume that social classes have structurally-defined, “objective” interests vis-à-vis democracy, they understand the actual behavior of historical class actors as a socially-constructed phenomenon influenced by contingent conditions. Thus, class actors do not always play the roles in democratization processes predicted by their structurally-determined interests. For example, the authors explain the weak democratic impulses of the working class in post-war Argentina as a consequence of the pro-working class, yet authoritarian, government of Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955).

In important ways, however, the analysis fails to integrate structural and voluntarist approaches. First, because critical junctures are understood as periods of class formation and class coalition-building, political institutions do not play the role of “carriers of the past” that embody actors’ contingent choices and transmit the effects of these choices to future periods of regime change.\(^{27}\) Hence, regime change tends to be explained as a direct outcome of macro-structural capitalist development and related changes in domestic class structures, regardless of actors’ choices. Second, the analysis does not use historical narrative to explore how the purposive and contingent behavior of social groups and leaders reproduced the legacies of critical junctures. Rather, to the extent that the authors do employ historical narrative, they often present it without reference to specific actors. Consequently, despite the integrative intentions of the authors, \textit{Capitalist Development and Democracy} ends up closer to a structural than an integrative approach.

\textit{Balancing Parsimony and Integration: Eclectic Strategies}

The quest for an integrative approach is often a “complexifying” endeavor that sacrifices parsimony in the effort to combine multiple types of explanatory factors. Without devices for managing this complexity, scholars who seek to combine agency and structure run the risk of creating unwieldy frameworks in which “everything matters.” The funnel and path-dependent strategies mitigate this trade-off between parsimony and integration with powerful integrative mechanisms. In the case of the funnel strategy, the levels of analysis hierarchy serves as a scaffold for sorting and weighting different types of explanatory variables. The path-dependent strategy, by contrast, relies on critical junctures to differentiate periods when voluntarist factors dominate from periods when structural factors dominate. These integrative mechanisms enable the two strategies to serve as methods for constructing explanations of regime change that are integrative \textit{and} parsimonious.

Not all integrative strategies have such mechanisms. Some successfully combine voluntarist and structural approaches yet lack clear guidelines for weighting different types of variables and specifying “what matters when.” Although such strategies are less tidy and systematic than the path-dependent and funnel strate-
gies, those who feel parsimony has been overvalued in the social sciences will find virtues in their complexity. Furthermore, as noted in our analysis of the limitations of the funnel and path-dependent strategies, the very mechanisms that give them integrative power and elegance can have the undesirable consequence of privileging structural or voluntarist factors. Legitimate reasons thus exist for choosing an eclectic integrative strategy that is less elegant than the funnel or path-dependent strategies, yet avoids some of their rigidities and pitfalls.

The contributors to the volume *Democracy in Developing Countries*, edited by Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset (1988-89), employ an integrative strategy rooted in explicit rejection of parsimony as a paramount goal in analyzing regime change. In their discussion of the project’s theoretical approach, Diamond, Linz, and Lipset explain, “Rather than pursuing some new, elegant, ‘parsimonious’ model, we deliberately eschewed mono-causal and reductionist interpretations in favor of an exhaustive examination of the historical, cultural, social, economic, political and international factors that might affect the chances for stable democracy” (xiii). In casting a wide net encompassing so many different components, Diamond, Linz, and Lipset’s framework satisfies our criteria for an integrative approach. It combines generalizations about how macro- and domestic-structural factors (e.g., international systemic conditions, levels of socioeconomic development, types of political culture, and class structure) favor or inhibit democratic regimes with a focus on political leadership and strategies of subjectively-defined social groups (e.g., factions of the armed forces, and associations representing regional or ethnic groups) (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1990, 9-34). Institutional variables are included through Diamond, Linz, and Lipset’s focus on political party systems and constitutional structures (1990, 25-29).

The case analyses in *Democracy in Developing Countries* employ an historical approach that weaves together agential and structural variables by considering the “entire history of a country’s experience with democracy...[encompassing] periods of democratic persistence, crisis, authoritarianism, and renewal...in order to explain the overall path of a country’s political development” (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1990, 4). In its focus on historical sequences, Diamond, Linz, and Lipset’s framework resembles the path-dependent strategy. However, their framework lacks an integrative mechanism for attributing different weights to variables at distinct points in historical sequences of regime change. While this integrative strategy has the advantage of minimizing the risk of premature reductionism and analytic rigidity, the lack of a mechanism for specifying relationships between variables encourages their random introduction and fosters an “indiscriminate eclecticism” that does not produce systematic explanations of regime change.28

In his book, *The Third Wave*, Samuel P. Huntington (1991) develops an eclectic strategy that is more systematic than Diamond, Linz, and Lipset’s. Huntington organizes his analysis around a distinction between “causes” and “causers” of transitions to democracy. “Causes” are social, economic, and international structural factors that created a context favorable for democratization across all the approximately thirty countries that formed what Huntington calls the “third wave” of democratization (i.e., those countries that democratized between 1974 and 1990). Huntington (1991, 107) asserts that these general causes of the third wave did not
make democratization a necessary outcome: “A democratic regime is installed not by trends but by people. Democracies are created not by causes but by causers.” According to Huntington (1991, 108), these “causers” are political leaders and social groups who either consciously promote democratization or take actions, such as partial liberalization, that indirectly make democracy more likely.

Through his analysis of “causes” and “causers,” Huntington combines structural and voluntarist approaches. The “causes” of contemporary democratization include macro-structural factors such as changes in the global economy during the 1970s and 1980s, the spread of international norms favoring democracy, and increasing levels of economic development. These factors are treated as a common structural backdrop against which processes of regime change with distinct dynamics unfolded within individual countries.

In his analysis of “causers,” Huntington shifts the focus to these processes, emphasizing strategic interactions among subjectively-defined actors. His focus on strategies employed by five groups—standpatters, liberal reformers, and democratic reformers within the incumbent regime, and revolutionary extremists and democratic moderates in the opposition—incorporates the components of voluntarist approaches (1991, 121-22). Although Huntington’s focus on strategic interactions among subjectively-defined political groups resembles that of voluntarist approaches, he avoids excessive voluntarism by embedding his analysis of interactions within meso-structural contexts defined by the institutions of incumbent authoritarian regimes. Different types of anciens regimes are understood to define varied contexts of strategic interaction by shaping actors’ bargaining power, coalitional options, and perceptions of the costs and payoffs of distinct strategies (1991, 110-21).

Huntington thus offers a sophisticated framework that successfully combines the components of voluntarist and structural approaches. Although it achieves a greater degree of parsimony and rigor than does Diamond, Linz, and Lipset’s framework, Huntington’s approach nevertheless lacks a clear mechanism for linking macro-level “causes” to micro-level “causers.” The analysis includes no explicit bridging devices for connecting macro-level factors, such as levels of economic development, prevailing global norms, and changes in the global economy, to the strategic choices of actors during processes of democratization in specific countries.29

The inability of eclectic strategies to achieve systematic integration stems from their lack of integrative mechanisms for combining multiple causal variables. Rather than employ such an organizing device, these strategies rely instead on a “correlational model” of causality. In a correlational model, “explanation is achieved by showing an event to be a type of occurrence associated or regularly conjoined with specified factors, conditions, and states-of-affairs” (Dessler 1991, 339). Huntington and Diamond, Linz, and Lipset use this model to explain regime outcomes by considering a multiplicity of variables that appear to be consistent antecedents to democracy. However, in contrast to standard quantitative correlational analyses, which rely on statistical methods (in particular, regression analysis) to pinpoint dominant causal factors and thus achieve parsimony, qualitative studies of regime change that rely on the correlational causal model have lacked a method for adjudicating among the multiple variables that co-vary with regime outcomes (see Ragin 1987, 56).
The failure of eclectic strategies to specify the causal weight of agential and structural variables is reflected in their tendency to privilege agency and structure indiscriminately. Analysts who employ such strategies typically do not rely on a consistent conceptual base, a situation that encourages the random introduction of a host of agential and structural variables. For example, Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1990, 16) treat societal political culture as a generative macro-structure that constitutes "the beliefs and values concerning politics that prevail within both the elite and the mass." At the same time, however, they view leadership in an undersocialized manner, because incumbent elites are understood always to have the opportunity to avert democratic breakdowns (1990, 15). Likewise, Huntington’s distinction between “causes” and “causers” entails a leap from a structuralist to a voluntarist conceptual base.

**Summary and Suggestions for Future Research**

This article has probed the differences between voluntarist and structural approaches to the analysis of regime change and introduced integrative research strategies for combining these two perspectives. We have sought to move beyond previous programmatic calls for synthesis of agency and structure by showing how scholars have actually attempted such a synthesis in empirical work. The funnel, path-dependent, and eclectic strategies have all been employed to construct integrative explanations. These strategies should serve as tools that facilitate further efforts to establish an integrative middle ground between the voluntarist and structural extremes that have dominated work on regime change.\(^3^0\)

We do not claim to offer an exhaustive menu of strategies for finding this middle ground: the three strategies introduced here are not necessarily the only methods for achieving integrative explanations. Nor do we claim to provide a definitive solution to the agent-structure problem in the study of regime change. Although all three strategies integrate the methodological and theoretical components of voluntarist and structural approaches, our analysis of the limitations of these strategies reveals that all are prone to privilege agency or structure because they combine integrative methodological and theoretical superstructures with non-integrative (i.e., voluntarist or structuralist) conceptual bases. A fully integrative approach requires an integrative conceptual base that goes beyond undersocialized and oversocialized conceptions of agency as well as constraint and generative models of structure.

Fortunately, these existing conceptions of agency and structure are not our only options. Recent work in social theory offers novel understandings of the agent-structure relationship that could be used to build an integrative conceptual base. Among the most promising of these conceptual formulations are the notions that structures are resources and that human agency is the capacity to appropriate and potentially transform structural resources in a self-conscious, reflexive manner.\(^3^1\) As Figure 5 illustrates, these conceptions of agency and structure can be combined to form a third—integrative—conceptual base.

Conceptualizing structures as resources highlights how they simultaneously enable action by providing tools actors use to pursue their political projects and
FIGURE 5
Voluntarist, Structuralist, and Integrative Conceptual Bases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voluntarist Conceptual Base</th>
<th>Structuralist Conceptual Base</th>
<th>Integrative Conceptual Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conception of Agency</td>
<td>Undersocialized</td>
<td>Oversocialized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conception of Structure</td>
<td>Constraint Model</td>
<td>Generative Model</td>
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</tbody>
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constrain action by delimiting the range of possible projects. The idea that structures both enable and limit human agency differentiates the resource model from the generative and constraint models, which obscure the empowering properties of structures by highlighting only how they impose limits on agency.

The resource model is further distinguished from constraint and generative models by *how* structures are understood to limit action. In the constraint model, structures are viewed as barriers that obstruct the designs of actors. In the resource model, by contrast, structures limit agency not by obstructing, but by making available a finite repertoire of tools for action—a repertoire actors can potentially modify and improve. In the generative model, structures directly determine human behavior. In the resource model, by contrast, structures operate as environments that delimit the range of possible actions without determining action. From this perspective, people act through structures, rather than structures acting through people, as in the generative model.

The reflexive conception of human agency emphasizes how actors self-consciously deploy structural resources and modify their behavior in response to changing situations. This notion that agency is the appropriation of structural resources contrasts with the undersocialized view that agency occurs in isolation from structural constraints. Likewise, the understanding that actors can choose how to use structural resources and potentially improve these resources differs starkly from the oversocialized view of agency as a result of generative social structures. Taken together, the resource model of structure and the reflexive conception of agency form an integrative conceptual base that could anchor future integrative strategies.

To our knowledge, this integrative conceptual base has yet to be employed in empirical work on regime change. However, recent research on political learning, public policy, and social movements has employed reflexive models of agency and resource models of structure. For example, in analyses of political learning and democratization, scholars have drawn on a reflexive model of agency by emphasizing how “cognitive change” and the ability of actors to redefine their interests and goals can help explain transitions to democracy (Bermeo 1992; Higley and
Gunther 1992; McCoy 1999; Weffort 1989). In work on the interaction of policy ideas and state institutions, scholars have employed a resource model of structure by viewing institutional structures as sites for agency that can potentially stimulate innovation and inspire creativity (Hall 1992, Thelen and Steinmo 1992). A resource model of structure has also been utilized by students of social movements who view culture as a repertoire of idioms and symbols from which political entrepreneurs devise “collective action frames” to mobilize support (Tarrow 1992; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1997). These diverse examples suggest how components of the integrative conceptual base sketched earlier can be used in empirical analysis. Works such as these should offer fruitful insights for students of regime change seeking to use an integrative conceptual base as a foundation for future integrative strategies.

The challenge of developing an integrative conceptual base raises the broader question of the potential contribution of meta-theory—or “theory about theory”—to designing research strategies for comparative analysis. Comparativists have often not been self-conscious about important meta-theoretical issues, such as the underlying conceptual foundations of their analyses (Lichbach and Zuckerman 1997). One could argue that this lack of awareness is of little concern, since meta-theoretical commitments do not necessarily determine the substantive content of theories. We agree that purely meta-theoretical discussions do indeed risk becoming “dead ends” (Skocpol 1987).

However, our analysis of voluntarist, structural, and integrative approaches reveals that in studies of regime change meta-theoretical assumptions have strongly shaped the content of empirical analysis: divergent conceptions of agency and structure have led scholars to emphasize very different factors in tackling similar empirical puzzles. As we have attempted to show, in areas of substantive research characterized by diverse, competing approaches, meta-theoretical tools offer powerful resources for understanding the logics of these approaches and clarifying their biases. Comparativists could benefit significantly from greater sensitivity to meta-theory, providing this sensitivity is linked closely to empirical work.

The specific topic of this article—the agent-structure problem in the study of regime change—suggests an even more significant advantage that meta-theory could offer: conceptual tools for making balanced assessments of possibilities for democratic change that transcend both the fatalism of structural perspectives and the naïve optimism of voluntarist ones. We have attempted to show how such tools can be used to construct an integrative conceptual base that gives a realistic view of the potential for actors to transform political systems. Rather than leading to dead ends, meta-theory may provide the best vantage point for developing realistic theories of political change that neither exaggerate nor underestimate the possibilities of human agency.

Notes

1. Structural analyses are associated most strongly with the dependency tradition and attempt to explain the rise of authoritarian regimes in the 1960s and 1970s. See, for example, O’Donnell (1973) and Schmitter (1974). Several exemplary structural analyses, however, fall chronologically outside this generation. See, for example, Moore (1966) and Luebbert (1991).

3. This prescription corresponds to the standard methodological advice that when two rival approaches to the same subject matter compete for scholars’ attention, it is a good practice to design research strategies that examine the two approaches simultaneously. See Chamberlin (1965).


5. The terms “oversocialized” and “undersocialized” are from Granovetter (1985) and Wrong (1961).


7. O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 18-19) distinguish between transitions from authoritarianism and transitions to totalitarianism, arguing that voluntarist approaches are more suitable for analyzing the former.

8. A third, integrative conceptual base is discussed in the conclusion.


10. The idea of a “funnel of causality” is found in Campbell et al. (1960, 24-32). Campbell et al. use the funnel to explain voting behavior.


12. The most notable applications of the funnel strategy are by Stepan (1978), Lepsius (1978), and Levine (1978).

13. See also Stepan (1971, chs. 6-9).

14. Almond and Mundt’s usage here of the terms “necessary” and “sufficient” is misleading. If structural conditions are necessary conditions of change, then it is logically inconsistent for choices to be sufficient conditions of change. Rather, structural factors and choices must both be necessary causes.

15. On counterfactuals in the social sciences, see Fearon (1991) and Tetlock and Belkin (1996).

16. Here the authors follow Hirschman (1971).


18. The term “destined pathways” is from Fulbrook and Skocpol (1984).


20. For examples of political institutions see Figure 3.


23. On punctuated-equilibrium models and institutional determinism, see Thelen and Steinmo (1992, 15-17).


25. As Munck (1992-93, 227) remarks in his review of Capitalist Development and Democracy, “the basic framework is that outlined by Barrington Moore expanded to include the working class.”

26. In addition to social classes, the authors consider state and transnational structures (pp. 63-75). However, they acknowledge that social class is the “master key” to their analysis (p. 5).

27. In chapter five on Latin America, however, political party formation plays a central role in the analysis. This chapter, as well as an earlier article on which it is based, fits more closely our criteria for an integrative, path-dependent strategy. See Huber Stephens (1989).


29. See Munck’s (1994, 357) critique of Huntington’s eclecticism.

30. See, for example, Snyder (1998), which uses a modified funnel strategy to integrate insights from structuralist theories of revolution with insights from voluntarist work on regime transitions.

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