

## 5 / THE CONSEQUENCES OF LEGITIMACY

Legitimacy is a great social good. Sociological and psychological accounts stress its importance to human happiness because most individuals prefer to relate to the powerful in moral rather than in self-interested terms.<sup>1</sup> Citizens strive to engage the state as moral agents, and a state that reciprocates will see its standing enhanced. Likewise, most rulers prefer to be esteemed rather than feared by their citizens: it is inherently desirable and it minimizes the time they spend worrying about their positions.<sup>2</sup> Prussian king Frederick the Great (r. 1740–86) famously lamented to a courtier near the end of his life that he was “tired of ruling slaves.”<sup>3</sup>

A legitimate state is less dominating over its citizens because the legitimate use of power minimizes the negative consequences of power.<sup>4</sup> Whatever else legitimate states do for their citizens, one of the greatest public services they deliver is rightful rule itself. Political science is unique in having entire branch of philosophy attached to it for this reason: achieving rightful rule is a momentous social feat. By implication, low-legitimacy states are failing to deliver an important public service, namely allowing citizens to esteem the rulers that claim their obedience.

However, legitimacy's importance does not end with its inherent value. If that were the case, its central place in the history of political thought would be inexplicable. Rather, legitimacy has instrumental benefits that suffuse many aspects of political life. In the last chapter, we saw how Uganda was transformed after 1986 with the coming to power of the National Resistance Movement. Ethnic tensions declined, a new constitution was enacted, development improved, and the state

was rebuilt. I was primarily concerned with the role of legitimacy in these outcomes. However, I considered alternative explanations as well and for the most part found them wanting. Legitimacy, in other words, was central not only to the NRM takeover of 1986 but also to the state reconstruction and consequent development success in the country thereafter. Moreover, the legitimation cycle spurred the democratization of 2006 and, as the NRM and Museveni clung to power, risked throwing the whole process into reverse, undermining the state and its performance.

This legitimacy-centered account of politics stands in contrast to “realist” or “structural” accounts. Not just the substance but the tone is different. Words like “domination,” “resistance,” “struggle,” and “interests” are less common. Instead the vocabulary is about shared ideas of politics: common good, consensus, justification, disagreement, reason, pluralism, and norms. In this chapter I consider this role of legitimacy in political outcomes at a general level and am more explicit in testing its relationship to these other types of explanations.

We already know that more legitimate states tend to enjoy a host of good outcomes: they are more stable, less war-prone, more liberal, and richer. The question is whether any causal significance can be attributed to legitimacy in explaining this pattern. Is there anything to legitimacy beyond the moral approbation that it bestows?

#### APPROACHES TO POLITICAL EXPLANATION

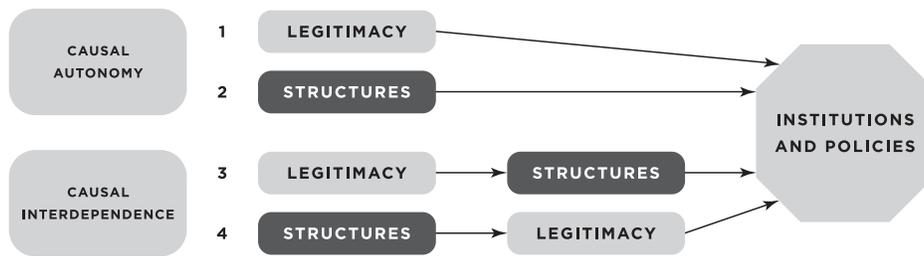
Legitimacy belongs to that class of explanations of political phenomena sometimes called ideational or constructivist. Such theories concern what people think, how that thinking defines interests and identities and motivates actions, and how those actions shape political outcomes. Terms like “public opinion” or “popular views” are often used interchangeably, although legitimacy is a particular type of opinion related to the *public* reasoning of a political community about its common good aims. In the legitimacy-based account, the preferences of a citizenry developed through a process of reason-giving centrally determine the domestic and international behavior of the states to which they belong.<sup>5</sup>

As illustrated in figure 3.1, the legitimacy-based approach conceptualizes states as being at the center of an endogenous system of legitimation. States and their institutions are the infrastructure for generating the performance on which legitimacy is based. Maintaining legitimacy means shifting institutions in order to generate valued performance. When that performance falls short, pressures grow for institutional change. In this sense, the legitimacy-based approach is explicit in modeling the state and its actions endogenously, as both a cause and a consequence of legitimacy.<sup>6</sup> What is key is that the endogenous relationship of legitimacy and the state is centered on the legitimating performance of the state, not on the state's structural influence upon legitimacy (through ideology, for instance). For the most part, states cannot manufacture legitimacy, they have to earn it.

In contrast, a whole range of structural accounts of politics can be invoked to explain political outcomes. Such accounts generally deny the importance of the preferences of a political community. Instead, they look to the various structural conditions that shape political outcomes. Although there is no agreed typology of such explanations, they can be roughly grouped into three schools. *Economic* structuralism explains outcomes in light of the demands of economic interests, whether group or individual, often according to a relatively simple utility-maximization approach to decision making.<sup>7</sup> *Sociopolitical* structuralism is similar but centers more on social or political power and its related interests and institutions.<sup>8</sup> *Historical* structuralism finds explanations in the impact of prior events, where exogenous technological change or endogenous facets of institutions themselves trump conscious social control.<sup>9</sup>

These three schools share several features, the most important of which is the absence of any subjective normative coherence to political outcomes. It is not assumed (indeed, it is generally rejected) that political outcomes are consciously endorsed or pursued by citizens as a whole. Instead, the focus is on the structural conditions—economic, sociopolitical, or historical—that shape those outcomes for better or worse.

These two approaches—legitimacy-based and structural—are not necessarily unrelated: legitimacy may shape the structural conditions of politics or vice versa. In other words, both legitimacy and structures may operate autonomously or act interdependently. This gives us a



**Figure 5.1** Legitimacy-Based and Structural Theories of Political Outcomes

four-part typology of structural and legitimacy-based theories of politics, as shown in figure 5.1.

Many studies invoke both legitimacy-based and structural factors. Indeed, it is unlikely that any one perspective is ever wholly sufficient for a rich historical account. South Africa's 1993–94 democratization, for example, was driven in part by the delegitimation of the apartheid regime and demands for a more inclusive and accountable one.<sup>10</sup> But it also depended on the political bargaining considerations of the National Party regime<sup>11</sup> and on the economic impact of international sanctions.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the institutions that arose had significant historical continuities with those of the apartheid era.<sup>13</sup>

Both approaches can be justified deductively. From the structural perspective, the demands of legitimacy are inoperative without the means with which to act. Since those means may be only loosely connected to those demands, the critical causal factor will usually be the structures themselves (variant 2 in figure 5.1). Przeworski argued, for example, that in democratization it is “not the breakdown of legitimacy but the organization of counter hegemony” that matters.<sup>14</sup> Legitimacy may be driven by those structural factors themselves (variant 4). Marx, for instance, believed that the popular legitimacy that sustained capitalism was generated by the structures of capitalism itself. Thelen says that “in many cases changes in power relations hold the key to creating the openings in which new scripts . . . can become more central.”<sup>15</sup> Legitimacy, on these views, is only one of the many “disguises”<sup>16</sup> of raw power.

The argument for the legitimacy-based theory of politics can likewise be made deductively. Not only might legitimacy have autonomous effects (variant 1), but it also may lurk in the fabric of economic, sociopolitical, or historical factors (variant 3). Except in finely tuned political

systems that respond to legitimacy rapidly and accurately, it is almost always the case that legitimacy must generate structural conditions to do its work. A close reading of many structural accounts, for instance, will find “norms” or “beliefs” listed as parameters of the “game” or as part of the definition of the structures themselves.<sup>17</sup> What is economically rational, politically feasible, or historically embedded is often a function of what is legitimate. In Polanyi’s classic study, for instance, it was the force of legitimacy, expressed as claims upon the common good, not the economic or social power of “class interests,” that determined the rise of regulative institutions—everything from the cleaning of bakery ovens to the inspection of anchor chains—in nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>18</sup> Or to return to the South African example, the fall of apartheid was a direct result of the delegitimation of the regime, but also an indirect result of how that delegitimation generated the structural conditions that magnified the impact of illegitimacy (the rise of a reform faction within the National Party or the application of economic sanctions).

Legitimacy does not always bring about outcomes with which we agree, of course. Contemporary postmodernist theorists, or those in sociology or anthropology, for instance, often pay close attention to the symbols, discourses, rituals, and social structures through which legitimacy is transmitted with a view to its critical causal importance while almost universally holding a very dim opinion of the resulting outcomes. Recognizing that others do not think as we do allows us to consider legitimacy as an autonomous cause without reaching for structural explanations of the outcome in question.

The consideration of legitimacy’s causal import has been dogged by several related challenges beyond the obvious ones of proper conceptualization and measurement. First, as discussed, legitimacy stands at the center of an ongoing and mutually conditioning relationship between citizens and the state. This means that separating cause and effect is particularly difficult. Unlike other discrete and readily observable factors, such as a rise in the wage rate or the presence of mountainous terrain, legitimacy suffuses every aspect of the political world and so is difficult to isolate. As Zelditch noted, legitimation “is a fundamental social process, but only because it is auxiliary to so many other social processes.”<sup>19</sup>

Second, as with many important factors in the world of politics, legitimacy influences outcomes through complex causal forms. States may respond to a decline in legitimacy through improved performance. But they may also respond by replacing legitimacy with other forms of political support, or by reconfiguring the evaluative basis of legitimacy. Some will not respond at all. In all cases, the outcomes of a decline in legitimacy will be different.

Since legitimacy is so deeply enmeshed in politics, and since its causal effects will take on many forms, separating its discrete causal influences is bound to be difficult. From the standpoint of the state, this makes legitimacy one of the most fearsome concepts around, one reason states spend so much time trying to gauge and assert their legitimacy. From the standpoint of the political scientist, it makes legitimacy one of the most difficult concepts around, one reason it has been derided as “mushy”<sup>20</sup> or “highly problematic.”<sup>21</sup> For Easton, making accurate predictions about the consequences of legitimacy was “virtually impossible.”<sup>22</sup>

I do not want to detract from the force of such arguments. Claims that legitimacy decline  $x$  will give rise to outcome  $y$  are surely deserving of skepticism, perhaps more so than other predictive claims. Legitimacy is often broadly invoked at the beginning of causal arguments before prudent scholars move on to more observable influences in the causal chain of events. As Kelman notes, the danger of employing legitimacy to explain political phenomena is that “in trying to explain too much, it ends up explaining too little.”<sup>23</sup> According to Aristotle’s distinction between final causes and efficient causes, legitimacy may be such an overarching final cause that it leaves little room for the efficient causes, which, in the end, may be more illuminating for the purposes of action and prediction.

Yet the difficulties of understanding legitimacy’s causal influences can only be set against the problems of ignoring them. Broadly speaking, when legitimacy is excluded from the explanation of political outcomes, the door is opened to a host of “realistic” structural explanations in which ideas about the common good are seen as irrelevant or naïve. Such approaches win by default in the absence of a proper conceptualization and inclusion of legitimacy as an alternative.

To take one example, explanations why China launched economic reforms in the late 1970s have been dominated by structural accounts

of elite political alliances and economic incentives for localities and peasants.<sup>24</sup> But such explanations tend to explain *how* economic reform proceeded rather than *why*. To understand the basic impetus of reform, one has to understand the legitimacy crisis faced by the regime after the successive ravages of the Great Leap Famine (1959–61) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76).<sup>25</sup> Had there not been an immediate danger of mass peasant protest and a sympathy for their claims in the wider public, the political and economic forces favoring reforms would have remained in abeyance. Other outcomes, such as a renewed Maoist line or a localization of the command economy, might have resulted from the same structural factors. Legitimacy crisis was both necessary to bring about the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1976 and the launching of economic reforms and a conditioning factor of the content and timing of those changes. As Saich puts it, the critical cause of economic reforms was that “the party was faced with a serious problem of legitimacy.”<sup>26</sup>

My purpose here is to consider whether a case can be made for the critical causal importance of legitimacy across many outcomes. Can it be reclaimed as an operable and useful factor that should be invoked more often in comparative politics and international relations? To what extent and in what ways should we bring legitimacy back in?

#### CITIZEN COMPLIANCE AND STATE EFFECTIVENESS

Writing in the nationalist periodical *Young India* in 1928, Gandhi agonized about the conflict between his personal commitment to nonviolence and his obligations as a citizen. He was aware that not all of his personal opinions were widely shared by his fellow citizens. Indeed, prior to his conversion to nonviolence, he had supported Indian involvement in three British wars (the Boer War, the Zulu Rebellion, and World War I). “I can conceive of occasions when it would be my duty to vote for military training of those who wish to take it,” he wrote. “For I know [that everyone] does not believe in non-violence to the extent I do.”<sup>27</sup>

Gandhi’s sense of obligation to the state reflects a puzzle that political philosophers and sociologists have wondered about for centuries. Why would any citizen submit themselves to public policies that they

opposed? Man is “born free,” in Rousseau’s phrase, and it is unclear why that freedom should be compromised by unwanted obligations to a predatory state. From radicals on the left like Lenin<sup>28</sup> to radicals on the right like Nozick,<sup>29</sup> some philosophers have long argued that states are unconscionable intrusions upon the freedom of man because they constantly demand obedience to rules and policies that individuals might dislike. On this view, to submit oneself to the state is to commit “crimes of obedience,” in the words of two sociologists.<sup>30</sup>

In political philosophy, investigating the reasons citizens so often obey states is known as the question of “political obligation,” and the work in this field has contributed greatly to understanding the socio-psychological processes that underlie citizen compliance.

Four main reasons for citizen compliance have been offered. *Consent* is the most basic: citizens obey the state when they have voluntarily indicated their acceptance of its power, for example by voting in elections or referenda, answering a call to arms, taking part in mass rallies, or purchasing policy-specific bonds.<sup>31</sup> A second reason is the principle of *fairness*: citizens who avail themselves of the benefits of the communal undertakings that states organize (roads, education, commercial regulation, etc.) or of essential services (public health, sanitation, national security, internal order, etc.) are willing to do their share in sustaining the institutions and laws that deliver those goods.<sup>32</sup> Third, every human has a *natural duty* to make some effort to ensure fellow human beings do not face dire suffering or deprivation. Thus citizens naturally support states that provide subsistence welfare to the poor or rescue people caught in natural disasters.<sup>33</sup> Finally, citizens obey states when they perceive that the state is advancing the *common aims* of the community, as long as those decisions are made democratically.<sup>34</sup> Beyond these “rational” reasons are further “affective” reasons such as loyalty, commitment, and faith. These are hard to quantify, but they can be seen vividly in cases such as the dogged political activities of involuntary exiles who maintain an “irrational” commitment to their home states.<sup>35</sup>

Much of the literature on political obligation concerns whether any one of these reasons can explain why citizens so often obey their states. Klosko<sup>36</sup> and others<sup>37</sup> have argued that they may work in tandem: different reasons will apply to different types of state activity. There are, in

other words, several reasons citizens obey state power. On this overlapping view, states do things that, in terms of the principles above, generate a sense of obligation among citizens. There is thus an “implicit social contract,” as Holsti calls it,<sup>38</sup> in which states do things that can be justified to citizens in a number of ways. This fulfills what Rawls called the “liberal principle of legitimacy,” namely that “the exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we offer for our political action may reasonably be accepted by other citizens as a justification for those actions.”<sup>39</sup>

Once we understand these bases of political obligation, the distinction between legitimacy and justice naturally arises. Two of the “rational” principles of obligation—consent and natural duty—as well as all of the “affective” principles imply a close correspondence between an individual’s personal conceptions of what is good (sometimes called “justice”) and their public views of what is right (“legitimacy”). However, the other two introduce a cleavage between these two: states that act fairly and enact common-good objectives as expressed through fair procedures have the right to be obeyed irrespective of whether particular citizens disagree. Since much of what a modern democratic state does may be justified in these terms, citizens make a distinction between their personal views of justice and their public views of legitimacy. Legitimacy thus differs from justice in allowing for a wider range of possible outcomes and in focusing on the question of how those things are decided. It is not simply a minimal degree of justice, but a qualitatively different concept.<sup>40</sup> As Rawls put it: “Laws passed by solid majorities are counted legitimate, even though many protest and correctly judge them unjust or otherwise wrong.”<sup>41</sup> Legitimacy serves the functional need for social cooperation, while justice serves the functional need for social critique. This is why legitimacy is so critical for state effectiveness. Since views of justice will vary not only across but also within individuals, as Gandhi found, any state that is judged by notions of justice alone is bound to be unstable. Legitimacy opens the way for disagreement that does not threaten the state. It allows citizens to be critical without being uncooperative. Notes McBride: “We should not [disobey] outcomes with which we disagree. . . . But we are not required to surrender our judgment about the substantive issue, nor are we obliged to refrain from seeking to reverse or revise the result,

although the means appropriate to this endeavor will be circumscribed by the legitimacy of the result.”<sup>42</sup>

Empirical studies have confirmed the centrality of legitimacy beliefs to citizen compliance. Modern states depend heavily on this sense of obligation for tax collection, law enforcement, judicial processes, public policy implementation, and conscription.<sup>43</sup> The more demands that states place upon citizens, the more the states need to be seen as rightful rulers. Levy uses the term “legislative median” to describe the various equilibria possible between state demands and citizen compliance.<sup>44</sup> Citizens reporting crimes, using courts to resolve disputes, cooperating with police investigations, obeying tax laws, or seeking out information from the state signals the success of the state in incorporating society into its power structure. For Tilly, breaking from his earlier coercive approach to state rule, “the integration of trust networks into public politics”—entrusting the state to regulate everything from marriages to personal finances—grew from a willingness to trust the state, and was in turn the foundation of state rule.<sup>45</sup> Tyler, referring to evidence from the United States, argues that “efforts to understand the effective exercise of legal authority inevitably lead to a concern with the attitudes toward authorities that exist in the general population, rather than an exploration of the coercive resources available to legal authorities.” The ability of a state to regulate society, he notes, “depends upon having the consent and cooperation of those who are being regulated.”<sup>46</sup> In a study of compliance with military conscription orders in seven states, Levi found that legitimacy was a better explanation than opportunism, habit, or indoctrination.<sup>47</sup>

Legitimacy is thus the ultimate form of “soft power” because it is a form of ideas or culture that is convincing and authoritative. Legitimate states find it easier to perform and to engender the sorts of socio-economic conditions that maintain or even advance their legitimacy, initiating what Coicaud called “a dynamic of responsibility”<sup>48</sup> in which state and society agree to comply with each other’s needs. Indeed, without legitimacy, even the most general legislation is impossible to explain.<sup>49</sup> Sakamoto has shown how legislators in Japan were able to appeal to legitimacy to pass unpopular consumption tax increases in 1988 and 1994.<sup>50</sup> In Uganda, as we saw, a solution to the land question was achieved through appeals to common-good concerns about land

use, poverty alleviation, and the environment. The problem with so-called “state-society” approaches is that they often reduce interactions between the state and society to a zero-sum game of domination and resistance. Yet the relationship is more often a positive-sum one, where the state provides public goods that society wants and society in turn complies with the state to enhance its effectiveness.

Even economic governance seems to depend critically on state legitimacy, for as Tyler notes, “when government can call upon the values of the population to encourage desired behavior, society has more flexibility about how it deploys its resources.”<sup>51</sup> Borner and colleagues use the term “political credibility” to show how legitimacy holds the key to improved long-term economic governance.<sup>52</sup> Johnson, who finds that economic adjustment programs only work when both the state and the program are legitimate in citizens’ minds, says starkly, “When the government’s legitimate authority is inadequate, program designers must advise the government to obtain it.”<sup>53</sup> In Uganda, the success of the economic liberalization measures in the 1980s depended critically on the NRM’s ability to convince Ugandans that such policies were in the public interest. A study of postcommunist legislatures in Eastern Europe similarly found that those that were legitimate were able to manage privatization while those that were not lost control over the process.<sup>54</sup> Not all citizen compliance can be explained by legitimacy, but there is much evidence that legitimacy is its more durable source. As Dahl put it, legitimacy is “not only more reliable and durable than naked coercion but it also enables a ruler to govern with a minimum of political resources.”<sup>55</sup> By contrast, illegitimate states are hampered from making changes to redress their plight. Without ready citizen compliance and trust, states find it harder to govern effectively, generate and distribute economic wealth, and create the conditions for fair elections and the realization of rights.

This is not to ignore the sometimes critical role of structural factors in ensuring citizen compliance—in particular the quality of institutions. However, without subjective legitimacy, institutional quality alone is a weak reed on which to hang developmental success. One study of citizen attitudes toward compliance with public regulations (on taxes, bus fares, and welfare benefits) in thirty-eight countries found that both

objective state performance and subjective state legitimacy mattered: “Confidence in political institutions and their objective quality are the strongest predictors of civic morality.”<sup>56</sup> As Beetham summarized: “People relate to the powerful as moral agents *as well as* self-interested actors. . . . What the powerful can get others to do depends upon normative considerations as well as upon the resources and organizational capacities at their command.”<sup>57</sup>

While many studies focus on the role of legitimacy in developed countries, there is no reason to suppose that legitimacy is any less important in developing ones.<sup>58</sup> Absolute levels of legitimacy are generally lower in poorer countries, but its relative importance to the maintenance of state rule, compared to coercion or bribery, is not. Thus “developmental crises” in countries with reasonably strong institutions are often properly speaking legitimacy crises. Likewise, “democratic crises” and “governance crises” may stem from problems of legitimacy rather than problems of state effort or performance per se. For development practitioners, creating objectively sound institutions and practices that lack subjective trust or legitimacy may be ineffective. No matter how many ISO certificates and donor awards a bureaucracy receives, they will not matter if citizens view them as illegitimate. Thus the sort of “state-trusting-society” model that we outlined in chapter 3 is not merely one way to escape from social traps but often the only way: As Letki concludes: “Getting out of the ‘inefficient equilibrium’ should be identified as a ‘top-down’ mechanism, where institutional quality is enhanced and political confidence is stimulated, and in turn they generate respect for norms and rules and positive attitudes to compliance.”<sup>59</sup>

The importance of citizen compliance for state effectiveness is a key reason it is appropriate to take all citizens as the relevant subjects of legitimacy. There will always be some citizens whose beliefs matters more. Yet the “popularization” of citizenship in modern states means that excluding any subset of citizens as a general rule would risk excluding those who turn out to be most relevant. It was, after all, the antiapartheid rioters in poor Soweto townships in South Africa or the drunken loafers of the Soviet Union’s industrial sector whose beliefs turned out to be the ones that undermined those repressive regimes. Gandhi’s *swaraj* was a massive noncompliance movement that ended

the British Raj. Likewise, Tanzanian peasants successfully foiled an illegitimate “villagization” program of rural resettlement in the 1970s through diligent noncompliance.

If legitimacy best explains citizen compliance with state policies, then the opposite is also true: illegitimacy is the best explanation of citizen unwillingness to obey. Hetherington, for example, argues that a decline in legitimacy in the United States since the 1960s is the best explanation for the decline in support for redistributive and antidiscrimination legislation in that country.<sup>60</sup> A similar debate has emerged throughout the West concerning social diversity and social welfare: if social diversity makes achieving legitimacy more difficult, it may undermine citizens’ willingness to support redistributive policies.<sup>61</sup> Berman, meanwhile, argues that state illegitimacy in the Middle East has turned civil society there into uncivil society, organized social networks that work against the common good rather than for it.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, when a citizen is tempted to violate the public interest and pursue private gains beyond those socially sanctioned as fair or reasonable, an empirical question arises: how large need the gains be for the citizen to break the social contract? The answer depends on both the absolute gains available from the untoward behavior and the citizen’s views of state legitimacy. What is remarkable is how often legitimacy constrains the incentives to defect. Sweden’s tax agency says it collects about 99 percent of the taxes that it is owed, even though highly taxed Swedes would seem to have every incentive to shirk their payments.<sup>63</sup> The extraordinary spectacle of U.S. presidential candidate Al Gore conceding victory to George W. Bush in deference to a flimsy Supreme Court ruling in 2000, despite having almost certainly won the election, reflected the force of legitimacy even when the private stakes are very high. The more legitimate a state is, the higher the bar is raised for a citizen to be willing to act unfairly. Contemporary societies are tremendously well ordered despite the ease with which one could, for instance, avoid taxes, run red lights, or ignore court orders. As Buchanan and Keohane note, “What is in our self-interest may change as circumstances change and the threat of coercion may not always be credible, [so] moral commitments can preserve support for valuable institutions in such circumstances.”<sup>64</sup> At the international level, the very existence of the United Nations system is a testament to the power of

legitimacy, since the organization is almost wholly lacking in coercive or financial power.<sup>65</sup>

Thus state performance depends critically on legitimacy and is also its major source, as described in our model (figure 3.1) and tested on our data (table 3.1). Lipset's<sup>66</sup> distinction between a state's effectiveness and its legitimacy ignores not only how legitimacy depends upon effectiveness but also how effectiveness depends upon legitimacy. The two concepts are intimately related. This is why it is better to speak of various equilibrium points of state performance and citizen response, as in chapter 3, than of one-way causal relationships. States both generate legitimacy and are shaped by it.

For some scholars, this deep interrelatedness makes legitimacy inoperable as a concept.<sup>67</sup> O'Kane, for example, argues that since a slave state creates the slave's resentment, we cannot use that resentment to explain the slave state itself.<sup>68</sup> Yet historically that is precisely how slave states have evolved, as both sources and victims of their illegitimacy.<sup>69</sup> Contemporary North Korea is a good example: the regime's repression and paranoia are both the cause and the consequence of its low legitimacy.<sup>70</sup> Fearing the lack of popular and international legitimacy that its Stalinist *juche* policies have generated, the Pyongyang regime must engage in constant ideological campaigns domestically and nuclear brinkmanship internationally. To eliminate legitimacy from the explanation of the state is to ignore the central dynamic that links rulers to the ruled. Far better to make that dynamic explicit and then, if necessary, focus on the structural dynamics that it creates.

#### STATE BUILDING, STATE FAILURE

The discussion of state effectiveness brings us naturally to the topic of state building—the ways states accumulate fiscal, coercive, and regulatory powers over society and strengthen the capabilities of their own bureaucracies. Conventional state-building literature has tended to stress the “structural” or “realist” reasons states originate and expand. In Tilly's famous bellic formulation, drawn from Western European experiences, frontiers were expanded and bureaucracies built through constant warfare.<sup>71</sup> Spruyt and Levi offered alternative views of states as

engaged in businesslike transactions with self-interested social actors,<sup>72</sup> a political economy approach that has its origins in Marxist analysis.<sup>73</sup> There is also a postmodern account of state building that stresses the unconscious role of ritual and discourse, a kind of false consciousness model.<sup>74</sup> On all of these accounts, states are predatory actors that fight, bribe, or fool citizens into accepting their power. The idea that they might win citizen support through common-good claims, consciously endorsed, is dismissed as naïve.<sup>75</sup>

This alternative view is that states originate and expand because they accommodate and serve society in ways that generate legitimacy. On this account, legitimacy is the critical “switch” that sets in motion a virtuous or vicious cycle, as in the Ugandan case. The legitimacy-based view of state building can be traced to Bendix’s work on the role of citizen rights in the state-building process in Europe.<sup>76</sup> Since then, a large number of works have argued that legitimacy is a necessary or critical factor for state strength, overshadowing the importance of other factors.<sup>77</sup> Investing in legitimacy, Gallarotti showed, is the most rational thing that state actors can do to enhance their power because it will be the most durable source of state construction.<sup>78</sup> In his later work, Tilly shifted from coercion to legitimacy in explaining the historical development of states.<sup>79</sup> Historical accounts have likewise rediscovered the role of legitimacy in state-building processes in the ancient world.<sup>80</sup> Perdue, in his study of China’s massive westward expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, argued for the importance of legitimacy because it “enunciated ideals that directed people’s goals.”<sup>81</sup> Migdal, also breaking from his earlier structural work, concluded that legitimacy was “the most potent factor determining the strength of the state.”<sup>82</sup>

Many avowedly structural accounts of state building more closely approximate variant 3 in figure 5.1, where legitimacy is lurking in the structures doing the work. Spruyt, for example, notes that state building in early modern Europe was driven by the imperatives of offering less repressive conditions to increasingly mobile skilled laborers. Such concessions, he notes, “brought private profit incentives in line with public welfare maximization” because “lordly repression would lead to labor flight.”<sup>83</sup> Legitimacy, not clashes of economic interests, was the key to state building.

Without legitimacy, arguments that link state performance to state strength become purely structural (variant 2 in figure 5.1).<sup>84</sup> To be sure, certain types of state structure are most conducive to the generation of legitimacy. Carothers, for example, argues that democracy is the best guarantor of a state-building process because it strengthens feedback mechanisms (links E and F in figure 3.1): “Opening up a closed media will allow greater public scrutiny of poorly performing areas of state function. Creating space for independent civil society permits advocacy groups to monitor and critique state performance and work together with the state to offer new policy ideas.”<sup>85</sup> Democracy, in this sense, plays a double role: it both helps create legitimacy and enhances the quality of feedback from legitimacy to state strength. What is key is that it is the legitimation cycle, not particular institutional features, that matters. As Mattes puts it, “regardless of how well-designed a country’s political institutions and processes are, a sustainable democracy requires people who are willing to support, defend and sustain democratic practices.”<sup>86</sup> Or as Holsti notes: “The *critical* criterion of state strength is the degree of . . . legitimacy, and not particular political institutions and practices.”<sup>87</sup>

The legitimacy-centered view of stateness also returns us to reasoned arguments for the existence of states themselves: citizens may believe that their state is the most effective organizer of resources for the pursuit of the common good. One can thus view state construction as being a result of “rational” or “liberal” ties between citizens and states that replace the familial or paternal structures of premodern states.<sup>88</sup> Augustine’s claim that an illegitimate state is merely “a gang of criminals on a large scale” should therefore be read retrospectively: a state that behaves like a criminal syndicate will likely see its legitimacy, and shortly thereafter its power, decline. States that survive and flourish, by contrast, are likely to be behaving more like mutual aid societies. State making and organized crime are not synonymous, as Tilly once argued, but antithetical: *legitimacy makes the state, but the state must earn legitimacy.*

Once legitimacy is made explicit, traditional accounts of state building become anemic or wanting. Centeno’s account of Uruguay is a good example. His explanation of state weakness in Latin America centers on the lack of out-and-out wars in the region. As he notes, Uruguay

was created as a buffer state between Brazil and Argentina after their 1825–28 and 1836–51 limited wars over its status. This was “a disaster for Uruguay and sentenced that country to fifty more years of caudillos and chaos” because of its lack of bellic domestic consolidation.<sup>89</sup> Yet what came next—the creation of an effective and stable state in Uruguay—goes unremarked upon and thus unexplained. Did it happen because Uruguay finally engaged in large-scale wars? Not at all. Rather, as mentioned in chapter 1, it resulted from the early twentieth-century reforms of Jose Batlle y Ordoñez, who transformed Uruguay into a legitimate and thus strong state, without any sort of major war. Legitimacy, not war, explains stateness in Uruguay. The “caudillos and chaos” of the preceding era was a result not of limited wars but of the limited horizons of the country’s leaders.

The logical analogue of the importance of legitimacy to state building is the importance of illegitimacy to state failure. In chapter 3, we considered the vicious cycle of delegitimation and its consequences for state power. What bears highlighting here is the centrality of this cycle to most state failures. As Rotberg argues, most structural accounts of state failure—pointing to the rise of violence, say, or to economic crisis—are about mechanisms rather than critical causes. These mechanisms are set into motion by a crisis of state legitimacy, “when the rulers are perceived to be working for themselves and their kin, and not the state.”<sup>90</sup> The full might of U.S. military, political, and financial power, for instance, was unable to prevent the collapse of an illegitimate South Vietnamese regime in 1975<sup>91</sup> and has been unable to dislodge a modestly legitimate Cuban state. Ramet has argued that the breakup of Yugoslavia, often cited as a paradigm case of malign state failure, originated in a legitimacy crisis that began as early as 1974.<sup>92</sup> As Harberson notes of Africa, home to the largest number of state failures:

A hegemonic ruler may dominate people, but the contemporary evidence from weak and collapsed states suggests strongly the hypothesis that domination alone is an insufficient foundation for enduring state stability. He cannot do so absent some degree of partnership with a political community, one formed on the basis of peoples’ willingness to share governance on terms to which they assent, at least tacitly.<sup>93</sup>

Or as Brett puts it about Africa: “The political and administrative apparatuses of the state . . . can only survive as corporate structures when private producers are willing and able to pay taxes, obey their rules, and recognise their legitimacy.”<sup>94</sup>

Legitimacy of course has limitations as an explanation of the dynamics of state failure—it answers the *why* rather than the *how* questions. It is appropriate for scholars of state building to focus on structural factors like political alliances, security dilemmas, and political economy in order to understand this process. Even if low legitimacy is the critical condition that sets the process in motion, it cannot explain the timing, pathways, or even outcomes. For this, we need much more complex causal models.<sup>95</sup> But once we allow our vision of state failures to be confined to those processes, we lose sight of the reason they have been set in motion in the first place.

One obvious policy implication is that failed states should not be written off by the international community merely for having failed. If stateness is not dependent on the brute facts of social structure, geography, history, or wars, then it can be rebuilt in even the most dire conditions. That is how places like Uganda, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have come back from failure after new groups with a plausible claim to legitimacy have seized power.<sup>96</sup> Calls to redraw borders in failed states ignore both the centrality of legitimacy to stateness and the centrality of readily available performance to legitimacy. What will save the postwar Iraqi state from failure, for instance, is the achievement of legitimate rule, not some set of structural conditions.

To rebuild failed states, then, requires first and foremost that state actors return to the “path of righteousness,” to borrow the psalmist’s phrase.<sup>97</sup> As Khadiagala puts it: “State reconstruction deals with rejuvenating institutional mechanisms that formerly gave consistency to state action, legitimized power, and established social trust, returning the state to the center of political life.”<sup>98</sup>

#### INTERNAL CONFLICT

Throughout the 1990s, as we saw, Uganda faced several insurgencies in its northern region, the most important of which was led by the Lord’s

Resistance Army (LRA). The onset of what would become the LRA rebellion in 1986 started from the NRM's comparative lack of legitimacy in the north. But even as NRM legitimacy improved nationally, the rebellion continued. Arms flows, the involvement of external powers (especially Sudan), the lack of representative institutions, and a fearsome LRA leadership prolonged the violence. Citizens in the north were denied the protections and public services of a state unable to defeat the LRA. The NRM's low legitimacy in the north became a consequence rather than a cause of the LRA insurgency.

In the 2000s, many of these structural conditions changed. The civil war in Sudan ended with a cease-fire, ending its southern warlords' support of the LRA. The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for five LRA leaders. Most important, Uganda became a multiparty democracy. Opposition or independent candidates won 19 of the 21 parliamentary seats in the northern region in the 2006 election (of 215 directly elected nationwide).<sup>99</sup> This created pressures on the NRM to reach a final settlement with the LRA,<sup>100</sup> which led to the signing of a formal peace agreement in 2006, the beginning of demobilization, and the clearing of refugee camps.

This example highlights the complex and uncertain way that legitimacy relates to internal conflict. Although the onset and conclusion of the northern conflict cannot be explained without the background condition of the NRM's national legitimacy, the timing, duration, and nature of the conflict depended on other factors. Indeed, the LRA conflict was one area where the lack of multiparty democracy during the "no party" period (1986 to 2005) clearly had *negative* interaction effects on other outcomes—in this case, security and peace.

The prevalence of internal conflict, meaning the use or threat of violence in localized disputes, has often been taken as an indicator of the legitimacy of states. Studies of collective action stress the importance of legitimacy beliefs to the resort to violence or protest.<sup>101</sup> The logic is that legitimacy failures lead to a questioning of the political order and hence to conflict. Indeed, the reason for including a behavioral political violence indicator in our measure of legitimacy was precisely the view that the resort to violence in everyday political activities represented one type of legitimation failure.

However, while those who threaten violence may be motivated in part by a sense of the illegitimacy of the state, this feeling may not be shared by the majority of the population. Legitimacy was defined here as support for the rightfulness of state rule by most citizens, and only a modest concession was made to minority views by including the political violence indicator. As a result, our legitimacy measure is largely insensitive to dissenting minority views that may be the most relevant to such conflicts. High legitimacy across a majority of the population may be irrelevant to internal conflict or may make it worse. Legitimacy in general should lead to greater peace and reconciliation in society (because losers can see that the views of others are reasonable and that the process is fair), but may in some cases do the opposite, stoking the fires of conflict by setting the majority against an unreconciled minority.

Factors explaining conflict have often been divided into demand and supply. The demand side is split between two schools generally described as grievance (violations of norms) and greed (payoffs or gains).<sup>102</sup> As a conflict hypothesis, legitimacy fits into the grievance category, and can be used to explain either the onset or the duration of a conflict. Supply-side factors, meanwhile, are many: arms flows, population densities, ethnic diversity, financial resources, terrain, state repressive capacities, governance structures, population exit options, trade openness, and external interventions, to name a few.<sup>103</sup>

Given that mass legitimacy may pacify or stoke conflict, it is no surprise that legitimacy (excluding the “political violence” indicator) and conflict (measured using two separate indicators) do not go together in any linear fashion (see table 5.1). In contrast, better-known supply-side factors like democracy and state capacity are more closely related to levels of conflict.

Legitimacy is *not* a very useful general predictor of conflict, even if it may contribute to particular conflicts. While I have stressed the importance of taking subjective views more seriously in politics, in this case structural factors matter most. Democracy and governance, for instance, matter to conflict not because of how they are perceived but because of what they do. Azerbaijan and pre-Rose Revolution Georgia, for instance, had similar levels of internal conflict in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Azerbaijan was from 1985 to 2003 embroiled in a

**Table 5.1** Correlates of Internal Conflict

Correlation Strength	Variable (expected sign)	ICRG	KOSIMO
Strong (any above 0.6)	Democracy (-)	-0.73	-0.42
	Governance (-)	-0.64	-0.38
	Income Level (-)	-0.62	-0.40
Moderate (any 0.3 to 0.6)	State Capacity (-)	-0.38	-0.34
	Development (-)	-0.49	-0.15
	Ethnic Diversity (+)	+0.20	+0.38
	Inequality (+)	+0.42	+0.08
Weak (both below 0.3)	Youth Unemployment (+)	+0.10	+0.11
	Legitimacy* (-)	-0.17	+0.04

NOTES: Indicators: Dependent variables: ICRG Internal Conflict, 2002. KOSIMO summary of intensity-weighted conflicts in 2002. Independent variables: Same as in chapter 2 except where multiple variables are available, in which case the strongest is chosen. For democracy, WBI Voice and Accountability. For ethnic diversity, Fearon Cultural Fractionalization index. Legitimacy\*: average of attitudinal and consent scores (eliminates political violence indicator to avoid endogeneity). State Capacity: central government revenues (all sources) as % GDP. All data late 1990s–early 2000s.

conflict over the status of its Nagorno–Karabakh region, and Georgia three separate regional autonomy movements on the boil. Yet the two states were diametrically opposite in terms of legitimacy. To explain conflict in these countries, we cannot resort to mass legitimacy, as do Glinkina and Rosenberg.<sup>104</sup> Instead, we must explain it by the normal supply-side issues of failed development, failed democracy, and massive misgovernance. Seligson and Booth, for example, find that Costa Rica’s consolidated democracy provides numerous “arenas” for activism by those holding low-legitimacy views of the state, which tends to reduce the recourse to conflict—a structural antidote to legitimacy failures.<sup>105</sup>

On its own, then, mass legitimacy is too majoritarian to explain conflict. Although both democracy and legitimacy can take on a majoritarian flavor, democracy has institutional features for handling minorities that legitimacy does not. Dahl called democracy a system for “the steady appeasement of relatively small groups.”<sup>106</sup> Legitimacy, however, taken as a majoritarian measure, may be very insensitive to such groups. As Calhoun shows, there is a natural tension between the imperatives of legitimacy (creating a shared sense of identity) and the sources of conflict (struggles over that identity).<sup>107</sup> Democracy is by its nature a procedural way to resolve political conflict. Legitimacy, by contrast,

*may* reduce conflict in some instances, but this depends critically on whether the common-good basis of that evaluation is sufficiently expansive to take into account the claims of minority groups. If not, mass legitimacy may worsen conflict.

Insofar as conflict can be taken as an indicator of anything, then, when it is a plausible effect indicator of a latent concept, the concept is democracy, not mass legitimacy. The eruption of internal conflict reflects a failure of democracy to appease the minorities that it is supposed to manage, not a failure of legitimacy. Conflict only reflects a lack of legitimacy if we define legitimacy to include the views of the aggrieved groups that resort to violence. Our inclusion of political violence in a legitimacy score can then only be justified in a teleological way: the resort to violence represents a legitimation failure by definition rather than by hypothesis. Going further, one of the key justifications for a normative rather than an empirical approach to legitimacy measurement must be that it arrives at a more “causally efficacious” understanding of the common good, assuming that minorities that resort to violence usually have a reasonable claim. A normative evaluation of the legitimacy of Azerbaijan, for instance, would likely place it close to low-legitimacy pre-Rose Revolution Georgia, thus providing a more causally efficacious predictor of conflict than our empirical measure of legitimacy.

We can thus outline a four-part typology relating mass legitimacy to conflict for all “typical” cases where there is a high level of conflict in the presence of a weak democracy (see table 5.2). For high- or medium-legitimacy states, legitimacy may exacerbate the supply-side factors by making the majority particularly insensitive or even hostile to the aggrieved minority, as was the case in Azerbaijan. Similarly, in China, high legitimacy wrapped up in a narrow nationalism has exacerbated ongoing conflicts with aggrieved minority groups like the Falun Gong, Tibetans, Uighurs, or Taiwanese. Alternately, high-to-medium mass legitimacy may be irrelevant to conflict. This was the case with Uganda, where a generally liberal legitimacy could not ultimately resolve the LRA conflict in the north. Other weak but liberalizing states with high-to-medium legitimacy, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, or South Africa, would also fall into this category.

**Table 5.2** A Typology of Legitimacy and Internal Conflict (High Conflict/Weak Democracy States, Late 1990s to Early 2000s)

Legitimacy	Level of Mass Legitimacy Worsens Conflict?	Examples
High/Medium	Yes	Azerbaijan, China
"	No	Uganda, Philippines
Low	Yes	Zimbabwe, Pakistan
"	No	Colombia, Georgia

The other dyad is where high conflict/weak democracy is found in the presence of low mass legitimacy. Again, legitimacy may contribute to the conflict or not. In Zimbabwe, where there was a steady loss of faith in the state by a larger and larger “minority,” legitimacy was central to explaining the conflictual nature of the state. The same was true in Pakistan, another low-legitimacy state operating with weak democratic institutions. There a military takeover of 1999 unified the mostly secular opposition with demands for a restoration of democratic rule, the main source of conflict.

In other cases, low legitimacy is more a consequence than a cause of high levels of conflict. Colombia, Latin America’s most conflict-torn country, is a classic case. On the left it had the FARC guerrilla movement and on the right, armed drug lords and anticommunist “paramilitaries.” The great middle opinion of Colombia distrusted the state not because it sympathized with those minorities but because the state had been unable to crush them.<sup>108</sup> In Georgia, where low legitimacy was mainly a result of dissatisfaction with the autocratic rule of Shevardnadze, legitimacy was essentially irrelevant to the disputes with the three minority regions. The cause of conflict in both instances was not low mass legitimacy but low minority legitimacy. The solution was democratization or democratic deepening, which could appease the aggrieved minorities by structural means.

The relationship between legitimacy and conflict, then, can be understood only in the context of a specific situation. Legitimacy may be an essential background factor in any conflict, but structural factors will be more useful in explaining the evolution of that conflict. Here is one instance where legitimacy should properly be relegated to the background of any explanatory account.

## STABILITY AND REVOLUTION

The cases of Zimbabwe and Pakistan highlight the gray area that separates particularistic conflicts from generalized instability or even revolution. For conflict to become a general threat to political stability, it must “jump the firebreak,” that is, become so regular and widespread that it threatens the entire political order. As one moves to this more “majoritarian” concept of conflict, it is no surprise that the “majoritarian” concept of legitimacy takes on greater importance.

Legitimacy has a long pedigree as the preferred explanation for the persistence or failure of political orders—paralleling its role in state failure, discussed above. It has been seen as particularly important to system stability in times of social change. Lipset argued that developmental conditions or government effectiveness alone (two structural factors) would be insufficient to preserve a system when the very values that the system was supposed to serve came into question.<sup>109</sup> As Coicaud puts it: “The function of legitimacy is to respond to the need for social integration.”<sup>110</sup> Again, we should never equate legitimacy with stability. After all, states may remain stable through repression and payoffs. Rather, legitimacy should be seen as a “usually necessary”<sup>111</sup> condition for the long-run stability of any state.

The role of legitimacy in sustaining states and their regimes has been seen by some radical thinkers as its most noxious consequence. As with the argument about state building, however, it is possible to rationally justify legitimacy in some instances and thus arrive at the possibility of what Rawls called “stability for the right reasons.”<sup>112</sup> In particular, to the extent that the sources of legitimacy outlined here—development, democracy/rights, and governance—command universal assent, they then provide a basis on which to distinguish between “good stability” (states that perform well and are stable, such as Denmark, Taiwan, or Poland) and “good instability” (states that perform badly and are unstable, such as Zimbabwe, Milosevic-era Serbia, or Algeria). That also leaves instances of “bad stability” (states that perform badly and yet are stable, such as China, Azerbaijan, pre-Orange Revolution Ukraine, and Belarus) as well as “bad instability” (states that perform well and yet are unstable, such as India, Colombia, and Indonesia).

One should thus avoid both the stylized conservative response that *any* sort of instability is irrational as well as the stylized radical response that *any* sort of stability is irrational. Instability caused by illegitimacy may be the socially rational part of a feedback cycle that leads to progressive political change. Alternatively, it may be the socially irrational work of particularistic interests. The distinction between justice and legitimacy is critical here. Where the state is legitimate, citizens are more likely to agitate for change within existing institutions, even if they feel that given policies are unjust.<sup>113</sup> Where it is not, citizens are more likely to pursue their claims by opposing the state itself. As Copp puts it, a state becomes irredeemably illegitimate when “the needs of the society [that it] governs are so poorly served by it that . . . the society would do better if people viewed themselves as under no moral duty at all to obey the law.”<sup>114</sup> The difficulty, of course, is knowing when that point is reached. This depends on the feasible alternatives, which are wholly case-specific. Citizens considering joining a revolution or foreign powers considering an armed intervention need to think carefully about what might be put in place of an existing regime before seeking its removal.

Writ large, widespread conflict against the state can become a coherent *political revolution*—a wholesale replacement of one set of state institutions, ideologies, and leaders with a new one through a sudden, violent, and mass-based movement. Political revolutions are important unto themselves. But they may take on added importance if they are accompanied by *social revolutions* wherein the fundamental social and economic structures of the society are changed as well. The United States had only a political revolution in 1776, not a social one,<sup>115</sup> as did Uganda in 1986. China and Iran, by contrast, both experienced simultaneous political and social revolutions in the twentieth century.

Like theories of conflict, theories of revolutions have typically been divided into “purposive” or “demand” arguments and structural or “supply” arguments. Johnson’s “systems value consensus” theory and Gurr’s “relative deprivation” theory are both examples of the former grounded in the question of legitimacy.<sup>116</sup> Sociopsychological accounts of revolution have also tended to center on the subjective delegitimation of the existing order.<sup>117</sup> From this perspective, the answer to the “rational choice” question of why an individual would risk their

“interests” to participate in a revolution is that an individual is also a bearer of the common-good claims of the community, and may act accordingly.

The most canonical formulation of the structural theory of revolutions was made by Skocpol,<sup>118</sup> who argued that revolutions result from a combination of state weakness and growing international pressures. Goodwin likewise centered his analysis on structural dimensions—whether a regime is inclusive or not; whether it relates to people as patrons or as citizens; and the strength of its ruling infrastructure.<sup>119</sup> Legitimacy, in such accounts, is downplayed, if not rejected altogether. At best, it is seen as a mobilizing source of rhetoric (variant 4 in figure 5.1); at worst, as a complete distraction.

Richer accounts of revolutions tend to invoke both legitimacy *and* structural explanations.<sup>120</sup> Such multicausal arguments proliferated as a result of the study of a greater number of revolutions, including those that failed—by the Kurds and Shias of Iraq in 1991, for instance, or by the Shining Path in Peru from 1980 to 1992. However, if one had to choose a *critical* factor in revolutions, legitimacy would trump structures, for two reasons. First, legitimacy is necessary for revolutions, whereas structural weakness is not. “Every revolution or revolutionary movement emerges out of a crisis of legitimacy,” notes Mason.<sup>121</sup> Revolution “symbolizes the near-total collapse of the government as a legitimate form of governance in the eyes of the populace,” write Welch and Taintor.<sup>122</sup> Arendt noted the “contempt for those in power” that “precedes all revolutions.”<sup>123</sup> By contrast, structural weaknesses of the sort mentioned above have not been present in many revolutions, notably those against the American-backed regimes in South Vietnam (1975), Iran (1979), and the Philippines (1986), not to mention throughout communist Eastern Europe. Iran’s 1979 revolution took place *despite* surging oil revenues and major U.S. support.<sup>124</sup> Structurally weak states that enjoy popular legitimacy will usually survive—Cuba comes to mind most vividly, as does Nehru’s India.

Second, drawing on the state-building discussion above, the structural dimensions of the state cannot be separated from legitimacy itself—legitimacy “lurks in the fabric” of those structures (variant 3 in figure 5.1). States do not become weak without the vicious cycle of delegitimation playing a central role. In the case of Uganda, the fact that

“organized political forces” with an ability to win and hold national office took shape under the NRM cannot be separated from the legitimacy crisis of the second Obote regime. Foran noted that social beliefs “slipped in through the back door” of many avowedly structural arguments, including that of Skocpol.<sup>125</sup> As Goldstone and colleagues have argued, fragile states result from low legitimacy, and revolutions erupt when that fragility is set afire by a crisis.<sup>126</sup> To the extent that structural weakness matters, it is as a direct consequence of illegitimacy, not as an alternative to it. Legitimacy’s exclusion from structural arguments is thus not an improvement in parsimony but rather a loss of the critical factor itself. As Coicaud puts it: “When the effectiveness of socio-historical structures reveals itself to be indissociable from non-structural factors, one cannot maintain that only the former are decisive.”<sup>127</sup> Or to quote Foran from his multicausal theory that places subjectively determined “political cultures of opposition” at the center of a causal chain: “When the state’s *raison d’être* no longer holds good, when it is effectively combated by competing conceptions, oppositional forces gain a valuable resource for organizing their struggle.”<sup>128</sup>

China’s 1949 revolution provides an illustration. In choosing between legitimacy-centered and structural explanations, Thaxton finds from his fieldwork in north China (the cradle of the revolution) that the critical cause was a loss of legitimacy—in particular, peasant alienation caused by the Kuomintang’s attempts to tax and nationalize salt and tobacco production. This both stoked protest (a direct result of illegitimacy—variant 1) and weakened state rule (an indirect result—variant 3). “It was the collective political action of the market community formed by these country people—not Kuomintang factionalism, Kuomintang army ineptitude, or Kuomintang administrative paralysis—that eventually defeated central rulers,” he concludes.<sup>129</sup>

Some have speculated that legitimacy and structural conditions may be negatively rather than positively related. The president of Zaire (now DR Congo) from 1965 to 1997, Sese Seko Mobutu, once blamed an African counterpart for building *too many* roads, which, while improving popular legitimacy, also provided transport corridors for revolutionary forces: “Building roads never did any good. I’ve been in power in Zaire for thirty years and I never built one road. Now they are driving down them to get you,” he said.<sup>130</sup> Yet Mobutu was eventually the victim of

his own failure to build roads, falling to rebel forces advancing from Rwanda in 1997. In Zaire, as elsewhere, legitimacy crisis not only was an independent cause of revolution but also worked in the expected way by weakening (not strengthening) the state. Mobutu's "realist" structuralism ignored the centrality of legitimacy to both revolutionary demands and state strength.

There is, to be sure, a structural school of revolutions that takes legitimacy seriously, but sees it as the result of structures rather than their cause (variant 4).<sup>131</sup> Goodwin calls for a "synthetic perspective" that integrates legitimacy and structure in this manner.<sup>132</sup> In chapter 3, we noted how the state can in limited ways shape legitimacy, both in the management of pluralism and in the creation of legitimacy norms. However, as I argued there, legitimacy remains mostly autonomous of such influences, which is precisely why it so often challenges them. The main way that states shape legitimacy is by performing well. Although it is possible to make probabilistic statements about the sorts of state institutions that will generate legitimacy, it is the legitimacy, not the institutions, that matters. Put simply, the only relevant form of state strength is legitimizing state strength, and this depends upon performance. Therefore, states and other structures need to be integrated into the legitimacy paradigm rather than the other way around. After all, in his own avowedly structural analysis, Goodwin finds himself referring time and again not to structures themselves but to their legitimating impact. The regime of Nicaraguan ruler Anastasio Somoza (1967–79) fell, he notes, because it "alienated most Nicaraguans," and neopatrimonial states are vulnerable to revolutions because their structure "entails no . . . legitimacy."<sup>133</sup>

Recent work on "sultanistic" regimes—highly personalized authoritarian regimes without any ideology or social base—has reinforced the centrality of legitimacy to regime collapse.<sup>134</sup> While Chehabi, Linz, and collaborators argue that such regimes fall to revolutions because of a weakening of their economic resources and patronage networks, legitimacy looms large either as a direct factor spurring the opposition (variant 1) or as a critical cause that explains that structural weakening (variant 3). To quote liberally from their book, sultanistic regimes fall when "in a vacuum of authority and with increasing delegitimation of existing institutions, there arises the need for someone [else] to assume

leadership” or as a result of “the decoupling of these regimes from their societies.” The Cuban regime of Fulgencio Batista (1952–58) “failed to rally the population and neglected the tasks of political mobilization,” and as a result its legitimacy “was remarkably feeble.” The Somoza regime “alienated virtually every sector of Nicaraguan society” so that “the ranks of the aggrieved increased” and the regime was “increasingly debilitated by popular hostility.” The overthrow of the second Shah of Iran (1953–79) “was the product of the unity of all social classes in opposing the state.”<sup>135</sup> The structural dynamics of revolution are important contributions to these accounts, but they cannot replace the causal primacy of delegitimation in explaining the outcomes.

Several caveats are important in asserting the centrality of legitimacy to revolutions. First, legitimacy decline need be only emergent rather than fully formed to begin the revolutionary cycle. Legitimation failure and revolutionary thought are two different things. The legitimation failure, as Scott argued, usually takes place “within the confines of the existing hegemony,”<sup>136</sup> whereas the revolutionary ideals are usually articulated only retrospectively. Revolutionary agents seize upon legitimation failures and offer a decisive new path that is retrospectively justified.

Second, it may take a particular geography of legitimacy failure to bring about a revolution—complete legitimacy failure among a plurality of the population rather than, say, partial legitimacy failure among the entire population. There may also be groups whose views of legitimacy are more salient than those of others—Brinton argued that the views of elites and intellectuals matter most.<sup>137</sup> Specifying such groups in advance, however, is impossible and risks tautological explanations of revolution, one reason I argued earlier for taking all citizens as the relevant subjects of legitimacy. Fukuyama, for instance, said that “a lack of legitimacy among the population as a whole does not spell a crisis of legitimacy for the regime unless it begins to infect the elites tied to the regime itself.”<sup>138</sup> But if legitimacy is defined as an ever-changing concept of “the elites tied to the regime,” then it can always be retrospectively defined in terms of those whose actual withdrawal of support led to revolution. Green, who says legitimacy is “one of the most useful concepts in the development of a theory of revolution,” argues that we must nonetheless stick to a separable and measurable definition of

legitimacy that allows us to test, and falsify, any legitimacy-based theory of revolution.<sup>139</sup> Thus, to the substantive reasons for defining legitimacy as mass legitimacy, this adds a methodological one: a changing definition would risk becoming nonfalsifiable. In any test of a theory of legitimacy, we need to consider “all attempted revolutions”—not just successful ones—and see whether a failure of legitimacy, defined in fixed terms, tends to be associated with successful revolutions. Needless to say, the same advice goes for structural theories, which are apt to define structural weakness retrospectively in terms of whether a revolution succeeded or failed.

Third, the background dynamics of legitimation need to be kept in mind. When we say that legitimacy is the critical factor, we mean that some dynamic story of how legitimacy was lost is the critical factor. Thus, for example, a massive corruption case, an economic shock following a long period of economic growth (the so-called “j-curve” hypothesis of Davies<sup>140</sup>), and a fraudulent election are all factors that may explain the onset of delegitimation. Underperforming states that do not enjoy legitimacy premiums are those most vulnerable to generalized instability or even revolutions. In our data set, countries fitting that description in the late 1990s and early 2000s were (in order of performance failure) Russia, Zimbabwe, the Ukraine, Algeria, Georgia, Venezuela, and Iran. Major political ruptures had happened in five of those seven cases—all except for Algeria and Iran—by the time of this writing. The fact that global legitimacy norms are converging on such a universal performance standard reminds us of the international sources of such ruptures.<sup>141</sup>

Finally, as with conflict theories, it is necessary to keep in mind the distinction between the onset of revolution and its continuation, which may have very little to do with questions of the illegitimacy of the ancien regime. Whether or not a political or social revolution lasts will depend on whether the revolutionaries can consolidate their gains, or new forces emerge with their own claims to legitimacy. Ethiopian Marxists who overthrew the monarchy of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 failed to legitimate their revolution and were in turn overthrown in 1991. Likewise for Nicaragua’s Sandinistas, who lasted only eleven years from 1979 after ruining the economy, alienating the faithful, depriving peasants of land rights, abusing police powers, muzzling the

press, and running up the largest external debt in history (the equivalent of seven times GDP).

Where revolutions carry through, the hope is for a steady improvement in state legitimacy and thus the reconstruction of a more durable state. Camus noted how new revolutionary states enjoy high levels of justificatory and consent legitimacy while lacking legal legitimacy. In revolutionary France, he wrote, "legality was lagging behind the facts."<sup>142</sup> The successful revolution, then, reestablishes the legality of the state while simultaneously delivering the performance that upholds its justificatory and consent legitimacy. Revolutions are risky precisely because they give birth to a state whose commitment to impartial laws and constitutional rule is so weak. Certainly, most social, if not political, revolutions have had dire results for human well-being.<sup>143</sup> Yet, as Trotsky put it in 1932, and might have reiterated after his own revolutionary state was overthrown by another revolution in 1991, "if the revolution precipitated the country into misery, the blame lay principally on the ruling classes who drive the people to revolution."<sup>144</sup>

#### INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Revolutions and state failure are a dramatic form of institutional change, a term used to describe the process by which the formal and informal procedures, rules, bureaucracies, policies, and ideologies of a state evolve. But most institutional change is incremental in nature. The institutions of a state are constantly being refashioned in small ways. Bureaucracies are streamlined, welfare policies revised, and electoral rules refashioned. How important is the legitimation cycle to such changes?

Authoritarian states usually experience significant institutional changes without the outside world paying much attention. By definition, they are less sensitive to the legitimation cycle than more open or democratic regimes, and thus institutional changes may have little to do with legitimacy. The abolition of courts and people's congresses (legislatures) by Mao at the outset of the Cultural Revolution, for example, cannot be ascribed to the demands of legitimacy. Nor can the many coups, countercoups, and regime changes within authoritarian states

that usually disfigure the history of any tyranny. One cannot explain Stalin's centralization and personalization of power in the Soviet Union nor the Myanmar regime's recent relocation of its national capital to the mist-shrouded mountain stronghold of Pyinmana as responses to legitimacy demands.

Nonetheless, the more that authoritarian regimes liberalize, the more that legitimacy comes into play. Even under the "authoritarian" period of "no party democracy," Uganda experienced dramatic institutional changes—decentralization, the 1998 Land Act, a new constitution, elected Resistance Councils, and economic liberalization—that responded to the NRM's reading of public sentiments. Indeed, modern authoritarian states often spend more time worrying about legitimacy than democratic ones because they have greater reasons to fear the consequences of delegitimation in a democratic age when their own legitimacy depends on delivering substantive results. In Myerson's model, autocrats can only maintain popular support by keeping a reliable group of critics around them who will punish them for wrongdoing. "This problem of trust is fundamental to the nature of [autocratic] political leadership and has broad consequences for the nature of the state."<sup>145</sup> As Brooker finds: "Not only do [authoritarian] rulers expend time and effort seeking to legitimate their rule, but also the search for legitimacy often seems to have shaped or influenced their regimes' official principles or goals, policy objectives and even political structure."<sup>146</sup>

Since 1989, for instance, China's ruling communist party has introduced significant institutional changes in response to the demands of legitimacy.<sup>147</sup> These include bureaucratic downsizing, major central-provincial and corporate tax reforms, semicompetitive elections in villages, enhanced legal institutions, the rise of a regulatory state, and the establishment of numerous new agencies of horizontal accountability, including a National Auditor-General and a National Corruption Prevention Bureau. These changes are consistent with broad public preferences for improved governance and growth rather than political participation.<sup>148</sup> In their cross-province study, for example, Huang and Yang found that the shift from coercive, politicized approaches to birth control to voluntaristic and professional ones was driven by public demands. "Concerned about the legitimacy problem, there was a

perceived political need to shift the contentious issue from the political arena to the administrative ‘neutral’ zone,” they write.<sup>149</sup> Likewise, the introduction of village elections in 1989—even amid the repressive conditions after Tiananmen—was motivated by what Kelliher calls “a political crisis in the countryside.” Village elections resolved a legitimacy crisis because in popular perceptions elected leaders, “unlike their [unelected] predecessors . . . dedicate themselves solely to the public good.”<sup>150</sup>

Purely structural explanations (variant 2) of such changes—that they respond to the imperatives of privileged economic groups, particularistic social forces, or path-dependent processes—are difficult to sustain in light of evidence of their legitimacy across *all* socioeconomic groups. In survey evidence, individual-level expressions of legitimacy beliefs in the national state in China are weakly or negatively correlated with individual income levels. The poor are as likely to express support for the CCP regime as are the better off.<sup>151</sup> Structural accounts might still be rescued if legitimacy beliefs are themselves a result of these structures (i.e., variant 4). Frequent use of the term “co-optation” to refer to citizens’ support of the regime implies some form of unwilling or unconscious agreement. Yet Chen and Shi, using data from 1993–94, found a negative correlation between media consumption and political support, for example.<sup>152</sup> Revisiting the question using 1999 data, Tang finds that media controls have only a partial impact on values, which continue to liberalize.<sup>153</sup> As a leading party theorist noted: “The CCP publicly recognized that the ruling position of the CCP is neither a natural right nor permanent. Only by satisfying the increasing political, economic and cultural demands of citizens can the CCP get support from the biggest majority of the masses.”<sup>154</sup>

Next consider democracies, which are in effect highly liberalized regimes. It follows that the force of legitimacy should be particularly relevant to their institutional changes. Democratic regimes are designed to change in response to popular legitimacy and thus the possibilities of disequilibria should be less. As an institutional feature of the state, democracy ensures that negative feedback caused by legitimacy failures is minimized while positive feedback that improves the efficacy and durability of state institutions is maximized.<sup>155</sup> In March and Olsen’s account, there is a “logic of appropriateness” that guides institutional

change in democracies.<sup>156</sup> Thus, Flanagan and Lee find that democratic deepening in Japan and South Korea closely tracked value shifts and legitimacy,<sup>157</sup> while Huntington famously argued that U.S. institutions change when they depart from “the American Creed.”<sup>158</sup> Inclan and Ruibal find that garnering popular legitimacy is a better explanation for moves by ruling parties in newly democratic Mexico and Argentina to allow judicial independence than conventional structural or interest-based explanations.<sup>159</sup>

Many accounts of institutional changes in democracies, however, stress factors other than legitimacy—self-interested bargaining, interest groups, media manipulation, or amoral party competition. Sometimes this is just a hard-edged gloss intended to make an account seem “realistic.” Lurking behind the descriptions of the actors is the question of legitimacy, or how institutions “rationally” adapt to unlock “the benefits of social cooperation,” to borrow Carey’s words.<sup>160</sup> Alternatively, some such accounts recognize the role of legitimacy in setting normative boundaries and shaping preferences and then focus on “what happens next.” But the tendency to stress such factors in order to explain the fine-grained nature of outcomes often leads to the unintended sense that legitimacy never mattered in the first place.

Boix, for example, shows how “conservative” groups were able to determine the choice between majoritarian and proportional electoral systems in twenty-two Western democracies between 1919 and 1939.<sup>161</sup> This seems to explain electoral systems as a result of sociopolitical structures. Yet lurking in the background of those changes is the expansion of the electorate itself, and the fact that the choices were limited to two equally justifiable systems. In other words, the main factor shaping the direction and form of political development in Europe was the demands of pluralism driven by legitimacy, not the machinations of elites. Even if “conservatives” were able to manipulate the outcome at the margin, this should not blind us to the larger importance of mass legitimacy in bringing about electoral reform in the first place.

Going further, even the particular outcome in this case seems to accord with a legitimacy-based view of institutional change. “Conservatives”—the label Boix uses for all nonsocialist parties—had garnered an average of 77 percent of the popular vote in the first near-universal elections preceding the electoral changes. Surely parties that commanded the

support of more than three quarters of the electorate were entitled to *some* say over the form that institutional change should take. Socialist parties claiming to represent “the people” in fact represented on average less than a quarter of them. If the “conservative” parties got their way, this may have been the most legitimate outcome. Legitimacy is at work not just in the big picture but also on the margins of choice. To say that electoral change resulted from power plays by “conservative” groups is to ignore both that the choices were constrained by the conditions of legitimacy and that those rational choices may have been legitimate choices from the standpoint of the common good.

Similarly, Diaz-Cayeros argues that the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was able to determine changes to electoral rules governing the Mexican Senate between 1986 and 1996 mainly due to “its capacity to keep on winning state elections, not to some institutional makeup of the upper chamber that would protect a group of senators from the pressures of electoral competition.”<sup>162</sup> Ignoring the social basis of parties and their elites obscures the role of popular legitimacy in institutional change.

Miller argues that economic self-interest is the best explanation for institutional change because of the frequent occurrence of suboptimal outcomes.<sup>163</sup> If common-good concerns of legitimacy were at work, he suggests, one would usually get socially optimal outcomes. But this reasoning involves two mistakes. One is to assume that action based on norms of legitimacy makes optimal outcomes more assured. While it may create more consensus, it may open up just as many divisions on what the common good demands—vividly illustrated by the 1998 Land Act in Uganda. The well-known problems of social choice theory are not necessarily mitigated by actions in pursuit of social fairness. Second, by unintentionally adopting the philosopher’s external point of view, Miller ignores how outcomes that appear objectively suboptimal to him may have been subjectively optimal to those concerned. Here Miller cites the failure of U.S. President Bill Clinton’s universal health care reforms of 1993–94, a case that many structuralists cite as proof positive that structures are determinative. However, on closer examination, those reforms failed precisely because they were illegitimate (see box 5.1).

The founders of the American republic who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 reached a compromise between state-based and population-

**Box 5.1.** The Failure of the Clinton Health Care Reform of 1993–94

Structural accounts of the failure of U.S. President Bill Clinton's 1993–94 health care reform plans attribute the outcome to either institutions of government or well-organized interest groups (as in variant 2 of figure 5.1).<sup>164</sup> In the view of Steinmo and Watts, for instance, divided government and weak parties coupled with influential medical and insurance industry lobbies threw up roadblocks to the legislative process that prevented majority public opinion from being translated into public policy.<sup>165</sup>

Most Americans then, as now, expressed the view that their health care system needed reform so that everyone would be covered and costs were controlled. But specific support for Clinton's "managed competition" proposal collapsed quickly from roughly 60 percent when first introduced (itself not an overwhelming majority) to 30 percent by the time of its failure.<sup>166</sup> As Brodie and Blendon put it: "When ultimately faced with specific proposals to overhaul the health care system, the public became more afraid of the negative effect of what Congress might enact than they were of the health care problem itself."<sup>167</sup> Congressional committees then acted in ways that reflected sentiments on the floors and in turn in society.<sup>168</sup> As public fears mounted, notes Peterson, "members of Congress began to fear supporting anything even more than they feared supporting nothing."<sup>169</sup> The result was failure.

The key question, then, as Rockman notes, is what explains this "delegitimation of Clinton's specific proposal"?<sup>170</sup> Structuralists here retreat to the second line of defense: public opinion was itself driven by those structures (variant 4). Thus Steinmo and Watts also argue that the antistatist public culture created by divided government and weak parties along with "the media and the [medical] industry's public (dis)information campaigns"<sup>171</sup> delegitimized the proposals.

This derivative view of public opinion, however, ignores the many instances in which those same institutions and similar interest lobbies have *not* blocked important redistributive legislation in the United States—on Medicare, Medicaid, social security,

**Box 5.1** (*continued*)

public education, voting rights, North American free trade, and deficit reduction. What seems to distinguish those cases is that the public groundswell in their favor survived the deliberative scrutiny of the democratic process. White says it is this “social process of persuasion,”<sup>172</sup> not the legislative process of coalitions, much less the informational process of misrepresentation, that is determinative (as in variant 1). If anything, the institutions that make the deliberative process so rigorous in the United States—everything from states’ rights to judicial review—are themselves products of legitimacy (variant 3): they were established to ensure that illegitimate proposals have less chance of surviving. Skocpol’s vituperative attacks on “right wing government haters” who voiced concerns about the protection of “liberties” (her quotes) seem to show her alienation from the considered views of her fellow Americans rather than the critical role played by interest groups.<sup>173</sup>

This is not to ignore the role played by social, media, and political elites in the delegitimation of the Clinton plans. The more complex the issue, the more such opinions will matter, as they did in this case. Jacobs and Shapiro<sup>174</sup> note that public opinion’s role in this process was limited to identifying the need for reform and some major principles that any proposal should meet, like universal coverage and cost control. But detailed proposals could only come from expert and legislative actors, who then sought to win public support for their plans. Public fears of being stripped of health care choices—fears that long predated industry lobby campaigns and that tapped into a more general cultural selectivity in the United States toward enacting large government welfare programs<sup>175</sup>—coupled with divisions among elites proved to be insuperable obstacles to social consensus.

Public opinion was dynamic on this issue, as one would expect. But that dynamism can only be explained as a failure of persuasion within some concept of legitimacy—evaluated in light of values, circumstances, and prospectival state performance. The relatively autonomous demands of legitimacy, not the impact

**Box 5.1** (*continued*)

of structures, best explains the presence or absence of certain types of institutions in this case. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's abortive 1982 attempt to shift National Health Service costs from taxes to private insurance—reform plans backed by a majority government in a strong-party, parliamentary system on an issue of concentrated executive authority and backed by powerful business lobbies—failed for the same reason: strong social opposition delegitimated the proposals almost immediately.<sup>176</sup> As a Harvard medical professor and supporter of the Clinton plan noted in a review of Michael Moore's 2007 film *Sicko*, which ascribed the failure of health care reform in the United States to interest group lobbies: "The finger of blame points to an obstacle different from the one the movie suggests: us."<sup>177</sup>

based plans for Congress because both approaches had legitimate claims—claims that have endured in spirited debates on the Constitution ever since. To interpret the American Constitution with its effective checks and balances as an "unintended consequence" of self-interested rationality, as Miller does,<sup>178</sup> is to ignore how it was an intended consequence of the demands of legitimacy. Structural accounts of politics err in a fundamental way: they ignore the reason-giving that is at the heart of politics itself.

Of course, structuralists can always retreat to the idea that citizen preferences are shaped by structures (variant 4).<sup>179</sup> But such closed circles of legitimation are very difficult to maintain, as I have argued. Powerful structural forces are frequently defeated by public opinion when they act in ways inconsistent with the demands of legitimacy. The appointed senate established in Thailand as part of its democratic reforms in 1992, for instance, was powerfully supported by the revered king, the military, and business elites, and was justified by them as an important source of social stability and national identity.<sup>180</sup> Nonetheless, it survived only five years. Thais believed that a popularly elected body was more rightful, and they soon got their way.<sup>181</sup> Similarly, a proposal floated by the Canadian government in early 2000 to provide annual

federal funding of \$3 million for struggling professional hockey teams was supported by all the apparent key “interests” in the country: the media, the business sector, the major parties, senators, and the *biens pensants* of society. Yet within weeks of its being suggested, the proposal was shot down in a volley of negative public opinion. Without the backing of popular legitimacy, structures are usually hapless. “Not in recent memory has a government plan been so soundly trounced by the voice of the Canadian people,” wrote one journalist.<sup>182</sup>

A similar critique can be lodged against historical accounts of institutional change that stress the baleful impact of past events. Historical effects, on closer examination, seem to switch on and off, and the only thing that can explain this is the demands of contemporary legitimacy. The adoption of constitutional bills of rights in jurisdictions like Canada with doctrines of parliamentary supremacy, for example, represented a decisive break with history in response to popular demands. As a “slow-moving” force in politics, legitimacy is perfectly amenable to historical study, as I undertook in the case of Uganda. Elsewhere, Gottschalk has shown how the slow buildup of popular demands for American penal reform determined the changes in U.S. penal institutions in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>183</sup>

Of course, merely to stress the importance of legitimacy to the maintenance, consolidation, and improvement of the institutions of democracy leaves open the question of what exactly legitimacy demands in any particular instance. Our cross-national statistics give us little purchase on this question, and our brief discussion of democratic design alternatives in chapter 3 offered only a glimpse of the possibilities. Moreover, given the changing basis of legitimacy over time, one would expect that the answers would change over time as well. What exactly will be demanded by “postmodern” societies in the future is anyone’s guess.<sup>184</sup> What we *can* know is that institutions will evolve in response to these emerging conceptions of the common good.

## DEMOCRATIZATION

The most critical and dramatic form of authoritarian liberalization involves the introduction of free and fair elections for executive and

legislative power. Between 1972 and 2005, there were sixty-four transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule, the so-called “third wave” of democratizations that roughly doubled the proportion of the world’s states that were democratic to 65 percent.<sup>185</sup>

As with revolutions, it is important to separate the question of why from the question of how. There is a wide literature on the short-term mechanisms of democratic transition, focusing on a common pattern of transition that usually follows several distinct stages: crisis, popular mobilization, regime split, hardline backlash, democratic pact, and founding election.<sup>186</sup> However, the fundamental question is what makes authoritarian states vulnerable to this transition sequence in the first place? In terms of our own data set, why did the Ukraine and Georgia experience democratic transitions in the 2000s while China and Azerbaijan did not?

Common sense tells us that democracies are created because people get fed up with dictatorship. But the literature on democratization has emphasized instead a series of structural arguments having to do with factors like class cleavages, elite economic interests, and regime cohesion. Harvard sociologist Barrington Moore’s well-known class-based formulation—“no bourgeois, no democracy”<sup>187</sup>—has spawned a series of imitators who share his structural instincts: “no regime split, no democracy,”<sup>188</sup> for example, or “no rural control, no democracy.”<sup>189</sup> To the extent that legitimacy is allowed to creep into these arguments, it is only in a retrograde manner. At best, it plays a background role as a necessary condition for regime transition.<sup>190</sup> In other instances it is allowed to act as a “constraint” on otherwise interest-driven processes.<sup>191</sup> In still other accounts, its role is reduced to a descriptive correlate of the transition, more a consequence than a cause.<sup>192</sup> At worst, it is rejected as a rhetorical construct of self-interested motivations.<sup>193</sup>

The alternative approach to democratization puts legitimacy at the center.<sup>194</sup> On this view, legitimacy—understood as the relatively autonomous evaluations of citizens grounded in common-good views of the political community—is the central factor that both weakens authoritarian regimes and replaces them with democracies. Here, legitimacy acts both autonomously to push authoritarian regimes toward democracy (variant 1) and indirectly by generating the structural conditions—an organized opposition, international support, regime splits, economic

crisis—that make transition more likely (variant 3). Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington, despite his structural approaches, admitted that without legitimacy it was hard to explain why democracies come about: “[Legitimacy] is essential to understanding the problems confronting authoritarian regimes in the late twentieth century.”<sup>195</sup>

Understanding the causal logic of the legitimacy-based approach returns us to the legitimation cycle (figure 3.1). When an authoritarian regime’s performance fails in the eyes of citizens—either because it has declined or because the evaluative norms of legitimacy have changed—two sets of feedback loops are set in motion. The direct effects of legitimacy generate citizen demands for change, challenge state structures, and support an organized opposition (link F in figure 3.1). The indirect effects undermine state performance itself (link E). With the authoritarian regime facing these pressures, democratization becomes more likely if the regime can neither reconfigure legitimacy along nondemocratic lines nor replace it with naked coercion or patronage. Then the regimes, facing a legitimacy crisis, seek to inch toward democracy while keeping control of the process. In doing so, they generate expectations and institutional momentum that lead to a full-scale democratization.<sup>196</sup> Legitimacy, then, is the critical switch that turns stable authoritarian regimes into weak ones. Structural factors either are irrelevant to this process or are relevant but critically dependent on legitimacy. Thus, to continue with imitations of Moore’s aphorism, we can offer our own: *no legitimacy crisis, no democracy*.

Although it is possible to frame the dynamics of legitimation in terms of “bargaining,” the questions of what is “*acceptable* to key constituents” or “the collective benefits [citizens] *perceive* . . . and . . . their *perception* of the fairness of the extractive procedures,” to borrow the language of Levi,<sup>197</sup> concern subjective legitimacy, not objective structures or interests. To reduce the dynamics of democratization to bargaining or political economy is to put a realist gloss on fundamentally moral issues. If we depart from this subjective and common good-oriented view, then we are left wondering how democracies come into being at all. Acemoglu and Robinson’s claim that “the only reason agents care about political institutions is because of their different economic consequences”<sup>198</sup> explains neither why individuals take part in prodemocracy movements nor why such movements result in the inclusion of *all*

citizens, not just those necessary to bring the costs of repression back down to acceptable levels. Acemoglu and Robinson stress “the de facto power of those without de jure political power in inducing a transition to democracy,”<sup>199</sup> but their economistic portrayal of that power ignores its essentially moral nature. Uganda’s democratic transition of 2005, for instance, occurred amid rising prosperity and no system-threatening redistributive conflicts. Many arguments were mustered for and against that transition by all sides. But one that was conspicuously absent from all sides was economic redistribution.

The most that one can say at a general level, then, is that democratization occurs when authoritarian regimes face a legitimacy crisis—extant or prospectual—from which they cannot escape. In a study of fourteen Latin American democratic transitions, Barriga and colleagues found that structural factors like economic crisis or human rights repression cannot be understood apart from their legitimating effect. “Regime legitimacy seems to underlie many of our findings,” they concluded.<sup>200</sup>

A good example is the rise, endurance, and eventual demise of Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which ruled for a remarkable seventy-one years from 1929 to 2000, just shy of the seventy-three-year record of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1918–91). The PRI was a centrist party with fairly robust support that was never seriously challenged by opponents on the right and left.<sup>201</sup> The legitimation crisis that eventually toppled the PRI resulted from stalling economic performance, rising democratic expectations, and reforms to one of the opposition groups (that of the right) that made it appeal to the average citizen. Again, there are structural factors that *describe* the mechanisms of this legitimation crisis. Greene, for instance, stresses how the PRI used the structural advantages of its incumbency to ensure that opposition parties were only staffed by radicals of the right or left, leaving Mexicans with little choice but to vote for the PRI.<sup>202</sup> As those advantages declined as a result of economic, regulatory, and media liberalization, opposition parties successfully challenged the legitimacy of the PRI. In Greene’s argument, legitimacy is merely a proximate cause of what are at root structural forces (variant 4). Yet this begs the question of why Mexicans allowed the PRI to control the bureaucracy, the economy, and the media in the first place. The reason, as Olney<sup>203</sup> has

argued, is that the PRI enjoyed wide legitimacy as a hegemonic but progressive party. As values changed, the delegitimation of that model forced liberalization, generating the structural conditions in which PRI dominance could be challenged (variant 3). Again, this puts legitimacy back at the center of the explanation, while noting the important role of structural factors in the timing and pathway of the change.

Like glacial meltwater seeking the ocean, legitimacy crisis will flow in the direction of democracy by one means or another. Sometimes it will be through the offices of the bourgeoisie and sometimes through those of enlightened elites. It may mobilize new wealth or social networks. Sometimes it will leverage international support and other times it will exploit splits in the leadership. It may generate economic crisis or political protest. The key point is that structural determinants cannot be separated from the legitimacy crisis itself. As Szelenyi and Szelenyi noted of communist Europe: "One should avoid the errors of reductionist Marxism, which reduced the legitimation problems to the contradictions of the economic system. The economic crisis of socialism may very well have its roots in the legitimation problems of the system."<sup>204</sup>

Empirically, the virtually universal assent to the idea that democracy is the only normatively legitimate form of government exerts a powerful influence on the motivations of actors. This explains why so many states with such vastly different structural features have all become democratic.<sup>205</sup> In an era in which democracy is both a key performance variable and a key institution for maintaining a virtuous circle of legitimation, authoritarian regimes find it difficult to remain on the wrong side of this normative practice. Carothers notes that "The global spread of the idea that being elected is the root of governmental legitimacy has been integral to the third wave."<sup>206</sup> If so, then to ignore the inherently legitimizing aspects of democracy is to ignore the reason it has so often followed authoritarian ruptures. As Gill wrote: "If the [democratic] transitions literature does not recognize this normative aspect of democracy, it cannot explain the appeal of this form of government."<sup>207</sup>

To say that legitimacy matters, of course, is to say that the universally valued sources of legitimacy matter. The repression of rights, fake elections, massive corruption, and welfare declines are all probabilistically related to legitimacy decline, which is itself probabilistically related to

democratization for authoritarian regimes. As countries develop and values become more closely aligned to the universal pattern of legitimation, authoritarian regimes find it increasingly hard to avoid legitimacy crisis. Rich and authoritarian microstates like Singapore, Tonga, Brunei, and Dubai are interesting precisely because they are nearly miraculous. Modernization theory, thus understood, is about the delegitimation of nondemocratic forms of rule as social values change.<sup>208</sup>

As it does for other outcomes, legitimacy provides only a broad-brush explanation of democratic transitions. It is appropriate for scholars of democratization to focus on the precise pathways and their associated structural determinants, provided the critical impetus of legitimacy is kept in mind. When it is not, democracy appears as merely a “fortuitous byproduct”<sup>209</sup> of struggles for domination and clashes of interest. Democratization may be contingent, but it is by no means fortuitous.

Przeworski famously claimed that legitimacy-centered explanations of democratization were false because delegitimated authoritarian regimes can survive for long periods. What matters, he argued, is “not the breakdown of legitimacy but the organization of counterhegemony” or “organized political forces.”<sup>210</sup> But no legitimacy theorist has ever claimed that legitimacy crisis leads immediately and certainly to authoritarian collapse: indeed, most have argued quite the opposite, as I do here: that there will be lags as well as possibilities of escape from crisis without democratization. Przeworski was correct that legitimacy should not be measured so as to include the rise of organized opposition forces, which risks making the legitimacy-based theory tautological (a risk also faced by structural accounts). Measurements of the sort used here do not make that mistake. Moreover, and this is where his particular criticisms are most wanting, such factors are often intimately wrapped up in the question of legitimacy itself—legitimacy lurking in the fabric of structural factors (variant 3). The ANC became a viable opposition in South Africa not because of its Soviet organizational skills but because of its massive social support under a delegitimated apartheid regime. In most cases, the result of such support will be democratization.

Of course, it is always possible to be wrong about the dynamics of legitimation and thus wrong about the prospects of democratic change. Many scholars found high legitimacy in the Soviet Union<sup>211</sup> and Yugoslavia,<sup>212</sup> and thus mistakenly predicted regime survival. The same mis-

calculation was made by Nicaraguan leader Daniel Ortega when he put his revolutionary Sandinista regime to an electoral test in 1990 and lost. But if properly measured, legitimacy is the best indicator of whether an authoritarian regime will survive. Thus, Kalyvas claimed that delegitimation was only a “correlate,” not a cause of regime breakdowns in communist Europe. However, his evidence was that most surveys in the 1980s showed medium to high levels of legitimacy (which only shows the importance of measuring legitimacy properly) and no organized opposition in most countries (which is analytically separate from legitimacy, and in any case might be unnecessary where elites act preemptively). Moreover, his own avowedly structuralist account is replete with references to the conditioning role of legitimacy (variant 3).<sup>213</sup> The claim of the legitimacy-based theory of democratizations is simply that, properly measured, legitimacy (and the legitimation cycle) is the most critical and parsimonious explanation of why countries democratize. Democratization will always appear descriptively to coincide with the eruption of certain structural factors, but those factors are usually mechanisms, not causes, of transition. It is the inability of authoritarian rulers to legitimate their rule that critically undermines it.

Democratizations led by the authoritarian states themselves (which accounted for forty-four of sixty-four “third wave” democratic transitions studied by Freedom House<sup>214</sup>) are thus an example of good political science in action. Dictators recognize not only the importance of legitimacy to state flourishing but also the threat represented by a potential crisis of legitimacy. Several studies have found, for example, that democracy was introduced by states that were under pressure to improve performance, which required higher levels of taxation and citizen compliance.<sup>215</sup> Democratization was the only way to improve performance without simultaneously precipitating a legitimacy crisis. The incompetent ruler waits until it is too late and is pushed out of power by force or circumstance. The wise ruler foresees the changes afoot and seeks to keep ahead of them, or even aspires to greater things for the state.

The Ugandan case highlights the ways what appear to be structural causes are undergirded by the issue of legitimacy. In making the case for the legalization of opposition parties at the secret NRM meeting of 2003, Museveni cited the dangers posed by the rise of inner-party opposition and growing pressures from international society. But NRM fac-

tionalism and international pressures came precisely from the growing evidence that “no party democracy” was becoming illegitimate among the Ugandan people by the early 2000s. When it was widely supported by Ugandans in the 1990s, NRM factionalism and international pressures were absent. The dynamics of legitimacy drove the structural forces that ushered Uganda into the era of multiparty democracy.

Bratton and van de Walle argue in favor of a historical structural explanation of democratic transitions in a study of forty-two sub-Saharan African states between 1988 and 1994. In every one of the forty cases where political liberalization was launched, they note, the authoritarian regime faced a “profound crisis of legitimacy.” However, only sixteen of those forty had achieved a full democratic transition by 1994. The reason, they argue, is that in the other twenty-four, including Uganda, neither political competition nor political participation had been institutionalized under the old authoritarian regimes.<sup>216</sup> An alternative explanation is that in those twenty-four cases, legitimacy crisis was not so profound as in the sixteen that democratized. In Uganda, the transition to multiparty democracy was not “blocked” by the NRM; rather, it was supported by an overwhelming majority of Uganda’s people. Ten years later, when the people’s views changed, the democratic transition occurred. The dynamics of legitimation were more than just necessary in this case. They were also sufficient to explain the dynamics of democratization.

Unfortunately, not all authoritarian leaders are good political scientists. In the early 2000s, both Georgia and Ukraine, two low-legitimacy authoritarian states, experienced democratizations. In the Georgian case, a failed post-Soviet regime, led by an autocratic former Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, after 1992, came under increased legitimacy pressure due to corruption, repression, and internal conflicts. Shevardnadze’s own reform-minded justice minister, Mikhail Saakashvili, resigned in September 2003 and established a New National Movement to contest the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. Shevardnadze stole the election by fraud, leading to street protests. Twenty days later, an emboldened Saakashvili stormed the parliament on national television and seized the podium, pointedly drinking the mug of black tea abandoned by Shevardnadze as he fled out the back door. Military and police forces sent to repress the pro-

testors were handed roses and defected. Two months later, Saakashvili won 96 percent of the vote in a new presidential election (a mandate renewed in 2008 with 53 percent of the vote).

Whatever contingencies, personal moves, and structural conditions facilitated Georgia's breakthrough to democracy in 2003, the strongest explanation is that the illegitimacy of the Shevardnadze regime had reached unbearable proportions. Shevardnadze was, after all, an ally of the United States and a beneficiary of European aid. Business groups were fully co-opted by the state—their New Rights Party supported Shevardnadze—and the media was cowed. Structural analyses of democratic possibilities in early 2003 allowed little possibility for change. Haindrava believed “the corrupted elite is not likely to relinquish power.”<sup>217</sup> But those same structures collapsed when legitimacy crisis reached unbearable levels. As one leader of the Rose Revolution put it: “All agree that dissatisfaction with Shevardnadze had reached a tipping point, and that his refusal to address that dissatisfaction pushed citizens over the edge.”<sup>218</sup> Or as another local observer put it, Shevardnadze “underestimated the power of public opinion.”<sup>219</sup> Starved of the broad-based and durable social support provided by legitimacy, Shevardnadze's regime was vulnerable to overthrow. As Miller comments: “The Georgian people acted out one of the purest renderings of the social contract. No longer seeing Shevardnadze's government as legitimate, they invoked their right to remove it.”<sup>220</sup>

More broadly, among the nine postcommunist states in Europe in our data set that endured entrenched authoritarian rule after the fall of the Berlin Wall, those facing a legitimacy crisis (six out of seven) were far more likely to experience a democratic transition than those that did not (one out of four), as shown in table 5.3. (The one low-legitimacy state whose communist-era rulers survived, Armenia, was a borderline case since major opposition demonstrations in 2004 and 2008 led to democratizing reforms that placed more power in the hands of the parliament.)

The flip side of a theory of democratization is a theory of authoritarian durability. Durable authoritarian regimes should be divided into two types: those that face a legitimacy crisis and those that do not. In the latter case, legitimacy is sufficient to explain regime endurance, at least probabilistically. The case of China is a good example. Since 1989, the

**Table 5.3** Legitimacy and Democratic Transitions in Postcommunist Europe

Country	Legitimacy	Democratic Revolution?
Azerbaijan	High	No
Belarus	Medium	No
Croatia	Medium	Yes (2000)
Moldova	Medium	No
Albania	Low	Yes (2005)
Armenia	Low	No
Bulgaria	Low	Yes (1997)
Georgia	Low	Yes (2003)
Romania	Low	Yes (1996)
Serbia/Yugoslavia	Low	Yes (2000)
Ukraine	Low	Yes (2004)

regime has been able to adapt institutions to maintain the performance that has kindled high levels of legitimacy, as argued above.<sup>221</sup> Despite the rise of a new middle class, the loss of faith in Marxism, and increasingly well-organized protest movements, there has been no weakening of the regime. If only appropriate structural conditions were needed to spark democratization, China would have democratized in the 1990s. In 1998–99, for example, the China Democracy Party was established in the country as a formal opposition party. By March 1999, the CDP boasted twenty-nine nationwide branches and eighty-three leaders. On the Przeworskian view of counterhegemonies, the CDP should have ushered in regime-changing institutional change. Instead, it crumpled after just a few arrests. As the sympathetic sister of one of its organizers noted: “They failed to take the measure of the national mood.”<sup>222</sup> Without legitimacy crisis, counterhegemonies fall flat. Similarly, in her study of China’s beleaguered democracy activists, Goldman notes that they “will need much more support from Chinese society than they had in the last two decades of the twentieth century” in order to have any impact.<sup>223</sup> If so, then legitimacy grounded in public opinion, not repression grounded in structural conditions, is the key to understanding opposition failure in China.

Similarly, the survival of the post–1979 revolutionary regime in Iran cannot be explained except with reference to the legitimacy of the regime, which was in the medium category in our period, more or less consistent with its universalistic performance. That regime survives above all because the average Iranian, having suffered the tumult of

one revolution and having enjoyed expanding welfare and wider social space throughout the 1990s and 2000s, was willing to put up with the regime's antics on Islam, nukes, and elections in order to avert even worse outcomes. As the *Economist* reported: "Despite the flaws in the system, they tend to respect their institutions. As several young Iranians volunteered to this correspondent, having lived through one revolution, the last thing they want is another."<sup>224</sup>

Brownlee's<sup>225</sup> view that authoritarian survival in Malaysia and Egypt can be explained as a result of effective party structures ignores how ruling coalitions in both places enjoyed sufficient popular legitimacy in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>226</sup> The particular party dimensions that he cites—leadership, economic resources, ideology, organization, and prior history—are themselves deeply dependent on popular legitimacy. In particular, the effectiveness of a party's ideology, the ability of parties to insert themselves into economic life, and their internal esprit de corps all depend on how societies respond to them. Authoritarian parties are strong when societies make them so. Without social support, they quickly collapse amid bankruptcy and bickering.

Although I want to reclaim the centrality of legitimacy and legitimation to the process of democratization, we should admit that for practical purposes legitimacy might be *too* powerful an instrument, an ends-oriented "final" cause rather than a process-oriented "efficient" cause, to study. Many of the structuralist studies cited above (including those of revolutions) could easily be reconceived as studies of process rather than cause, and an argument made that they are more useful to understanding political change. Ultimately, the choice of what to study may depend on the particular impasse that an authoritarian regime has reached. If it is already in deep legitimacy crisis, then a focus on the structural conditions eroding or upholding the regime will be appropriate. But if the regime remains legitimate, then its legitimacy must remain the central fact for the study of the regime.

#### DEMOCRATIC BREAKDOWN

Democratic breakdown is the opposite of democratization, a move from democracy back to authoritarian rule. It is rare because of democracy's

inherent legitimacy. But as the absolute number of democracies rises, so will the absolute number of democratic failures. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia, and Venezuela, to name a few of the states in our data set, experienced democratic breakdown or backsliding in the 2000s, as did democratic Thailand and Fiji.

From the standpoint of legitimacy, the reason that democratic failure is rare is that democracy, when it is actually working, generates supportive and effective feedback from society that keeps the state performing optimally. To explain democratic failure in terms of legitimacy, then, implies one of two possibilities: either social values change in an undemocratic direction (perhaps aided by the influence of antidemocratic social or political elites), or democracy is seen as contributing to a broader performance failure by the state. In both cases, the legitimacy of the democratic state declines and democracy itself takes the blame.

The eruption of antidemocratic social values is the most dramatic case because it suggests a relatively weak adherence to a universally valued form of government. Often, new authoritarian leaders successfully convince citizens that democracy is unnecessary to their legitimate right to rule, which is instead grounded in other sources—a return to national greatness, for instance, or the attainment of ambitious social or economic goals. A year before the election and then authoritarian shift toward “true democracy” of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 1998, for instance, two scholars warned presciently that “interest in authoritarian solutions persists among broad segments of society, and that the legitimacy of Venezuelan democracy is not indisputable.”<sup>227</sup> China after 1989 is another case where democracy got shunted aside in favor of developmental and nationalistic legitimacy sources. Many radicals argue in favor of a “postdemocratic” age in which states are judged solely by their ability to enact far-reaching social and economic changes, a looming threat to democratic values that often goes under the guise of “deepening democracy.”

The other possibility is that democratic failure is driven by democracy’s failure. In some cases, democracy may be blamed because it is the performance failure—a manifestly corrupt or unfair democracy, for example, that has become a de facto dictatorship of an unaccountable political class. This was the situation in Pakistan, where a thoroughly rotten and delegitimated democracy was replaced by military rule in

a coup in 1999 (ratified by a mass referendum in 2001). The military regime of General Pervez Musharraf was remarkably stable and popular until its even worse intrusions upon democratic rights reignited the prodemocracy opposition in 2007.

Alternately, democracy may be blamed because it is perceived to be causing a performance failure on other dimensions—usually development or governance. The antidemocratic age of Russian state builder Vladimir Putin from 2000 to 2008 was directly attributable to the perception that democracy had caused the socioeconomic hardships and misgovernance of the 1990s. The delegitimation of democracy, as Sil and Chen argue of this case, is “the higher order variable in the equation, analytically and normatively prior to arguments about the functioning and robustness of democracy.”<sup>228</sup>

In both cases, citizens calculate that some plausible authoritarian alternative will be more legitimate. In doing so, they also generate the social support for the structural forces that help create this authoritarian alternative (the rise of Putin’s United Russia party, for instance, or the Western support of Musharraf in Pakistan). Low legitimacy thus acts directly to weaken the democratic state (variant 1) and indirectly to strengthen its alternatives (variant 3).

But low legitimacy is not the only situation where a democracy may fail. In some cases, countervailing forces may arise apart from legitimation problems and gain sufficient strength to overthrow a democracy in spite of its legitimacy. Bermeo, for instance, argues that the seventeen democratic failures of interwar Europe and postwar Latin America occurred despite continued popular support for democratic institutions in these countries.<sup>229</sup> Most accounts of democratic breakdown in Uganda under the Milton Obote governments of 1962 to 1971 likewise suggest that multiparty democracy was working reasonably well and was simply a victim of illegitimate action from the top—action that stirred a twenty-year civil war until a democratic state could be reestablished. The Thai military’s 2006 military coup against the popular government of Thaksin Shinawatra likewise came amid strong evidence of broad support for democratic institutions in society (Thaksin’s party swept back into power when elections were held the following year). The democratic failure in Bangladesh in 2007 is another good example: military generals took action amid growing Islamicist threats and

a political stalemate between the two major parties, but despite reasonable levels of legitimacy for the democratic state (as our measurement showed). Predictably, authoritarian rule in both Thailand and Bangladesh was immediately challenged by society, forcing generals to make hasty promises of a return to democratic rule. As Schaffer put it presciently, comparing the threats to democracy in the two former parts of Pakistan: "In Bangladesh, unlike in Pakistan, popular faith in elections has not faltered."<sup>230</sup>

O'Kane argues that legitimacy is wholly irrelevant in cases where legitimate democratic regimes are overthrown.<sup>231</sup> A more accurate view would be that mass legitimacy is *insufficient* in such cases to protect the state from countervailing forces that arise even in the absence of legitimation problems (variant 2). Colomer and Linz both argue that legitimacy holds the key to the duration of democracies because where it is sufficiently high, such countervailing forces will usually fail (either they will remain weak for lack of social support or they will be defeated by social opposition).<sup>232</sup> As Bermeo notes of her cases, while ordinary people did not support the return to dictatorship, "they did not immediately mobilize in defense of democracy either."<sup>233</sup> In the face of well-organized antidemocratic forces, even modest levels of legitimacy may be insufficient to save a democracy.

Thus legitimacy is causally linked to all democratic breakdowns, but in different ways. In one group of cases, low legitimacy is blamed on democracy itself (due to changing values or perceptions of performance failure). In another group, legitimacy is insufficient to withstand countervailing forces. Since the strength of those forces is probabilistically related to legitimacy itself, democracies with high levels of legitimacy are usually safe from threat. As legitimacy deteriorates, however, a democratic state not only loses its ability to withstand antidemocratic assaults but also contributes to strengthening those assaults. As the left-wing Italian parliamentarian Gaetano Salvemini recalled ruefully of his delegitimizing attacks on Italian democracy in the early 1920s that paved the way for Mussolini's fascist takeover: "I must acknowledge . . . that I would have been wiser had I been more moderate in my criticism of [prime minister Giovanni Giolitti]. For while we Italian crusaders attacked him from the Left, accusing him of being—as he was—a corrupter of Italian democracy in the making, others assailed him from

the Right because he was even too democratic for their taste. Our criticism thus did not help to direct the evolution of Italian public life toward less imperfect forms of democracy but rather toward the victory of . . . reactionary groups.”<sup>234</sup>

Not surprisingly, most studies of democratic breakdown have not explicitly included legitimacy as a predictive factor and have identified only structural causes. Diskin and colleagues, for instance, found that seven main factors (presidentialism, constitutional instability, social cleavages, economic instability, lack of democratic history, governmental instability, and foreign intervention) provide good predictions of democratic failures across sixty-two cases (thirty failures and thirty-two survivals), especially when several of the factors are present.<sup>235</sup> Of these seven factors, governmental instability, constitutional instability, and foreign intervention are nearly synonymous with democratic failure, while presidentialism, as they note, is a proxy for countries in Latin America, where it predominates. Of the remaining three, only democratic history is clearly structural in nature. The other two—social cleavages and economic instability—are important because of their delegitimizing effects (again, legitimacy is the higher order variable here). The Marcos takeover of the Philippines in 1972, one of the cases considered by Diskin and colleagues, came against a backdrop of spreading communist, Hukbalahap, and Muslim insurgencies, student protest, labor strikes, kidnappings, and economic crisis. Filipinos, then as now, were enthusiastic democrats. But democracy at the time was seen as having negative effects on governance and development in its inability to resolve these crises. As a result, most Filipinos supported the coup by Marcos, who had been reelected president in 1969. “Filipinos shrugged and were ready to give Ferdinand and his ‘technocrats’ a chance to show what they could do,” writes Seagrave.<sup>236</sup> What is important is that democratic breakdown was a subjective response to, not an objective result of, the performance failures. Social cleavages and economic crisis delegitimized democracy in the Philippines, paving the way for Marcos’s new technocratic regime.

Similarly, Gasiorowski and Power argued that levels of socioeconomic development—proxied by university enrollment levels—are the best indication of whether or not democracies will fail.<sup>237</sup> As they noted, this confirms modernization theories of democratization that posit the im-

portance of socioeconomic development for democratic transition and consolidation. Again, however, this correlational finding begs the question: in our theory, development is a proxy for the ability of states to generate all sorts of legitimating outputs including democracy itself, so it should be no surprise that development creates legitimate states, which in turn sustain democracy. Their other major finding, that democratization in neighboring states has a positive effect, is ascribed to the “ideas, norms, and political pressures transmitted from abroad.”<sup>238</sup> But in the absence of any regional hegemons in the areas they studied, the “political pressures” of neighboring democracies are probably less important than the “ideas and norms” that they transmit. Again, avowedly “structuralist” accounts may be masking questions of legitimacy.

A final note: just as legitimacy is implicated in democratic failure, either as a background or a critical cause, any new authoritarian regime immediately faces the same challenges of legitimation. Marcos after 1972 launched a New Society movement to try to heal cleavages, redistribute land, and restart the economy—but after a decade his regime lost legitimacy and was overthrown by the “People Power” movement of 1986. In Pakistan after 1999, Musharraf pledged to clean up politics and control terrorism. Yet his sacking of the country’s chief justice in 2007 marked the erosion of his right to rule. As the leader of the movement put it: “Musharraf is rapidly losing the minimum respect that gives you the moral authority to rule a country.”<sup>239</sup>

A few words are worthwhile to conclude the discussion of the role of legitimacy in institutional change, including democratization. If most institutional change is driven in the direction of becoming more legitimate most of the time, a question that arises is why the world is not populated by high-legitimacy states. The answer is that the world is indeed populated by states that are more democratic, better governed, and better at development than in any previous historical era. Subjective evaluations will always depend on current best practice and information levels; in objective terms, states have a greater claim to the right to rule than ever before. Legitimacy-driven processes of institutional change have brought about better institutions because they empower the average citizen, who is generally a good judge of what works best.

That said, institutions can and do go through lengthy periods of legitimacy disequilibrium as countervailing forces take charge—an ar-

gument made most explicitly above about some types of democratic breakdown. Institutions are no more in a permanent “legitimacy equilibrium” than they are in a permanent “interest equilibrium.”<sup>240</sup> Russia lost a decade to its postcommunist transition, and Uganda’s lost years under Obote and Amin totaled two decades. While legitimacy is indispensable for explaining the key pressures for institutional change, it is a clumsy tool for the understanding of year-to-year variations, a “slow-moving” social phenomenon compared to the “fast-moving” politics of a state.<sup>241</sup>

In general, however, there is no escaping the force of legitimacy. Tilly, writing in a realist vein, argued that “recognition of the centrality of force opens the way to an understanding of the growth and change of government forms.”<sup>242</sup> Yet the evidence presented here shows that this is a misleading characterization of institutional change. The moral fetters of politics are not marginal but central to the evolution of states. Thus to rephrase Tilly (again), *recognition of the centrality of legitimacy opens the way to an understanding of the growth and change of government forms*. While legitimacy must be carefully invoked to explain any particular change, ignoring it in favor of a “structural” or “realist” approach turns out to be the least realistic approach of all.

## INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

International politics often looms large in the domestic legitimation cycle, as we have seen. Global factors influence domestic political demands, global norms shape legitimacy evaluations, and global actors evaluate the legitimacy of various states. But domestic legitimation also affects international politics. Citizens may judge their states based on their international behavior. For example, the Argentinean attack on the Falkland Islands in 1982 was a bid to shore up a faltering military regime, and Japan’s reluctance to send troops abroad since World War II has reflected deep antiwar sentiments among the general population. Beyond explicit citizen demands, the level and nature of domestic legitimacy may inadvertently affect the way that states behave internationally: North Korea’s illegitimate and violent domestic rule is perfectly reflected in its paranoid international behavior.

To the extent that international politics is an extension of domestic politics in either of these senses, we would expect that those states whose domestic orders more strongly reflected the imperatives of legitimacy would shape their international behavior likewise. They would be engaged in creating legitimate international institutions, pursuing legitimate agendas, and constructing legitimate relationships with other state and nonstate actors in global politics. We can refer to this as the “legitivist” theory of international politics.

This legitivist theory is a subset of a wider “liberal” school of international politics that pays attention to the domestic sources of international behavior.<sup>243</sup> Liberal theories of international politics differ from “realist” theories insofar as the latter explains state preferences as being objectively defined by a common set of state “interests”—power, wealth, territory, prestige, etc.—unrelated to its particular society, history, or state-society relations. (A third, “institutional” school focuses on the structure of the international system itself.)

Moravcsik identifies three distinct variants of the liberal school of international politics, which I label economic (his “commercial”), interest-group (“republican”), and legitivist (“ideational”). As defined by Moravcsik and others, the economic and interest-group variants share an essential feature with realist theories, namely a focus on the pursuit of some objectively defined “interests.” The only difference is that in economic and interest-group theories, these interests derive from social actors rather than from the state itself. Only the legitivist variant pays particular attention to the *ideas and norms* that guide state behavior, that is, to the social construction of reality that characterizes all “constructivist” approaches to international politics (which are sometimes distinguished from liberal approaches). In Moravcsik’s words, the legitivist approach centers on “the set of preferences shared by individuals concerning the *proper* scope and nature of public goods provision, which in turn specifies the nature of legitimate domestic order.”<sup>244</sup> According to Russett and colleagues, the legitivist approach is built upon “an understanding of the legitimate rights of all citizens and of all republics.”<sup>245</sup>

Moravcsik notes that legitimacy is contested domestically and is thus even more likely to be contested internationally. International cooperation and compromise will therefore depend upon the emergence

of shared legitimacy norms. As I have argued here, the contemporary world is characterized by a remarkable convergence on such norms.

Moravcsik and others such as Holsti<sup>246</sup> have made a compelling case for the centrality of liberal theories as a whole. Realist and institutional theories, they argue, can explain neither the actual behavior of states nor the substantive content of international politics. Indeed, realist theories often inadvertently make reference to the importance of domestic politics—as when they seek to explain responses to “expansionist” powers (why are they expansionist?) or when they specify variations in the “interests” that states pursue (why the variations?).<sup>247</sup> Scholars have thus advocated the adoption of “two-stage models” in which domestic factors are analytically prior to the realist and institutional considerations that further shape state behavior at the international level.<sup>248</sup> A key characteristic of this trend is the “*domestication* of international affairs.”<sup>249</sup>

Assuming that liberal theories are central, to what extent do the three liberal variants complement or challenge one another? The theoretical arguments in favor of the economic and interest-group variants are well known and can be briefly summarized. The economic variant, which is closest to Kant’s conception of the conditions necessary for a “perpetual peace” in world affairs, focuses on the mechanism of expanded commercial interactions across borders. This is expected to generate constituencies in favor of peace and cooperation *if* peace and cooperation serve such interests. Commercial interests may, for instance, be sensitive to the costs of conflict incurred through foregone business opportunities, higher taxes, or material and labor conscription. Or they may view war and conflict as being economically beneficial.

The interest-group variant is similar, but assumes that a wider range of constituencies are relevant. It seeks to explain a state’s international behavior as a result of coalitions of interest groups that arise within it, which in turn depend critically on the nature of representation in the state. The notion of a “democratic peace”—a probabilistic claim that when two states are democratic, the interests on both sides are more likely to favor peace over war—arises from this variant.<sup>250</sup>

Recalling the possibility of causal interdependence between structures and ideas (variant 4), economic and interest-group factors may also operate by shaping a state’s views about what is most legitimate in inter-

national affairs. Some scholars frequently refer to the global pursuit of development, governance, rights, and democracy as “new hegemonies”—that is, global legitimacy norms that are stalking horses for the realist, economic, or interest-group concerns of powerful states.<sup>251</sup>

The theoretical arguments in favor of the legitimist theory center on the claim (made above) that the state itself is a creature of legitimacy, understood as being relatively autonomous of structural factors. Thus the “interests” that a state pursues internationally are doubly so: because they are determined by the domestic legitimation cycle and because they are then reshaped by the imperatives of international legitimacy. On this view, the pursuit of global democratization is promoted by states because it is a shared norm of legitimate rule. To the extent that conflict persists, it is because either the pertinent legitimacy norms remain generally unsettled—on questions of the scope of international law, for instance—or one of the parties to a conflict does not share in the global consensus—as in the case of “rogue” regimes.

The steep decline in international conflict in the early twentieth century<sup>252</sup> and the spread of cooperative institutions covering dozens of areas from human rights to nuclear nonproliferation is thus a result of *normative* convergence above all. From this perspective, ideational factors have primarily driven the creation of such institutions as the International Criminal Court, the United Nations human rights regime, and the World Bank.<sup>253</sup> Arch-realist Keohane’s latter-day attention to the question of legitimacy in international institutions reflects a belief in the centrality of legitimacy to the success or failure of such institutions.<sup>254</sup> As Clark notes, in the absence of a binding sovereign, international institutions are almost wholly dependent on legitimacy for their creation and survival.<sup>255</sup> There is now a broad research agenda for those who study the centrality of legitimacy norms to international politics.<sup>256</sup>

From the legitimist perspective, realism—domestic or international—is relevant only within the boundaries and concepts defined by legitimacy. Indeed, legitimacy norms may shape those factors themselves (variant 3). The transnational NGOs to which “realists” ascribe near-supernatural powers, for instance, may be powerful for a much simpler reason: they represent widely held (“utopian”) beliefs about the appropriate uses of political power. The dogged U.S. support of Israel that re-

alists so often denounce as inconsistent with some objectively defined “national interest” is another good example: conceptions of legitimacy have reshaped U.S. perceptions of what those interests demand. A similar argument could be made about U.S. support for Taiwan or opposition to communist Cuba.

The legitimist perspective thus contains a broad prediction about the nature of international order. If states domestically are increasingly engaged in mediating through fair processes the competing claims of pluralistic societies, then this will affect relations among peoples as well. So global tensions are no different from the tensions of domestic politics: the inevitable result of states seeking legitimacy amid growing pluralism. Rather than a “clash of civilizations” (irreconcilable differences) or a “democratic peace” (disappearing differences), the legitimist approach to international politics predicts a middle position, what might be called a “debate of civilizations.” The designation of 2001 as the UN Official Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations captured this notion of societies that were neither converging nor clashing but conversing, just as they do domestically.<sup>257</sup>

Moravcsik refers to “the analytical priority of liberal theory”<sup>258</sup> for international politics. But if legitimacy, rather than just any domestic demands, is definitive, then an alternative claim would be *the analytical priority of legitimacy to international politics*. As Clark summarized: “What proves to be legitimate at any time . . . provides an essential explanation of state conduct.”<sup>259</sup>

Statistically, we can examine the linear relationships between the three liberal theories and four different types of international outcomes (see table 5.4). The interest-group variant of liberal theory is operationalized, as Moravcsik suggests, using a measure of democracy, a system of representation that increases the salience of interest groups. The assumption is that a greater diversity of interest groups will increase pressures on the state to behave cooperatively because the costs of conflict tend to be broadly borne whereas the benefits are usually narrowly distributed. The economic variant is operationalized using the ratio of a country’s total international trade in goods and services to its total economic output. The assumption is that where economic interests are more dependent on international sources, they will be more likely to advocate pacific international behavior by their states. Legitimacy is measured

**Table 5.4** Explaining International Cooperation and Conflict

Bivariate correlation coefficients (r) and significance levels in multivariate regression (OLS), ***: p<0.01, **: p<0.05, *: p<0.10.	Legitimacy	Democracy	Trade Dependence
Memberships in International Organizations (n = 67)	0.71***	0.68***	-0.06**
Levels of Foreign Assistance (n = 21)	0.73**	0.89***	0.38
External Conflict (n = 65)	-0.33	-0.45**	-0.32**
Military Spending as % GDP (n = 68)	-0.30	-0.48***	-0.11

SOURCES: Legitimacy: as measured in chapter 1; Democracy: World Bank Institute, Voice and Accountability, 2001; Trade: total trade of goods and commercial services divided by nominal GDP at market exchange rates, 2003–2005, World Trade Organization; Memberships in International Organizations: memberships in intergovernmental international organizations, 2002, *Yearbook of International Organizations*, 2003/4; Levels of Foreign Assistance: commitment to Development Index, 2006 (mostly based on data from 2003 to 2005), *Foreign Policy Magazine/Center for Global Development*; External Conflict: International Country Risk Guide External Conflict, 2002; Military Spending: military spending as a % GDP, 2002; Jeffrey Chamberlin, “Comparisons of U.S. and Foreign Military Spending,” Congressional Research Service, Report RL32209, 28 Jan 2004.

as in chapter 1, but consistent with the universalistic basis of legitimist theory, I exclude the four major outlier countries—Azerbaijan, China, Russia, and Tanzania (although this does not affect the overall results).

A state’s international cooperativeness has often been measured by the extent of its memberships in international organizations. Legitimacy and democracy are both closely related to such memberships, and both remain significant predictors in a multivariate setting with all three variables (trade has an unexpected but small negative effect). Together, democracy and legitimacy account for 58 percent of the variation in memberships across the 67 states. Attributing causal significance to democracy, interpreted in the interest-group sense, implies that international memberships are usually beneficial to coalitions of domestic interest groups. Alternatively, it may be that such memberships impose costs and restraints on domestic interests that they oppose. If so, then the strength of the democracy variable would relate to how broad representation leads to the pursuit of policies that *transcend* such interests, in other words, to the pursuit of legitimate ends. Both interpretations are consistent with the literature on the subject.<sup>260</sup> Democracy, then, plays both a structural and an ideational role. Legitimacy plays its expected ideational role, but because of its majoritarian character cannot capture the minority concerns that democracy does.

The developmental stance of wealthy countries toward poor countries is another test case. The Commitment to Development Index includes indicators of the aid, trade, investment, migration, environment, security, and technology policies for 21 of the rich countries in our data set. Again, both legitimacy and democracy are closely related to the extent of a rich country's commitments, and both remain significant predictors in a multivariate setting—accounting for roughly 84 percent of the variation across the 21 states. Scandinavian countries do best, accounting for four of the top five spots, while southern European countries do worst, accounting for three of the bottom five. The former tend to be both more democratic and more legitimate and the latter less so on both counts.

In the case of the legitimist explanation, states whose domestic behavior involves the pursuit of common-good policies are more likely to be engaged in similar behavior globally, and development will figure prominently in the mix. Their self-identities as agents of the domestic common good are globalized into identities as agents of the global common good. This mechanism does not rely on citizens directly espousing the normative view that their states should be doing more for global development. The empirical link between a state's legitimacy (or more loosely defined "public opinion") and its performance on such global obligations remains weak at best.<sup>261</sup> Legitimate states do not engage in more developmental efforts because their publics directly impel them to do so. Rather, they do so because their internal cultures, which are directly related to their levels of legitimacy, lead them to do so.

This raises a question about the strength of the democracy variable. If democracy is interpreted in the interest group sense, the finding seems unusual because groups espousing greater foreign aid or developmental assistance are generally relatively weak. The Center for Global Development argues that democracy and development commitment are linked because "in wealthy democracies with less accountable governments, special interests hold more sway."<sup>262</sup> In other words, democracy explains overseas development when interest-group power is less, not more, just as is part of the story with respect to memberships in international organizations. On this interpretation, strong democracies are those in which common-good demands *trump* interest-group demands and thus strengthen the commitment to overseas development.

But this interpretation is about a legitimist view of democracy, not an interest group-based one. Committing to overseas development is one of the purest forms of common good behavior insofar as the immediate or even foreseeable payoffs to any identifiable interests are virtually negligible. Although direct aid may be more subject to rent-seeking, the overall stance of a country on developmental issues as measured here depends more on the broad norms by which public policy is made. Here, democracy's strength alongside legitimacy can only be interpreted within the legitimist framework.

Finally, on the question of international conflict, legitimacy will act as a pacifying force to the extent that a state is not legitimated through particularistic sources that come into conflict with those of other states, or to extent that the state does not face a legitimacy crisis. If either of those conditions is untrue, the state's internal character will be liable to bring it into conflict with other states—Napoleon's armies marching on Europe in the name of French notions of freedom, for example, for example, or Shevardnadze's Georgia offering safe haven to Chechynan rebels from Russia. The stalemated Iran–Iraq War of 1980 to 1988, which took an estimated 500,000 soldiers' lives and perhaps another one million civilian lives, involved two states that were both prone to conflict from this perspective—a particularistically legitimated Iran espousing Shia fundamentalism and a delegitimated Iraq under Saddam Hussein maintaining its rule through domestic violence and bribery. Elsewhere, Tomz shows how wars between Western powers and debt-defaulting states in the nineteenth century were driven not by the economic interests of repayment but by the security concerns raised by states in legitimacy crisis.<sup>263</sup>

Economic and interest-group factors might be expected to reduce conflicts for the same reasons as sketched above: in a global age, interest groups and economic interests are most often opposed to state conflict. Democracy in particular creates structures—a free press, opposition parties, an openness to mediation, committees and think tanks that scrutinize the costs of war, etc.—through which wars are reduced, sometimes for common-interest reasons but also for self-interested reasons. Again, democracy thus interpreted captures both legitimist and interest-group concerns.

Two different measures of international conflict are used here: the International Country Risk Guide series, which defines external conflict

as “the risk to the incumbent government and to inward investment, ranging from trade restrictions and embargoes through geopolitical disputes, armed threats, border incursions, foreign-supported insurgency and full-scale warfare”; and the proportion of a country’s economic output devoted to military spending. In the former, both democracy and trade dependence are close predictors of conflict—although together they can explain only 25 percent of the overall variations. In the latter, democracy alone proves to be a good predictor, again explaining only 23 percent of variations. Obviously, there is much more to conflict or military spending than liberal theories of international politics alone can explain. Structural factors like “bad neighborhoods,” disputed borders, alliances, and arms flows must be invoked to explain when international conflicts arise. But among liberal theories, democracy is the most important.

How can we explain the lack of linear correlation between state legitimacy and international conflict? In the case of low-legitimacy states, the absence of legitimacy may either stoke or restrain conflict. States that are sustained by massive repression (North Korea or Myanmar, for example) are more conflictual because their repressive nature is easily externalized. However, Morgan and Anderson argue that other low-legitimacy states are less vulnerable to international conflict because low legitimacy inhibits their ability to mobilize the resources for war, say by conscripting soldiers or selling war bonds.<sup>264</sup> Thus, one would need conjunctural factors, such as the ready availability of draft soldiers or alternative revenue sources (as North Korea has generated through drugs and counterfeiting) in order to explain conflict in delegitimated states. Alternatively, Morgan and Anderson speculate that the leaders of such states may believe that external conflict would simply not help their cause—military regimes in Greece, Portugal, and Argentina all fell from power in the late twentieth century because of failed wars. Thus just as low legitimacy may be more a consequence than a cause of internal conflict (the case of Colombia in table 5.2), leaders of low-legitimacy states may choose not to risk a further deterioration of their standing by engaging in international conflicts.

In medium- to high-legitimacy states, again legitimacy may stoke or restrain international conflict. If states over time have become more legitimate in longitudinal terms and on a more similar basis, as I have

argued, then we have a mechanism to explain declining international conflict. A congruence of values between states will lead to the same pacific consequences as it does between state and society. When states “see eye to eye” because they are based on similar imperatives of legitimacy, they are more likely to cooperate. In other words, where states are equally congruent with the same general sources of legitimacy, their relations are more likely to be peaceful because they share fundamental moral imperatives. No less a realist than Kissinger has noted that international “stability has commonly resulted not from a quest for peace but from a generally accepted legitimacy.”<sup>265</sup>

But when states’ domestic legitimacies are not based on shared universal principles, legitimacy may give rise to international conflict, just as economic or interest-group competition may. If states have different understandings about what is legitimate, they will find themselves in ideational-driven competition, as Bukanovsky has argued of revolutionary France<sup>266</sup> or as Ninic has argued with respect to “renegade regimes.”<sup>267</sup> The reason China’s rise is potentially unsettling to the international system is not so much that its relative power is a threat to the power of the United States. The United States, after all, encouraged and welcomed the rising power of a united Europe. Rather, China represents an ideational challenge to shared international legitimacy norms—especially with its deemphasis on democracy and its reemphasis of the inviolability of state boundaries.<sup>268</sup> Again, there is a close parallel to the cases of Azerbaijan and China in the typology of internal conflict in table 5.2: legitimacy in such instances may worsen conflict because it is insensitive to the concerns of “minorities,” which in this case are rival powers.

Thus even the legitimacy measure used here is too rough to capture the possibilities of particularistic legitimacy arising within apparently universalistic states—the India–Pakistan conflict being a good example. The influence of neoconservative views that consciously eschewed global norms under U.S. President George W. Bush shows how seemingly norm-congruent states may, in critical instances, act more like outliers. As with internal conflict, legitimacy needs to be judiciously invoked in any explanation of international conflict. For the purposes of prediction, it is a clumsy tool. For the purposes of explanation, it remains essential.

Without doubt, all five theories of international politics—legitivist, economic, interest-group, realist, and institutional—have *something* to contribute to our understanding of any issue area. None should ever be taken as paradigmatic. The U.S. decision to invade Iraq in 2003, for instance, was certainly driven in part by American unipolarity (a realist explanation)<sup>269</sup> and by the weakness of international institutions (an institutionalist insight).<sup>270</sup> Economic interests may have played a role too, although given the ambivalence of U.S. oil companies toward the invasion, this explanation has generally been found wanting.<sup>271</sup> Interest-group theories offer more insight since powerful “anti-Saddam” lobbies comprised of security hawks and Iraqi exiles were able to exploit the “policy window” created by the 9/11 attacks, while the lack of representation in Iraq made it difficult for effective coalitions to develop against the war.<sup>272</sup> Finally, from the legitivist viewpoint, an important role was played by the “neoconservative” ideology of ending Saddam’s tyranny and spreading democracy to the Middle East irrespective of the views of international institutions.<sup>273</sup> On the Iraqi side, Saddam’s Iraq was a low-legitimacy state that relied upon coercion and fear for its survival. The 2003 war was the culmination of Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which, like its attack on Iran in 1980, was a classic diversionary war. The result was that a unipolar America—backed by a strong domestic coalition in favor of war and seeing itself as the rightful agent of international society—took it upon itself to invade Iraq, a war-prone and illegitimate state.

If anything, the Iraq example shows the potential dangers of state legitimacy in international politics because legitimacy norms are so likely to be contested. By contrast, interest groups, economic or otherwise, are more likely to have a pacifying influence where the institutions of information, debate, balancing, and accountability are working well. Trade and democracy, then, still offer the best hopes for international peace in the absence of institutions of global governance that effectively contain the effects of struggles over the question of rightfulness in international politics. On this view, international politics reflects the danger that arises when antagonistic views of justice clash outside of any widely legitimate world order.

Legitimacy, then, provides a useful corrective to overly interest-based approaches to international politics, especially in matters of coopera-

tion and aid. In the case of conflict, it is essential for a full understanding, but only in conjunction with an understanding of the structural factors (domestic or international) that condition its effects. Like domestic politics, international politics cannot be separated from the moral imperatives of rightful rule.

In the summer of 2007, the Nigerian president Umaru Yar'Adua told a visiting delegation of tribal elders from the country's oil-rich Niger River delta region that their various requests for everything from road repairs to inclusion in a delta people's advisory council would be considered in light of the country's common good. "I will do what is right and provide service in the interest of all Nigerians," Yar'Adua told them. The same month, a group of rebels in the delta region issued a statement calling for the appointment of more indigenous people to top positions in the country's oil industry. "There must be willingness and a concerted effort on the part of government and relevant stake-holding groups to do what is right at all times," their statement read.<sup>274</sup>

This simultaneous invocation of "doing what is right" is a rhetorical strategy that suffuses politics in every country. Yet political scientists have been trained to ignore this rhetoric as meaningless babble that conceals the "real" interests and motivations of the relevant actors. Writ large, the question of rightfulness in politics—that is, of legitimacy—is dismissed as a sign of naiveté. Good scholarship, on this view, requires a self-imposed isolation from the moral dimensions of politics, similar to the "trained incapacity"<sup>275</sup> that Veblen accused business owners of having with respect to the social dimensions of their activities. Legitimacy in particular is "self-consciously eschewed"<sup>276</sup> as a distraction from the central business of domination, resistance, trickery, and bribery that politics is assumed to be.

In this chapter, I have been at pains to show the ways that this is an empirically accurate view of politics. Some types of conflict and some types of democratic failure are the work of structural or realist factors in which issues of legitimacy are either marginal or wholly irrelevant. I hope also to have shown the many ways that legitimacy does matter, in ways that either complement or entirely displace realist or structural arguments. In ignoring legitimacy, we ignore a central facet of politics, namely the burden of justification imposed upon any who would use

political power. Writ large, the concept of legitimacy proves to be a parsimonious and powerful explanation of many political phenomena, from state failure and revolutions to democratization and multilateral cooperation.

Politics is a complex process and no single variable could hope to encompass it all. Beetham's claim that legitimacy is "not merely an important topic, but the central issue in social and political theory"<sup>277</sup> is overstated, if only because a single explanation rarely suffices to explain all things. Nonetheless, legitimacy matters sufficiently in most instances to make it worthy of serious consideration in explanations of politics. Whether Nigerian President Yar'Adua's subsequent reforms in the delta region were motivated by the demands of maintaining legitimacy or by other factors is, at the very least, something to be answered by empirical inquiry. In other words, legitimacy must be "brought back in" to the study of politics, whatever the challenges, lest the discipline lose sight of this critical force shaping the political world. In the conclusion, I outline the implications of this study for research, policy making, and normative philosophy.