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## Elites, Crises, and Regimes in Comparative Analysis [1998]

*Mattei Dogan & John Higley*\*

**Abstract:** »*Eliten, Krisen und Regime in vergleichender Perspektive*«. Most political regimes, whether authoritarian or democratic, are born in abrupt, brutal, and momentous crises. In this volume [Mattei Dogan, and John Higley: *Elites, Crises and the Origins of Regimes*], a group of prominent scholars explores how these seminal events affect elites and shape regimes. Combining theoretical and case study chapters, the authors draw from a wide range of historical and contemporary examples to challenge mainstream developmental explanations of political change, which emphasize incremental changes and evaluations stretching over generations. Instead, the authors argue here, political leaders and elites possess significant autonomy and latitude for maneuver, especially in times of crisis. And their choices are frequently decisive in the making of regimes and the forging of national political histories. Providing a sustained comparative analysis of elites, their circulation, and behavior across times and countries, this lucid volume will be invaluable for scholars and students alike.

**Keywords:** elite, elite theory, political change, crisis, regime, comparative analysis.

Most political regimes, whether authoritarian or democratic, are born in abrupt, brutal, and momentous crises. Crises are the birth certificates of regimes: they mark their start; they can be found in the histories of nearly all countries; and they are commemorated by solemn ceremonies, days of remembrance, and many symbols. Crises involve sharp confrontations among political elites, and they often produce changes in elite composition and functioning that are manifested by new or significantly altered regimes. Especially in moments of crisis, political leaders and elites possess significant autonomy and latitude for maneuver. The choices they make at such moments are frequently decisive for the outcomes of crises and for the regimes that follow. Political elites are never wholly independent actors, but neither are they simply the puppets of larger class, economic, ethnic, or religious forces.

Comparativists who study political regimes have customarily given priority to gradual processes of political development, comprising incremental changes and evolutions stretching over generations. This approach reflects the conver-

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gence of comparative politics with sociology and social history. Although beneficial in many respects, it has led comparativists to neglect momentous crises and to overemphasize the *longue duree*. The idea that regimes emerge in step with changing economic conditions, mass beliefs, political cultures, and other glacial processes of social maturation ignores the seminal importance of sudden and dramatic crises in the making of regimes and the forging of national political histories.

We believe that it is time to return to the study of how crises affect political elites and regimes. Comparativists must bow before the enormous historical fact that most regimes are born in crises and elite confrontations; they originate in political impasses and elite power struggles fraught with the potential for great violence. It is necessary to re-establish this fact and to admit that theories that ignore the pivotal roles played by crises and elites in the birth of regimes have limited validity.

A perusal of the circumstances in which most European regimes were born supports our belief. The British regime's birth occurred in England's great political crisis of 1688-89, the so-called Glorious Revolution, when Tory and Whig elites rid themselves of the detested James II and established a parliamentary regime that has lasted to this day. Today's regime in Sweden stems directly from the crisis of 1808-9, during which time the country, governed by the incompetent Gustav Adolf IV, was in economic disarray and was threatened by Russian and French-Danish military invasions; as in England, leaders of opposing elite camps unseated the monarch and in five weeks negotiated a new and lasting parliamentary regime. In Amsterdam in the winter of 1813-14, the basic structure of today's Dutch regime was created in a fusion of elites from previously disparate Dutch provinces amid the collapse of French military occupation; it was consolidated constitutionally in the subsequent political crisis of 1848. The latter year also witnessed the brief civil war in which the modern Swiss regime originated. In France, crises in 1789, 1799, 1814, 1830, 1848, 1852, 1871, 1940, 1945, and 1958 spawned the revolutionary, dictatorial, monarchical, and several republican regimes that have made up the tumultuous French political record. Paralleling that record, Spain's several authoritarian, monarchical, and republican regimes during the past two centuries were all born in crises, the most recent of which began with Francisco Franco's death in 1975.

In Germany during the twentieth century, elites were reconfigured and new regimes were produced in four major crises: those of 1918-19, 1932-33, 1945, and 1989. Austria and Italy experienced two crisis-generated elite and regime changes during the first half of the century: in Austria, the downfall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 and the onset of an authoritarian regime under conditions of civil war in 1934; in Italy, the consolidation of the Mussolini fascist regime in a crisis during 1924-25 and that regime's demise toward the end of World War II. Portugal's long-lived and authoritarian Estado Novo

regime originated in a sharp economic and political crisis in 1926, and its successor, today's democratic regime, was created in the crisis of 1974-75, when a losing effort to retain African colonies culminated in coups and power struggles among military and political elites. Similarly, in Greece in July 1974, a crisis that arose from the involvement of the colonels' regime in a coup against the government of Cyprus and an ensuing Turkish invasion of Cyprus precipitated an elite reconfiguration and the rebirth of a democratic regime in Athens.

The list of crisis-induced elite and regime changes extends far beyond Western and Southern Europe. In Russia, the Soviet regime was, of course, born in the great revolutionary crisis of 1917-18, and it collapsed in the space of a few months during another severe crisis in late 1991. The Soviet regime's weakening during 1988-89 produced political crises throughout East Central Europe from which diverse postcommunist regimes emerged. The regime in Mexico today dates back to a political crisis that started with the assassination of president-elect Alvaro Obregon in July 1928; Japan's democratic regime was born in total military defeat and occupation at the end of 1945; Iran's theocratic regime originated in a crisis during late 1978 and early 1979, when the shah was forced to abdicate and an Islamic republic was proclaimed; in South Africa, a crisis that climaxed between June and September 1992 provided the incentive for elites to create a substantially new and more inclusive democratic regime.

This book [Mattei Dogan, and John Higley: *Elites, Crises and the Origins of Regimes*] explores these and other crises and their effects on elites and regimes. Its premise is that political regimes are deeply imprinted by the genetic crises and elite disruptions in which they are born. By studying crises and the elite changes they involve, much can be learned about the origins and trajectories of political regimes. This is not a simple undertaking, however, because the relation between elites, crises, and regimes is extraordinarily complex and variable. First, some political crises do not lead to significant elite and regime changes. The dramatic *tempête* in France in May 1968 produced widespread panic among elites and the political class, but it was nevertheless contained without important changes among French elites or the regime of the Fifth Republic. To take another example, the armed confrontation between the Russian government's executive and parliamentary branches in Moscow in October 1993 was clearly a crisis, but it produced few changes in elite makeup and regime functioning. Second, some regimes originate in circumstances that fall short of profound crises. A number of the recent transitions from authoritarian to democratic regimes in Latin America (Peru in 1980, Uruguay in 1984, Brazil in 1985, Chile in 1989) involved the negotiated transfer of government power from military to civilian elites in situations that were undoubtedly tense but hardly crises. Third, there can be significant elite changes, accompanied or unaccompanied by crises, without any clear regime change taking place. The gradual, electorally driven circulations of political elites in countries with sta-

ble, politically representative regimes illustrate this pattern: witness Britain over the past two centuries and the succession of sixteen political dynasties, from the Adams to the Kennedy families, in the United States (Hess, 1966).

Adding to the complexities, crises take many forms, and their intensities vary. As Alan Knight observes in chapter 2, there is no simple metric by which major crises can be distinguished from minor ones. Crises have a subjective component, so that what we as observers might regard as a major or a minor crisis may well be perceived as the opposite by actors who are embroiled in it; needless to say, it is actors' perceptions that count. To give one example, comparativists observing Chile during 1973 might have had a hard time identifying a climactic crisis, but military and right-wing political leaders in July and August that year felt the political and economic situation to be so dire that seizing power and liquidating Salvador Allende and his government was to them essential. Nor is there any easy way to distinguish between simmering crises and sudden, crippling ones. As Michael Burton and John Higley note in chapter 3, Colombia has long been beset by guerrilla insurgencies, and many outside observers would say that Colombia has been in continual crisis throughout the past half century. But since the late 1950s and down through President Ernesto Samper's recent entanglement with drug cartels, there has been no crisis explosive or powerful enough to reconfigure elites or change the regime; conversely, as Burton and Higley show, the crisis in Colombia that did produce elite and regime change, during 1957-58, had little connection to ongoing guerrilla insurgencies.

To make the puzzle still more complex, crises frequently involve more than elite confrontations. Mass protests, riots, strikes, uprisings, and assorted terrorist actions are often prominent features of crises, helping to shape their severity and paths. Many students of politics hold that mass discontents and pressures greatly limit elite autonomy, and never more so than during crises. Is it, therefore, wrong to focus primarily on what happens to elites in crisis situations? Should one instead concentrate on mass and "structural" forces? This is one of the issues most frequently raised in comparative politics and political sociology. Although we cannot hope to resolve it, exploring the relation between elites, crises, and the origins of regimes yields much evidence about the political intersections of elites and mass publics.

### Characteristics of Crises

Because the term "crisis" is so casually and routinely used by politicians, commentators, and scholars to characterize all manner of events and situations, its meaning must be specified. By *crisis* we mean an abrupt and brutal challenge to the survival of a political regime. A crisis most often consists of a short chain of events that destroy or drastically weaken a regime's equilibrium and effectiveness within a period of days or weeks. More rarely, a crisis is a

chain of individually small but cumulating events and power confrontations that unfold over several years. In either sense, crises should not be confused with the “historical crises” of center-periphery, church-state, land-industry, and owner-worker cleavages on which scholars associated with the school of political development focused during the 1960s (e.g., Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Binder, 1971). Although those lasting cleavages generated many specific power struggles, they were not crises as we think of them.

Typically, crises involve a sudden flaring of belligerence by one or more of the elite groups that are jockeying for government power, a rapid escalation in the volume and intensity of political actions, and a clear change in the flow of power exertions among elites, as well as greatly increased elite insecurities. There is always much uncertainty about the outcomes of crises, and this uncertainty is immediately and intensely felt by the supporters and opponents of an existing regime. Unlike palace intrigues aimed at changing the pecking order among individual actors, crises have far-reaching implications. They threaten to involve large segments of elites, and even of society, in violent actions more or less immediately. The Algerian crisis in France in May 1958 was a prototypical case: in a single week of high drama, General Charles de Gaulle reentered French political life and agreed to become premier, and in so doing he staved off impending civil war.

It is necessary to distinguish crises not only from lasting cleavages and the changing power balances they gradually produce, but also from the assorted “affairs” and scandals that are often dubbed “crises” by commentators and journalists. The Dreyfus affair, which dominated French public life between 1894 and 1906, or the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals, which respectively preoccupied American politics during the early 1970s and mid-1980s, were not crises in our sense. The Dreyfus affair involved a heated moral, intellectual, and ultimately political debate about justice in France. The American scandals centered on breached codes of political behavior and standards of political rectitude among government officials and institutions. But these long-running disputes and revelations did not challenge the survival of the French and American political regimes, nor did they gravely weaken either regime’s equilibrium and effectiveness.

Crises are potentially major turning points in politics. They go beyond the pushing and shoving, the tactical maneuvers and surprises, that capture headlines and are the stuff of everyday politics. Thus, a “government crisis” brought about by the loss of a parliamentary majority (as occurred more than fifty times in Italy between 1947 and 1997), by revelations of corrupt or immoral practices among the high and mighty (as happens recurrently in all countries), or even by the sudden demise of a powerful chief executive (such as the murder of Sweden’s prime minister Olaf Palme in 1986) are not in themselves crises, though they may sometimes be part of the backdrops to crises.

## A Rough Inventory of Crises

Specifying what we mean by political crises is a first step. However, the circumstances in which crises occur and the forms they take are so diverse that it is impossible to group them in a few tidy categories. It is nevertheless useful to assay several main kinds of crises and to explore their somewhat differing effects on elites and regimes. We propose the following rough, admittedly incomplete and overlapping, inventory.

One kind of crisis often occurs when territories achieve national independence. Especially after a violent secession struggle, national independence may involve the ascendancy, *ex abrupto*, of a new political elite. The new elite's functioning, as well as the character and effectiveness of the regime it erects, are usually highly uncertain. There is much initial disorganization; new political institutions are unfamiliar and untested; the new regime's writ is not everywhere obeyed; different groups want to go in different directions or in the same direction at different speeds; there are old rivalries and scores to be settled; economic and other resources are in short supply. In 1948 there were 46 independent national states recognized by the United Nations; today there are more than 190, many of them in old countries that have been resurrected. Not infrequently, their births or rebirths have occurred in crises from which deeply divided political elites and harsh authoritarian rule have stemmed. A good example is the chaotic struggles that attended the Belgian Congo's abrupt independence in June 1960 and their legacy of dictatorial rule by Joseph Mobutu over what came to be known as Zaire.

A second, especially stark kind of crisis arises from defeat in warfare. The responsibility for defeat is almost always sheeted home to the political and military elites who presided over it. Where they are not annihilated, these elites, as well as the regime they operated, are destroyed politically. An ancient example was the overthrow of democracy in Athens following the disastrous defeat of the naval fleet sent to Sicily in 415 B.C. Some twentieth-century examples are the crises arising from military defeats of the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman imperial regimes at the end of World War I. Still deeper crises arose from the devastating defeats suffered by the Japanese and German Nazi regimes in World War II. Other instances of political crises stemming from defeats in warfare include France after the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-71, Portugal after failure in its African colonial wars in 1974, Greece indirectly by the Turks in Cyprus that same year, and Argentina in 1983 after losing its war with Britain over the Falkland Islands. In each case, the existing regime either was destroyed or was so gravely weakened by defeat that there followed a period of great political uncertainty while surviving and emerging elites maneuvered for power.

A third kind of crisis, and one that has received much study, is "revolution." The quotation marks are necessary because there is no agreed definition of

revolution (for a typology of revolution, see Dobry, 1992). But whatever is precisely meant by the term, most historians and comparativists agree that revolutions have punctuated the modern political record. As the American historian Crane Brinton (1965) shows in his “anatomies” of the English, French, Russian, and (more dubiously, in our view) American revolutions, they constituted political crises of the highest order. Revolutionary crises involve interregnums in which all the expectations of normal political life cease to obtain, there is for the moment no clearly constituted regime, and political power is up for grabs. Recent scholarship on revolutions links them closely to defeats in warfare (the Russian and Chinese communist revolutions) or to fiscally enervating foreign adventures such as those France undertook during the 1780s under Louis XVI (Skocpol, 1979, 1994).

A fourth kind of crisis that might be distinguished involves the withdrawal of foreign support for ruling elites and the regimes they operate. A physical analogue would be the cracks that temperature changes create in the polar icecaps, so that great icebergs drift away and later melt. When foreign support is withdrawn (the “temperature” changes), elites dependent upon that support lose much of their capacity to rule, so that deep “cracks” at the elite and regime level quickly open. This approximates what happened in the countries of East Central Europe once the Soviet Union signaled, during 1988 and early 1989, that it would no longer use force to shore up communist elites and regimes in the region. In less than a year, eight countries recovered their national independence and established new regimes, although most entrenched elites survived by shedding their communist mantles, adopting nationalist idioms, and reveling in testimonies about their country’s ancient lineage. However, the withdrawal of foreign support for a regime often occurs in the midst of, and due to, a crisis that already challenges the regime in question. It was in such circumstances that the United States withdrew its support for the Batista regime in Cuba in late 1958, for the shah’s regime in Iran during the last weeks of 1978, and for the Marcos regime in the Philippines at the start of 1986. The withdrawal of foreign support can thus be more like the proverbial straw that breaks the camel’s back, greatly fueling and perhaps even shaping the outcome of an already existing crisis.

Political “implosions” may constitute a fifth kind of crisis. As happened to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, a radical decompression or a rapid and grave weakening of state apparatuses (the military, police, the central administration) takes place. Ruling elites suddenly find themselves without support from any quarter, their capacities sclerotic, and their decisions and edicts largely ignored. But violent struggles between ruling and challenging elites, accompanied by mass uprisings or military defeats by hostile foreign powers, are not central aspects of the situation. Implosions, in other words, are not the same as revolutionary crises. Although the societies in which implosions occur suffer great distress, most institutions and elites manage to survive, and there is no



chaotic interregnum when power is “in the streets.” There is, however, much disarray among political elites; regime leaders are discredited and forced to leave politics; their lieutenants hastily repackage themselves politically or move to elite positions outside politics; hodgepodes of leaders and cliques reconstitute the decompressed state, possibly with new territorial boundaries. Reflecting the trauma of implosion crises and the positional scrambles they entail, political elites become badly fragmented; elite relations and political game rules are in flux, and conflicts proliferate. All of this makes the character and direction of postimplosion regimes uncertain.

Implosion crises result from a concatenation of accumulating economic malfunctions, spreading corruption among elites, and greatly increased difficulties in keeping national states that are culturally and regionally segmented intact. They consequently take the form of a self-dissolution, of self-destruction – a kind of collective political demission or resignation. One example is the decision of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party on October 7, 1989, to dissolve itself (1,059 delegates to the party congress voted for dissolution, and only 159 resisted it). Or consider the Czechoslovak communist regime’s relinquishing of power in the space of ten days during November 1989. The Soviet regime imploded quite suddenly and unexpectedly during the autumn months of 1991, even though dissipative tendencies had been evident for some time. Under the postcommunist Russian regime that followed, living standards dropped precipitously, with roughly half of all economic activity taking place underground and outside state control or regulation. The Yugoslav regime imploded with nearly equal suddenness during 1990-91. The hecatomb of much of the Italian political elite between 1991 and 1994 in a whirlpool of revelations about corrupt practices is another interesting case, although the regime itself never quite imploded.

Weak political regimes in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa seem particularly vulnerable to small-scale implosion crises. In this region, states are skeletal, in part because they are beset by vertical political cleavages between ethnic groups with regional bases, rather than by horizontal cleavages based on social class. Consequently, instead of revolutions there are successive small implosions followed by the ascendancy of new but short-lived ruling cliques. Whether more sweeping implosions will occur in such multiethnic and territorially fragmented states as Indonesia, or in the somewhat culturally and regionally divided China, is a question of great importance.

Do economic disasters constitute another distinct kind of crisis? Stephen Haggard and Robert Kaufman (1995) think so, and they are certainly not alone in this belief. They argue that a sharp deterioration in a country’s aggregate economic performance may challenge its political regime by adversely affecting a wide segment of the population and by forcing ruling elites to adopt dramatically different policies. The new policies alienate the coalition of groups that benefited from the previous, failed policies and supported the elites. If the

new policies do not quickly reverse the economic deterioration, and if the ruling elites are unable to fashion a new and powerful coalition to support those policies, the elites may be overthrown and the regime replaced. Like defeats in warfare, economic disasters may thus constitute crises in which elites are re-configured and regimes are changed. In Germany during the Great Depression, economic collapse and mass unemployment, preceded by a catastrophic monetary inflation during 1923-24, climaxed in the brutal political crisis and elite machinations that unfolded during December 1932 and January 1933, following the Nazi Party's strong performance in 1932 elections. Its outcome was the harsh Nazi dictatorship that followed Hitler's ascendancy as chancellor at the end of January 1933, the Reichstag fire, which he used as a pretext for assuming emergency powers less than four weeks later, and the rigged elections he engineered in early March 1933. Similarly in the Soviet Union, as Jack A. Goldstone discusses in chapter 5, ever more dire economic circumstances during the 1980s lay behind Mikhail Gorbachev's increasingly divisive efforts to reform the Soviet system. The result was a profound political crisis during August and September 1991 in which the Soviet regime was effectively destroyed.

It is clear, however, that not all economic disasters produce elite- and regime-destroying crises. Anglo-American and Scandinavian elites and democratic regimes survived the Great Depression, Mexican elites and the PRI regime weathered severe economic crises in 1982 and 1994-95 (discussed in chapter 4), and during 1992-93 elites and regimes in Venezuela and Peru were badly shaken but not destroyed by failed coups and constitutional confrontations that were in great measure fueled by steep economic declines. It thus appears that only in some conditions – the central feature of which may be the presence of elites that are already deeply divided and therefore unable to implement effective new policies – do economic disasters constitute highly destructive crises.

Another, more indistinct kind of crisis involves sudden breakdowns of unstable democratic regimes. In Europe twenty-two new democracies emerged overnight from the cataclysm of World War I, and eight older democracies survived the war: those in Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden (Spain and Portugal might be added, though nascent democratic regimes in both countries soon fell in crises during the 1920s). Born in war-induced crises and upheavals, only two of the twenty-two new democratic regimes (Finland and Ireland) were still functioning at the start of World War II in 1939. Among the older democracies, as already noted, Italy succumbed to a fascist regime when a chain of crises involving postwar insurrections and Mussolini's 1922 "march on Rome" climaxed in the crisis triggered by the Fascists' murder of Socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924. By 1939, Europe was a cemetery of twenty-one collapsed democracies, each of them destroyed in a crisis during which nondemocratic forces seized

power. But admittedly, the crises in which sudden democratic breakdowns occur are highly variable in their forms and intensities, so that it is difficult to speak of a generic “democratic breakdown crisis.”

A coup d’etat is often a central feature of such breakdown crises, and coups figure importantly in the other kinds of crises we have surveyed. We are reluctant, however, to view coups as a distinguishing feature of crises. Most coups are limited to skirmishes over the control of a few strategic buildings. They reveal the weakness of states and are manifestations of fights and rivalries among political leaders and cliques. But most coups merely alter political pecking orders in small ways (for example, the numerous and recurring coups by cliques of military officers in many African countries). Only where the state is strong may a coup result in a substantial replacement of elites and a change of regime. Coups led by the two Napoleons in France (1799 and 1852), by Col. Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt (1952), and by General Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973) are good examples. They might constitute another kind of crisis or perhaps help to specify the heterogeneous “breakdown crisis” we have mentioned, but we see no obvious way to separate the relatively few consequential coups from the many inconsequential ones.

It will be apparent that the kinds of crises we have canvassed often overlap and compound each other. To take a particularly elaborate example, defeat in warfare followed by an implosion crisis led to a revolutionary crisis in Russia in 1917. After disastrous military setbacks at German hands and mass troop desertions, strikes and demonstrations broke out in St. Petersburg on March 7, 1917. One week later, Nicholas II abdicated, and a political implosion of the tsarist regime occurred. A month later, the run-up to a revolutionary crisis began with the arrival of Lenin, and that crisis climaxed with the Bolsheviks’ seizure of power on November 7, 1917. Similarly in Turkey during 1917, military defeat of the Ottoman regime was followed by the regime’s implosion and by the emergence of a charismatic leader, Kamal Ataturk, who then reconstituted the state and initiated a modernizing process (Dogan, 1984). A comparable sequence of military defeat, political implosion, and the emergence of a “providential” leader (Marshall Philippe Petain) unfolded in France in 1940.

We do not mean to suggest that in a given country and time there is but one kind of crisis or that crises always and everywhere consist of a few brief and clear-cut events. Rather, we are focused primarily on crises as important phenomena in the study of elites and the origins of regimes. Our rough inventory helps, we hope, to accomplish this aim. It is relevant to note that only one of the seven kinds of crises we have distinguished – the revolutionary crisis – appears among the four modes of transitions from authoritarian regimes that Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe Schmitter (1991) have outlined. Among their three other transition modes, elite “pacts” specifying a programmed alternation in power may or may not modify the basic character of a regime. Some pacts do indeed have this consequence, but as Burton and Higley argue in chapter 3,

many do not. The “imposition” mode Karl and Schmitter discern in the Soviet transition is, we believe, better viewed as a regime implosion. Similarly, whereas Karl and Schmitter treat the Yugoslav regime’s disintegration as illustrating a fourth “reform” mode, events since they constructed their typology more clearly indicate an implosion. Finally, a series of cases they evaluate as “difficult to classify” are for us crises that arose from defeats in warfare: Japan and Germany-Austria in 1945, Greece and Portugal in 1974, Argentina in 1983. Other cases unclassified by Karl and Schmitter underwent elite and regime changes during crises that stemmed from the sudden withdrawal of foreign support: Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria in 1989. It is necessary, moreover, to consider all kinds of crises and regime changes, not just exits from authoritarian rule. Crisis-generated replacements of authoritarian regimes by other dictatorships and breakdowns of democratic regimes must also be studied.

### Crises and Elite Change

“Elite” is a word that is used almost as casually and routinely as “crisis.” In some sociological studies, however, “elite” is given a more precise meaning by estimating the size of a social system’s top level. One example is tsarist Russia at the end of the eighteenth century, in which the individuals who monopolized ruling functions have been estimated to number nine thousand men (LeDonne, 1993, 288). Obviously, there are difficult questions about the definition and criteria of “eliteness.” In 1947, the Hungarian communist government deported some ten thousand “capitalists” from Budapest and other large cities to rural villages. In 1941, Stalin’s secret police agents decapitated the Polish army, executing some fifteen thousand officers at Kalinin, the Katyn Forest, and Starobel’sk. Certainly, all of those Hungarian businessmen and Polish officers were not “rulers,” though many analysts and observers would see them as part of their country’s “elites.” The French “political class” has been estimated at three thousand persons in 1990, even though various *Who’s Who?* compilations numbered France’s “visible elites” at approximately twenty thousand persons (Dogan, 1994).

The size of political elites or of a strictly defined political class depends on a country’s size. For countries the size of Germany, it is plausible to think in terms of a few thousand persons who head the major institutions, organizations, and political movements and who are able to take, force, or impede political decisions on a regular basis (Hoffmann-Lange, 1992). For countries the size of the United States, the most plausible number is closer to ten thousand persons (Dye, 1983). Located in an array of hierarchies and sectors, political elites usually display widely varying interests and stances, including antiregime stances in many countries. There are, of course, tens or hundreds of thousands of people in a modern society who resemble elites in levels of education,

wealth, and other social characteristics and whose second-echelon positions in powerful institutions, organizations, and movements enable them also to influence political decisions. But the political influence of these persons is usually intermittent, indirect, and limited to specific issues pertaining to the organizations and movements in which they are located. They are better thought of as “shadow elites” or what Gaetano Mosca (1939) calls the “second stratum.” By *political elites* we refer only to holders of strategic positions in powerful organizations and movements, including dissident ones, who are able to affect national political outcomes regularly and significantly.

Political elites are the critical actors in crises. Indeed, many crises are initiated by the actions or inactions of leaders and tiny groups at the top of the political pyramid. Political fights among elites occur precisely because it is unclear who will win them, and their outcomes are seen to depend upon the actions that various leaders and elite groups may or may not take. We contend that, especially in crises, the “makers of history” enjoy a latitude of action. We adduce as evidence the innumerable memoirs and testimonies of political leaders recalling the crises they faced, the hopes, doubts, and fears they harbored, and the choices they made on the basis of assumptions they knew were frail. The search by historians for causes, determinisms, and “necessary” outcomes of crises comes later, when the dust has settled. If, by some magic, historians could do their job in advance of crises, then crises would not occur because the potential losers would adopt a different strategy. In working such magic, however, historians would do away with most of political history.

There are few political crises that do not alter the composition and functioning of elites in important ways. Crises and elite change are closely related. Getting a better grip on the genetic importance of crises, therefore, requires comprehending the kinds of elite changes they may induce. This is the province of elite theory, the seminal contributions to which were made by Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and, to a lesser extent, Robert Michels early in the twentieth century, even though all three elite theorists too often neglected the role of crises in propelling elite change.

## Elite Composition

Crises most often affect the composition of political officeholders (e.g., cabinet ministers, party leaders, and parliamentarians). Changes in the makeup of bureaucratic, economic, and other elites who stand at some distance from the corridors of government power are usually less pronounced, though crises also frequently produce important changes in the composition of military elites. Japan in 1945 is an excellent example, and it is the subject of detailed analysis by Hiromitsu Kataoka in chapter 9. According to the Potsdam Declaration of August 2, 1945, only persons who had not been associated with the defeated Imperial regime could hold high political office in postwar Japan. In an early

study, Hans Baerwald (1959) found that some 210,000 Japanese notables who survived the war were purged by the American occupation authorities. Kataoka confirms Baerwald's estimate for notables, though he adds on the basis of more recent research, that altogether some 640,000 persons were purged from Japanese public life during the years after 1945. Four of every five of those purged were military officers; but 16.5 percent were former political leaders and activists. However, the upper reaches of the formidable Japanese government bureaucracy were left virtually intact. Out of a total bureaucratic elite "talent pool" numbering 8,300 officials, fewer than one percent were purged. Likewise, the largest part of the business elite escaped the purge. As General Douglas MacArthur explained, some of the most able business leaders were removed because they were "born and bred as feudalistic overlords who held the lives and destiny of the majority of Japan's people in virtual slavery and geared the country with both the tools and the will to wage aggressive war" (quoted in Baerwald, 1959, 93). Nevertheless, Baerwald found that only 468 of a total of 2,395 private enterprise owners and managers were removed, while Kataoka, in chapter 9, calculates that fewer than one percent of the top business elite were purged. Baerwald concludes that

on the basis of statistical evidence it is fallacious to believe that the purge substantially altered the composition of Japan's leadership in these [bureaucratic and business] fields of endeavor; the purge was, at best, only temporarily and partially effective in changing the economic leadership of Japan (93).

In Germany, too, most business and bureaucratic elites survived the Nazi takeover in 1933, and they also survived the Nazi regime's total defeat in 1945, as Ursula Hoffmann-Lange recounts in chapter 8. Although its members collaborated actively with Hitler's government, the business elite remained intact, and it largely retained its autonomy during the Third Reich. With only a few exceptions, the business elite was similarly unaffected by the Nazi regime's destruction. As Hoffmann-Lange (chapter 8) and also Herve Joly (1995) show, business leaders moved from the Nazi regime to the Federal Republic regime during and after 1945 without difficulties. Most high-level German bureaucrats also survived the Nazi regime's destruction, even though the occupying authorities gave priority to recruiting and promoting new bureaucrats untainted by Nazi associations. Studying the demise and replacement of the Ottoman and Chinese imperial regimes early in the twentieth century, Fred Riggs (1994) has found an altogether similar continuity of administrative and business elites, despite the Turkish and Chinese regime changes.

Six possible effects of crises on political elite composition can be distinguished:

- Some elite persons and groups remain untouched and retain their positions, with each case being of special interest,
- Some are obliged to accept less powerful and prestigious but still politically influential positions,

- Some are pushed out of politically influential positions and forced to take up more nonpolitical and specialized positions,
- Some are obliged to accept obscure positions (e.g., an ambassadorship in a peripheral country) or other cushioned sinecures,
- Some manage to undergo “ideological conversions” at early points so that they survive politically in the postcrisis regime,
- Some incumbents of elite positions, as well as some positions themselves, are simply eliminated, although the sectoral proportions vary and must be investigated in each case. This is the most significant effect of crises on elite composition, but it is also the most difficult to measure and evaluate.

The extent of such changes in the composition of political elites differs among the several levels of a political hierarchy: at the apex or nucleus of the political system, at immediately adjacent echelons, or at middle ranks. The amount of change also differs between a nation’s capital and its regional and local centers. The extent of elite replacement depends, additionally, upon similarities and differences between the old and the new regime: if both are authoritarian or both are democratic – what Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996) call “within-type” regime transitions – the replacement is likely to be less substantial than in “out-of-type” transitions from authoritarian to democratic regimes or vice versa.

Most crises, in any event, engender a change of guard at the elite level, although the new guard does not necessarily appear overnight. New elites often emerge piecemeal, coming from “shadow elites,” from prisons, from exile, and from underground organizations. These new elites are seldom able to take charge of a crisis in its early stages. However, by the time a new regime is instituted, there is a significantly altered set of elite groups, at least some of which have had little or no previous experience in top-level power positions.

### Elite Relations and Behavior

In order to assess changes in elite functioning that occur as a consequence of crises, we suggest distinguishing between political elites that are fundamentally disunited and those that are “consensually” or “ideocratically” united. Disunited elites are marked by pervasive distrust and fear. The groups making them up adhere to differing codes of political conduct, view politics in winner-take-all terms, dispute the worth of political institutions, and engage in unrestrained, often violent struggles for government power. Where a political elite is disunited, an irregular seizure of executive offices through a coup or elite-led uprising is probable during a crisis. Its result is usually an authoritarian regime operated by the group or groups that carry out the power seizure. Although crises and the elite struggles they involve may sometimes open the way to more democratic regimes, a new democratic order is likely to be short-lived unless

elites have somehow managed to become more united during the crisis that produces that order.

There are, however, two distinct configurations of united political elites. In one, all or nearly all groups belong to a dominant party or movement, and they uniformly profess its ideology, religious belief, or ethnonationalist creed – an “ideocratic” configuration that is primarily coerced (Piekalkiewicz and Penn, 1995). Such an “ideocratically united” political elite usually originates in a revolutionary crisis during which an extremist group gains the upper hand, destroys most of its rivals, and dictates that henceforth anyone who possesses or aspires to power must conform to the extremist group’s doctrine and organizational base: examples include the Russian Bolsheviks from 1921, Yugoslavia’s League of Communists from 1945, Mao’s communists in China from 1949, Castro’s communists in Cuba from 1961, and the Shia fundamentalists in Iran from 1980. An ideocratically united political elite may also be created when a foreign power imposes an extremist group on a country following conquest in warfare, as occurred in East Central Europe after World War II and in South Vietnam in 1975. Because of their exceptional capacity to identify and weed out “troublemakers,” regimes created by ideocratically united elites tend to be long-lived.

In the other configuration of united elites, groups are affiliated with competing parties, movements, and beliefs, but they share a consensus about rules and codes of restrained political competitions. Such “consensually united” political elites have sometimes originated in fundamental compromises and accommodations negotiated by leaders of waning elite camps. As Burton and Higley discuss in chapter 3, such sudden and deliberate “elite settlements” appear to occur only during profound crises that threaten elite bloodletting but at the same time provide key leaders with strong incentives and sufficient autonomy to “settle” the most basic disputes between their respective camps. The much-analyzed Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 in England was the classic instance of an elite settlement (see chapter 3 and, *inter alia*, Mansfield, 1964; Rustow, 1970; Weingast, 1997). Consensually united political elites have also originated through political cooperation in operating “home-rule” governments in colonial territories and through unifying elite struggles for national independence (e.g., American, Australian, Canadian, Indian, and New Zealand elites under and then against British rule; Norwegian elites under and then against Swedish rule during the nineteenth century; Senegalese elites under and then against French rule before and after World War II). Once political elites become consensually united, their competitions for electoral and other support are restrained and conducive to the peaceful, politically binding elections that are the hallmark of stable democracies, or at least of liberal oligarchic regimes like those in the English-speaking and Scandinavian countries before universal male suffrage was introduced.



These distinctions between disunited and two types of united elites are, of course, simplifications. In reality, political elites in all countries compete continually for advantage, and none is ever fully united. Similarly, most political elite groups have nothing to gain in a war of all against all, so probably no political elite is ever completely disunited. Elite professions of ideocratic unanimity always conceal doctrinal disputes and much jockeying for power; a voluntary elite consensus about the rules and proprieties of restrained competitions is always fraying and in need of reinforcement; disunited elite expressions of unbridgeable oppositions are often belied by secret deals. The extent to which political elites are disunited or united thus fluctuates with changing circumstances, and the ambiguities and secretiveness of elite behavior make its assessment difficult. Nevertheless, we believe that shifts from one to another of these basic patterns of elite functioning can be observed in a significant number of countries, and we contend that these shifts usually occur during or immediately following political crises.

Studying the relation between crises and regime changes must therefore involve assessments not only of the changing compositions of political elites but also of changes in their disunited or united functioning. In revolutionary crises, wholesale change in both the composition and functioning of elites is likely. In other kinds of crises, there may be significant change in one but not the other aspect. In crisis-induced settlements, for example, there is usually little change in elite composition but a fundamental change in elite functioning. In most crisis-induced overthrows of authoritarian rulers, conversely, there is usually significant change in elite composition but no basic change in elite functioning; the authoritarian rulers are replaced by a congeries of cliques and factions that continue the disunited pattern that sparked or contributed to the crisis in the first place. In chapter 8, Hoffmann-Lange discusses how the disunited pattern continued in Germany down to the Nazi regime's onset; in chapter 9, Kataoka traces the same pattern among Japanese elites from the Meiji Restoration of 1868 until the end of World War II.

## Crises and Regime Change

A political regime is the basic pattern by which government decisionmaking power is organized, exercised, and transferred in a society. We may speak, for example, of monarchical or republican, parliamentary or presidential, and authoritarian or totalitarian regimes (Linz, 1975). A regime is not necessarily synonymous with the current wielders of government power – a “Chirac regime” in France or a “Clinton regime” in America at the time of this writing. Chief executives such as Jacques Chirac and Bill Clinton and the governments (or “administrations,” in the more accurate American term) they lead come and go according to electoral fortunes, scandals, party splits, and much else; but the basic pattern of organizing, exercising, and transferring government power

among its successive holders may nevertheless persist, and in some countries it has done so over long periods. Thus, in Britain there have been many Tory, Whig, Liberal, Labour, and assorted coalition governments since the Glorious Revolution; but government executive power has been continuously organized, exercised, and transferred in accordance with the principles and processes of a sovereign, popularly and periodically elected parliament that were agreed by contending elites in that seminal crisis. Britain has, in effect, had but one slowly evolving political regime during the past three hundred years. In France since 1789, by contrast, the organization, exercise, and transfer of government power has oscillated between five republican, three monarchical, and two “imperial” regimes, plus an authoritarian one (the Vichy regime during World War II), each of which was born in a major crisis.

Comparativists have constructed many typologies of regimes, but we are content to use the most familiar and basic one: traditional (monarchical), authoritarian, totalitarian, and democratic regimes. Each type can be unstable or stable according to the occurrence or nonoccurrence or the perceived likelihood or unlikelihood of irregular seizures of government power through coups and uprisings. The composition and functioning of political elites is, we contend, the most important determinant of the type of regime that exists in a country. There are, of course, other determinants of regimes, but none is as critical as the configuration of elites. Where elite composition changes only gradually and where elite groups are consensually united, stable democratic regimes evolve and persist over long periods (e.g., the Anglo-American and Scandinavian democracies); where elite composition changes even more slowly but where elite groups are ideocratically united, relatively stable totalitarian regimes persist and perhaps evolve toward a post-totalitarian condition (e.g., the Soviet Union from 1922 until 1991, or the Chinese communist regime from 1949 to the present; for a discussion of the posttotalitarian condition, see Linz and Stepan, 1996). On the other hand, where there are sizable changes in elite composition during crises and where elite groups remain disunited, a succession of unstable authoritarian regimes, perhaps interrupted by unstable and short-lived democratic regimes, is the usual pattern (e.g., all Latin American countries during the nineteenth century and most African countries during the past forty years).

Between these stable democratic, stable totalitarian, and unstable authoritarian poles, however, there are several complex patterns and possibilities. At least eleven “itineraries” of regime change that are associated with crises and with the changed elite compositions and patterns of elite functioning that crises produce can be identified (see table 1.1).

These itineraries do not exhaust the modern record of regime changes, and our classification of some of the typical cases can be disputed. Our purpose is to highlight the importance and variability of crisis-induced elite changes in the origins of regimes. The itineraries listed involve different patterns of elite re-

placement and elite functioning, but several complications need to be mentioned. As regards elite replacement, one complication is hierarchical level: the higher the level, the greater the extent of replacement. In many regime changes, as noted earlier, the entire group of uppermost political rulers is replaced, while the turnover of political elites at middle levels is more limited. A second complication, also commented on earlier, is sector: elite replacement is almost always greater among top-level political leaders than among other powerful elite groups such as high-level bureaucrats, business leaders, or prominent clergy. A third complication is geographic: elite replacement is usually greater in the political capital of a country than in its provincial cities and towns. A fourth complication is simply the size of the political elite: the smaller and more concentrated the top of the political hierarchy, compared with middle and lower levels, the greater the rate of the top elite's replacement. Still another complication is time: if a regime has been long-lived, an entire generation of previous political leaders will have died by the time a regime change occurs, and there will accordingly be that many fewer experienced leaders available for top positions; conversely, if a regime is short-lived, leaders of one or more earlier regimes may reappear rapidly to construct a new regime.

In studying the relation between elite change and regime change, it is also necessary to take into account "conversions" or adaptations by political leaders and elites. Elite replacement may be limited because many persons and groups suddenly convert to a new regime and its principles. A famous example was the chief rabbi of Toledo who became Catholic bishop of that city when Queen Isabel ascended to the Spanish throne in 1474. Such conversions may occur at all levels of a political hierarchy, and through them elites may retain their positions or obtain comparable ones. The existence of political chameleons is well known in French history, and the world has recently witnessed more or less wholesale conversions to liberal democratic principles among the former communist elites of Eastern Europe.

Finally, a change of political elites is possible only if there is an organized opposition and thus a reservoir of counterelites. A new ruling elite cannot be created *ex nihilo*. When their communist regimes fell between 1989 and 1991, the countries of Eastern Europe were not pluralist societies. Apart from Poland, where the communist regime had always been more authoritarian than totalitarian (Higley and Pakulski, 1995; Linz and Stepan, 1996), there were no free parties, no free trade unions, and no economic forces independent of the state, and in the Orthodox countries of the region there were no relatively independent church hierarchies. Because of the absence of counterelite power bases under communist rule, it is not surprising that large proportions of postcommunist elites have consisted of persons who were prominent in the communist regimes.

Table 1.1: Itineraries of Regime Change and Associated Patterns of Elite Change

<i>Regime Itinerary</i>	<i>Elite Composition/Functioning</i>	<i>Typical Cases</i>
Traditional to stable democratic	From notables to professional politicians, progressively chosen in free elections/Consensual unification of elites	England, 1688-69; Sweden, 1808-9; Netherlands, 1813-14
Traditional to authoritarian	Annihilation of ruling class/ New elites are disunited	Turkey, 1922; Egypt, 1952; Ethiopia, 1974
Traditional to totalitarian	Annihilation of ruling class/New, ideocratically united elite takes over	Russia, 1917-22; Yugoslavia, 1945; Iran, 1979-81
Unstable democratic to stable democratic	Hecatombs of a political class/Consensually united elite begins to form	France, 1958-62; Italy, 1992-94
Unstable democratic to authoritarian	Replacement of politicians by military and bureaucratic elites/ Elites disunited	Portugal, 1926; Spain, 1936-39; most East European countries, 1919-39
Unstable democratic to totalitarian	Persistence of bureaucratic and business elites/New, ideocratically united political elite represses opposition elites	Italy, 1922-26; Germany, 1933
Authoritarian to new authoritarian	Opposition elites annihilated/Ruling elites remain disunited	Indonesia, 1965
Authoritarian to stable democratic	Authoritarian ruler toppled/ Consensual unification of remaining elites	Costa Rica, 1948; Colombia, 1957-58; Venezuela, 1957-58
Authoritarian to totalitarian	Annihilation of ruling elites/New, ideocratically united elite takes over	Most East European countries, 1945-48
Totalitarian to posttotalitarian	Rise of technocratic elites/ Ideocratically united ruling elite begins to fragment	Hungary, 1970s-80s; U.S.S.R., 1970s-90s; China 1990s
Posttotalitarian to stable or unstable democratic	Ruling ideocratically united elite implodes/Consensual fusion or fragmentation of surviving elites	Hungary, 1989; U.S.S.R.-Russia, 1991

### Crises, Elites, Regimes: Questions about Causation

We have argued that political crises are pivotal events that frequently produce changes in elites and regimes. The historical and contemporary political record on this point is indisputable. Put in the form of a simple causal model,

political crisis → elite change → regime change

As we have seen, however, the relation between crises, elites, and regimes is not so straightforward. When it is “unpacked,” as we have begun to do in this chapter and as Alan Knight does in the next chapter, the causal arrows quickly start to point in both directions. Crises effect changes in elites and regimes, to

be sure, but elites and regimes often create crises. Many crises involve, but they also derive from, elite confrontations and regime weaknesses. The danger of tautology is evident: elites and regimes change during crises that elites and regimes create.

One way to reduce the circularity is to look for conditions in which the preponderant flow of causation is from crises to elites and regimes and for other conditions in which the preponderant flow is in the reverse direction, from elites and regimes to crises. Crises created mainly by exogenous forces – conquests by foreign powers, fluctuations in world markets that create local economic disasters, as well as calamitous earthquakes, fires, and floods – may independently cause changes in elites and in the regimes elites operate. Similarly, crises that originate in dramatically altered situations of mass populations – the onset of famines, diseases, and population explosions or sudden mass migrations into territories – occur more or less independent of existing elites and regimes, yet they may serve as catalysts of elite and regime change.

We are interested, however, in more overtly political crises: the achievement of national independence, defeat in warfare, a revolutionary outbreak, a mainly endogenous economic disaster, an implosion of elite and regime power bases, a democratic breakdown. As Knight worries in chapter 2, most political crises have important origins in elites and regimes themselves, and their analysis is indeed uncomfortably tautological. At the same time, Knight contends, most political crises have important mass or “structural” causes. To this extent, it is not crises themselves that explain elite and regime change but, rather, the mass and structural conditions that fuel crises in which elite and regime changes then take place. In Knight’s view, our claim that political regimes originate in crises and elite confrontations is at best only half the story, and at worst it ignores the most important causes of political change, which are the conditions and forces that shape mass discontents and propel mass actions. Moreover, Knight argues, there are reciprocal relations between elites and mass publics, so that elites compete for the support of mass publics, which the latter are always capable of withdrawing, and there are also reciprocal relations between regimes and mass publics, so that regime strength or weakness shapes the probability and success or failure of antiregime mass mobilizations.

Somewhat contrary to Knight, we regard the idea that mass publics may revolt or otherwise force a regime change without emerging or existing political elites mobilizing and leading them to be as misleading as the notion, before Pasteur discovered microbes, that “agents” of diseases are generated spontaneously. We do not ignore the occurrence of sudden, essentially “eliteless” peasant jacqueries, worker riots, or student demonstrations. These take place sporadically in nearly all known societies and historical periods. In a discussion of mass uprisings in Mexico – especially the self-proclaimed “Zapatista” uprising that occurred in the state of Chiapas on January 1, 1994 – Knight, in chapter 4, highlights the importance of such events. But more or less spontaneous

manifestations of mass discontent (the Kwangju uprising in South Korea in 1980, the Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing during May and June 1989) do not by themselves topple regimes. One reason is that they are almost always too local and short-lived to have such a momentous effect. For masses to bring down regimes, especially modern regimes with all the firepower they deploy, serious organization and the articulation of a clear leadership or elite that can plan and direct a mass assault on the bastions of power is essential.

Our skepticism about the importance and independence of mass publics in producing crises and the elite and regime changes they entail is not widely shared among comparativists. Knight takes direct issue with us in the next chapter, and he argues cogently for the proposition that, especially during crises, mass publics play decisive roles. Is it in times of crisis that elite autonomy wavers and contracts, as he suggests, or is it precisely at moments of traumatic events that the freedom of political leaders and elites to make decisions, wisely or foolishly, is greatest? Burton and Higley argue in chapter 3 that in the kinds of crises that produce elite settlements, elites are very much in control; indeed, settlements are possible only where this is so. Hennie Kotze's detailed account in chapter 10 of how elites maneuvered and largely controlled the crisis in which South Africa's regime was transformed during the early 1990s supports and further illustrates Burton and Higley's argument. Assessing the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 as stemming from a true revolutionary crisis, Jack A. Goldstone similarly concludes, in chapter 5, that the crisis unfolded primarily from the top down – from changes in elites – rather than from the bottom up. Indeed, much of the recent writing about the Soviet regime's dramatic implosion highlights the absence of mass actions (e.g., Fish, 1995; Hough, 1997; Kotz, 1997).

The competing views of elite or mass causation fit different historical circumstances. Neither is universally valid, and each can be supported with numerous examples. But precisely because of this, naive theories that pretend to universal validity fail. In March 1917 in St. Petersburg, thousands of civilians and soldiers played the decisive role. But during the forty-eight hours between the assassination of Caesar and the meeting of the Roman Senate, only a handful of individuals played the crucial, and exclusive, role. If forced to choose between the competing views, we believe that the weight of historical evidence is that leaders and elites are the substantially autonomous and thus decisive actors in crisis situations.

The following chapters explore how patterns of crises have affected political elites and regimes in a score of countries. All the authors are less interested in why these crises occurred – questions of complex causation and historical contingency that require full-fledged historical studies – than in their consequences for elites and political regimes. We suggest that three propositions emerge:

- The crises studied greatly challenged existing regimes and the political elites that operated them, so that substantial elite and regime change was unavoidable.
- The character of successor regimes was a product of the choices that leaders and elites made during the crises, and those choices are best understood in terms of the changed composition and functioning of elites.
- The crises were profound enough to ensure that there could be no going back, that is, that the new elite configurations and regimes were likely to persist, absent another deep crisis.

In sum, the crises and elite and regime changes dealt with in this volume were watershed events in the politics of the countries where they occurred. They demand a central place, despite their contingent and impetuous character, in explanations of political change.

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