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Introduction

A CENTURY OF SHOCKS AND WAVES

The winds and waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators.

—EDWARD GIBBON, *DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE*, 1776

The twentieth century was shocking in its volatility. It witnessed the greatest creation of wealth in human history, and the subjugation of millions into unimaginable misery. According to the calculations of some economists, if we take life in the bleak sixteenth century as the baseline level of 100, during the twentieth century the Earth's average standard of living rose from 700 to 6,500—the sharpest increase ever recorded, by far. During the very same period, the number of people who perished from war, genocide, and other forms of politically organized carnage totaled between 160 and 200 million people—making it the bloodiest chapter on record.¹ The paradoxical, Janus-faced nature of modern life has been defined by peace and bloodshed, abundance and famine, progress and barbarity all coexisting within the same brief span of civilized existence.

It is only appropriate, then, that the evolution of domestic institutions in the twentieth century has also been exceptionally volatile. Since the end of World War I, the expansion of democracy around the world has been driven by democratic *waves*—turbulent bursts of regime change that quickly sweep across national borders (see figure 1.1).² Moments of dramatic upheaval, not

1. De Long 1998 and the appendix in Ferguson 2006 offer a detailed discussion of the numbers.

2. The global average is measured using the Polity IV index (rescaled from 0 to 100; see Mar-

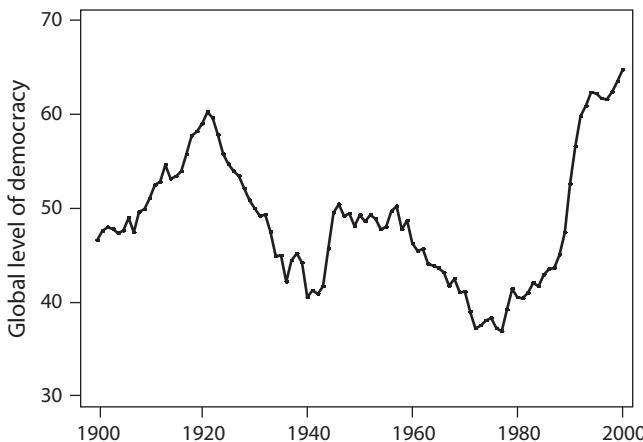


FIGURE 1.1. Global levels of democracy, 1900–2000.

steady and gradual change, have been the hallmark of democratic evolution. Nor is this pattern of fits and starts limited to democracy: both fascism in the late interwar period and communism after World War II expanded through abrupt cross-border surges that quickly transformed the global institutional landscape (see figure 1.2).³

Why does democratization occur in waves that cluster in space and time? And what does the looming persistence of these institutional waves, both democratic and nondemocratic, tell us about the nature of domestic reforms in the twentieth century? After all, a number of powerful theories have been put forward to explain the causes of democratization. Many of these, however, focus on some element of the country's internal environment that can help or hinder reforms—economic development, class relations, or civil society, to name just a few. These domestic explanations cannot tell us much about waves of regime change, which by definition defy and transcend national influences. Understanding the sources of these waves requires stepping outside the state and focusing on the international system as a whole.

In this book I offer an explanation for the timing, intensity, and content of regime waves during the twentieth century. My central argument is that abrupt *hegemonic shocks*—moments of sudden rise and decline of great powers—act

shall and Jagers 2007). A similar pattern shows up using other measures of democracy, including dichotomous indices like Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013.

3. While nondemocratic regimes (currently) lack detailed measures like Polity, figure 1.2 charts fascist and communist waves by measuring the relative share of world power held by these states. National power is calculated via the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC), an aggregate of five indicators: total and urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, military expenditure, and military personnel. See Singer 1987. The full list of communist and fascist states is presented in appendix 1.



FIGURE 1.2. Communist and fascist shares of global power, 1900–2000.

as powerful catalysts for cross-border bursts of domestic reform. These intense geopolitical disruptions not only alter the global hierarchy of leading states but also shape the wave-like spread and retreat of democracy and its rivals. As a result, the volatile evolution of domestic regimes during the twentieth century has been closely linked to sudden tectonic shifts in the structure of global power.

The relationship between the international and the domestic is often obscured by the vivid particularities of local transformations—the despised tyrant, the crowds in public squares, the seemingly unique social forces and historical contingencies that shape each country’s institutional trajectory. But as I show throughout the book, the aftermath of hegemonic shocks creates powerful incentives for domestic reform even in countries that have little to do with the great powers themselves. The case studies, focusing on the four hegemonic shocks of the twentieth century, explore periods of domestic change that were deeply embedded in larger international shifts and in fact could not have occurred without them. While rare and fleeting, hegemonic shocks have left a lasting footprint on the path of modern institutional development.

Though each regime wave was unique, its broad contours were shaped by predictable material and social changes in the global order forged by the hegemonic transition. Namely, there are three recurring mechanisms that connect shocks to waves—hegemonic coercion, inducement, and emulation.

First, hegemonic shocks produce windows of opportunity for regime imposition by temporarily lowering the costs and raising the legitimacy of foreign occupations. The communist wave in Eastern Europe, for example, was made possible by the Soviet Union’s victory in the Second World War and its postwar ascent to superpower status. In fact, great powers act very differently

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in the immediate wake of hegemonic shocks—they become much more likely to intervene in other states, and when they do so they are much more likely to impose their own regime than in periods of “normal” politics. The outcomes of foreign interventions are therefore contingent on the effects of hegemonic shocks in a way that studies of regime imposition have not yet fully appreciated.

Second, hegemonic shocks enable rising great powers to quickly expand their networks of trade and patronage, exogenously shifting the institutional preferences of many domestic actors and coalitions at once. In this way, rising powers are able to shape the regimes of other states by swiftly altering the incentives and opportunities for the adoption of particular domestic institutions. Inducement therefore operates through a variety of measures that allow great powers to alter the costs and benefits of institutional reforms. Such inducements can be quite direct, taking the form of sanctions and foreign aid, technical assistance, military exchanges, or diplomatic support. Others are more subtle, operating through the rules of new international institutions created by hegemons, through policies that indirectly empower particular domestic groups, or even through cultural propaganda campaigns. While hegemons continuously seek ways to shape the incentives of weaker peers, their ability to do so rises dramatically after hegemonic transitions in which they emerge triumphant. By contrast, countries that suffer a sudden decline will be diminished in their capacity to exercise influence beyond their borders. The Soviet collapse, for example, disrupted patronage networks throughout Africa in the early 1990s, undermining the basis of stable rule for many of the continent’s despots.

Third, hegemonic shocks inspire emulation by credibly revealing hidden information about relative regime effectiveness to foreign audiences. By producing clear losers and winners, shocks legitimize certain regimes and make them more attractive to would-be imitators. Material success, in these cases, often creates its own legitimacy: regimes become morally appealing simply by virtue of their triumph in a tense struggle. By contrast, hegemons whose fortunes suddenly decline will find their regimes discredited and abandoned by former followers or sympathizers. Success is contagious, in other words, but only failure demands inoculation.

The interaction of coercion, inducement, and emulation produces powerful waves of regime change in the wake of hegemonic shocks (see figure 1.3). And since hegemonic competition is a game of relative gains and losses, the rise in the status of one great power is necessarily accompanied by the decline of another. In the wake of shocks, rising hegemons are able to impose their regimes on others through brute force, to influence the institutional choices of these states more indirectly through patronage and trade, or to simply sit back and watch the imitators climb onto the bandwagon. The declining hege-

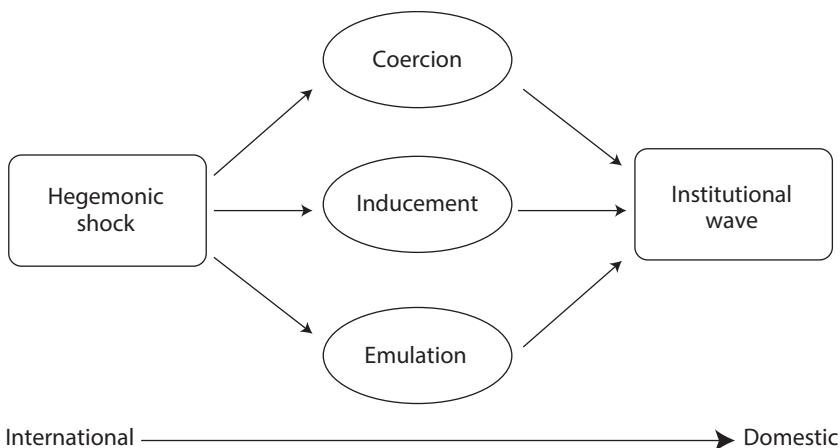


FIGURE 1.3. Causal mechanisms linking hegemonic shocks to regime waves.

mons, meanwhile, face an equally powerful but countervailing set of forces: their capacity to coerce erodes, their ability to influence others through various levers of economic and political inducement declines, and the legitimacy of their regime as a model for emulation evaporates, revealed to be inadequate under duress.

But explaining the sources of waves does not tell us the full story. As figure 1.1 shows, every democratic cascade has also been defined by some degree of *failure* after an initial burst of success. This failure can be total, as in the short-lived wave after World War I, or partial but persistent, as in the African wave following the Soviet collapse. If my first question engages the causes of waves, the second focuses on the sources of reversals that follow democratic waves. Why do democratic transitions associated with waves so often roll back, leading to failed regime consolidation and autocratic reassertion? Put simply, why do the waves crest and collapse?

The two questions are in fact linked. The democratic failures that follow waves stem from the very same forces that create waves in the first place. Hegemonic shocks create extremely powerful but *temporary* incentives for democratization. In the short term, a wide variety of states experience immense pressures to democratize, and these pressures can override the domestic constraints that hinder reforms in times of normal politics. Countries with strained class relations, ethnic tensions, low levels of economic development, and no history of democracy suddenly find themselves swept up in the euphoric momentum of the democratic wave. This can help explain the puzzling finding that while democratic consolidations require a few well-established prerequisites, democratic transitions can occur at all levels of development.

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In their initial intensity, hegemonic shocks create episodes of “democratic overstretch”—the regime version of a stock market bubble, in which systemic pressures create an artificially inflated number of transitions. The strong but vaporous pressures that allow the wave to spread also ensure that at least some of these transitions take place in countries that lack domestic conditions needed to sustain and consolidate democracy.⁴ As the pressures of the shock pass and the difficult process of democratic consolidation moves forward, domestic constraints reassert themselves and contribute to failed consolidation. Democratization that takes place during a wave is therefore systematically more fragile than democratization driven purely by domestic forces.

While shocks enable rising powers to build new global orders, this process rarely attains the clear-eyed neatness of purpose implied in the term. The “building” of orders is rarely strategic or even conscious; it is often unintentional, half-blind, and halting, swayed by chance and circumstance, and shaped by amorphous and misinformed interests. Even Dean Acheson, an architect of the century’s most sustained and purposive effort to build a new global order, confessed in his memoir: “The significance of events was shrouded in ambiguity. We groped after interpretations of them, sometimes reversed lines of action based on earlier views, and hesitated long before grasping what now seems obvious.”⁵

The construction of global orders is thus rarely an orderly process. Great powers do not always set out to transform domestic regimes, and when they do so their efforts may face failures and unintended consequences. Moreover, it is not always the active exercise of hegemonic power that shapes regime choices after shocks, but the mere existence of the hegemon itself. By the virtue of their recent success, rising hegemons not only alter the cost-benefit calculus of national reforms but also force a deep normative reevaluation of which domestic institutions are considered discredited or desired, laudable or repulsive, legitimate or obsolete. As John F. Kennedy noted, “Strength takes many forms, and the most obvious forms are not always the most significant.”⁶ Hegemonic power can indeed coerce and intimidate, but it can also cajole, inspire, and repel—sometimes without the hegemon’s desire or even awareness.

4. The “overstretch” argument only applies to democratic waves, since their nondemocratic counterparts were upheld by the continued use of force.

5. Acheson 1969:3–4.

6. Kennedy 1963.

The effects of hegemonic transitions therefore cannot be reduced to the foreign policies of great powers. Hence the emphasis, in this book, on hegemonic shocks as a *structural* source of regime change, rather than only on great-power strategies as such. Of course, emphasizing large-scale structural determinants of political change involves inevitable trade-offs. History—as historians are quick to point out—unfolds through people rather than structures. Structures don’t wage wars, raze cities, or protest in the streets. The people who do so, however, act in ways that are always and everywhere constrained—by their position in society, by their access to material resources, by their inclusion or exclusion from social groups, and by their underlying (and often unacknowledged) beliefs and assumptions. As Kenneth Waltz argues, structures do not mechanistically determine outcomes but can act as powerful constraints on individual action.⁷ By increasing the salience of systemic pressures, hegemonic shocks raise the general probability of regime transitions. Yet the outcomes of individual transitions are still contingent on the domestic circumstances within each country. Except in very rare cases, states are not merely passive conduits of external influence.⁸ Systemic forces are inevitably mediated through domestic conditions and filtered through local opportunities. At the same time, there are moments when systemic pressures have important and long-lasting effects on the evolution of domestic regimes, and such moments are the focus of this book. My goal here, therefore, is not to downplay the importance of domestic influences but to examine how they interact with the crucial and often-ignored consequences of hegemonic shocks.

Not all regime waves are caused by hegemonic transitions. The Arab Spring of 2011, for example, was largely disconnected from any broader shifts in the global distribution of power. These kinds of waves, as I discuss in the next chapter, are driven by horizontal cross-border linkages rather than vertical impulses, and thus fall outside the scope of the argument. The twentieth century, however, was dominated by waves that were forged by great power transitions. In fact, every hegemonic shock of the twentieth century produced a wave of domestic reforms. (Shocks are therefore a sufficient but not necessary condition for waves.) In the democratic waves that followed World War I and the Soviet collapse, the fascist wave of the 1930s, or the twin waves toward democracy and communism after World War II—in each case, shifts in the distribution of hegemonic power produced bursts of reform that affected many

7. Waltz 2000:21. Thus in the seven decades of ideological conflict that followed World War I, argues Owen (2010:251), “norms entrepreneurs were hard at work proposing reforms that would soften or end the conflict, yet the conflict endured as long as each regime type had a successful exemplar.”

8. Even in coercive cases like postwar Japan, “both elite and ordinary Japanese played active roles not only in interpreting American goals, but in shaping them to meet local needs” (Schaller 2000:109).

countries around the world. Theories of democracy, therefore, cannot dismiss such intrusions into domestic politics as mere anomalies, since they constitute an important and recurring element of modern regime evolution more generally. How democracy spreads can tell us a lot about the nature of democracy itself.

I begin by defining hegemonic shocks, then examine each of the three mechanisms that link shocks to regime waves, and conclude by briefly discussing how the interaction of these forces produces cascades of domestic change.

Defining Hegemonic Shocks

The word *hegemon* is used ambiguously in international politics, referring to either a single paramount state or one of several great powers. In this book I adopt the latter definition of a hegemon as a state that comprises a pole in the international system.⁹ I define a hegemonic shock as a sudden shift in the distribution of relative power among the leading states in the international system. The term builds on the concept of “hegemonic war” to include non-military shocks like global economic crises or imperial collapses—any period in which the power of one hegemon rises or declines significantly against the others.¹⁰ By producing clear winners and losers, shocks clarify the global distribution of power and allow opportunities for the creation of new international orders. In doing so, they become the graveyards and incubators of competing domestic regimes.

Selecting cases of hegemonic shocks requires an index of hegemonic volatility. This was defined as the average annual change in relative power among hegemonic states, using the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) (see figure 1.4).¹¹ This index captures hegemonic shocks by tracking how

9. I thus follow Keohane’s (1984:32) simple definition of a hegemon as a state with a “preponderance of material resources,” reserving the possibility that several states can fulfill this criterion. Following the general view that the system was multipolar until World War II and bipolar until the Soviet collapse, great powers between 1816 and 2000 are labeled as follows: United States 1898–2000; Russia/Soviet Union 1816–1991; Great Britain 1816–1945; France 1816–1941; Germany 1871–1945; and Japan 1905–45. See, e.g., Waltz 1979 or Kennedy 1987.

10. On hegemonic war, see, e.g., Gilpin 1981. Beyond incorporating nonmilitary shocks, this argument diverges from the power transition literature by focusing on the regime consequences of hegemonic shocks, rather than on the causes of major wars.

11. This was operationalized by summing the absolute values of annual changes in the CINC score (see note 3) among great powers. More precisely, average hegemonic volatility (HV) in year t is defined by the formula:

$$HV_t = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n |CINC_{i,t} - CINC_{i,t-1}|}{n}$$

where n is the number of hegemonic states in that year.

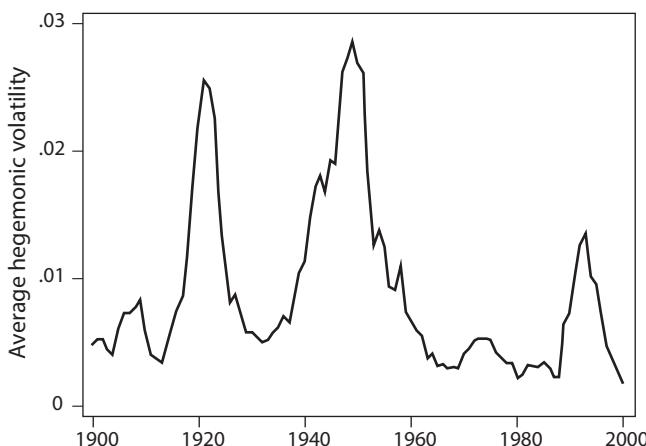


FIGURE 1.4. Average hegemonic volatility, 1900–2000.

quickly the distribution of relative power among major states changes over time.¹²

The figure reveals three immediately visible spikes of volatility: 1917–1922, 1940–1947 (with some reverberations into the 1950s), and 1989–1995. These represent the three hegemonic shocks of the world wars and the Soviet collapse. A fourth, the Great Depression, is added to the analysis for two reasons. First, because of the way CINC is constructed, it is likely to underestimate economic change in favor of military and geopolitical factors. Second, consistent with the demands of the theory, even when measured via CINC, relative US power declines dramatically after 1929, while German power rapidly increases after Hitler's ascent to leadership in 1933 (see figure 4.1). The period of the Great Depression thus offers a case study of a democratic hegemon in decline, offering greater variation on both the dependent and independent variables. Table 1.1 identifies the rising and declining powers for each of the four hegemonic shocks of the twentieth century, as well as the regime waves associated with each transition.

In each case, the regime type of the rising hegemon shaped the content of the institutional wave that followed the shock. After World War II, for example, both the United States and the Soviet Union emerged with their relative power and global prestige greatly strengthened by the triumph over the Axis powers. Despite the profound differences in their content, both regime waves propa-

12. In doing so, the index offers a more fine-grained measure than using dichotomous variables to mark predesignated shock years (see Gates et al. 2007, for example). As with any measure of power, the CINC index has potential drawbacks (see, e.g., Wohlforth 1999), but also offers the advantages of easy replicability and internal consistency over time.

TABLE 1.1. Hegemonic Shocks and Regime Outcomes in the 20th Century

Hegemonic Shock	Rising Hegemon(s)	Institutional Wave(s)	Declining Hegemon(s)	Declining Regime Type
1. World War I	United States	democracy	Germany	monarchy
2. Great Depression	Germany	fascism	United States	democracy
3. World War II	United States Soviet Union	democracy communism	Germany	fascism
4. Soviet Collapse	United States	democracy	Soviet Union	communism

gated through a mixture of coercion (through occupation and nation building), influence (via the expansion of trade, foreign aid, and newly built international institutions), and emulation (by outsiders impressed with the self-evident success of the two systems).

While both countries fought to prevent political backsliding in their European zones of influence, in the West this was achieved by economic development and social stability, rather than the suppression of dissent and the continued threat of force. For the United States, various levers of economic inducement quickly became the primary way of solidifying its own informal empire. By contrast, the primary mechanisms of Soviet hegemonic engagement were coercion in Eastern Europe and emulation in the developing world. Stalin was skeptical of non-Europeans' faith in Marxism and dismayed by the prospect of potential Titos, so inducement remained a modest element of the Soviet repertoire until after his death in 1953.¹³

Europeans felt a range of sentiments about American postwar involvement, which the French disdained and the Austrians cheerfully accepted. Still, by and large, America's presence in Western Europe comprised what Lunestad called "an empire by invitation."¹⁴ The fear was not too much American involvement, but too little. On the continent's eastern half, Soviet presence was also initially welcomed by local populations, but this feeling quickly dissipated once they saw what this presence actually entailed. The periodic Soviet incursions into Eastern Europe testified to the fragility and artifice of local communist support. In this respect, the American presence was distinctly different. American domination sometimes brought unease, cultural anxiety, or feelings of inferiority; Soviet domination brought tanks into the street—an unease of a qualitatively different sort. "I think that only the most paranoid of politi-

13. Rubinstein 1988:18,46.

14. Lunestad 1986:263. Maier (1977:630) calls the postwar West European economy a "consensual American hegemony."

cians,” argued Howard in 1985, “would allege that American influence in Western Europe is dependent on their military presence.”¹⁵

Yet portraying the struggle of the Cold War as a battle between good and evil is as misleading as claiming an equivalence between the two sides. The Soviet story possessed enormous political and ideological clout, particularly in developing states. The industrialization of a backward, illiterate, agrarian state; the dramatic defeat of a feared military juggernaut; a swift rise to the status of an anti-imperialist, anti-Western superpower: for new states shedding colonial bonds, everything in this narrative suggested a virtuous shortcut to modernity.

A mixture of coercion, inducement, and emulation was therefore common to both waves, particularly in the early stages of the Cold War. To present the early postwar period “as a struggle between Soviet tyranny and American freedom is to simplify reality and distort the way most peoples around the world understood events,” argues Leffler. “In the cauldron of postwar national and transnational politics, the appeal of liberal capitalism was anything but certain.”¹⁶ As one of the two beneficiaries of the hegemonic shock, the USSR offered both the promise of material might and a vision of a better world. Its sudden emergence as a superpower, Furet writes, “combined the two gods that make or break historical times: power and ideas.”¹⁷

The sudden global prestige of the Soviet model was therefore not just a product of its universalizing ideological claims—which had remained largely unchanged since the *Communist Manifesto*—but a consequence of its changing hegemonic status. Noting that World War II created “a great upsurge” of communism in the Middle East, Laqueur contends that the major factor behind this growth was Soviet success in its defeat of fascism.¹⁸ In that region as elsewhere, the hegemonic shock appeared to offer a clear and credible demonstration of the military and industrial superiority of communist institutions.

In the absence of a hegemonic shock, ideas could inspire movements but were incapable of generating institutional waves. This was the case for fascism until 1933 and for communism until 1945. In each case, ideas could create consequential real-world precedents, in the form of the Bolshevik Revolution or the March on Rome. But they could not forge institutional change until their visions of a modern state were incarnated in the regimes of indisputably successful great powers.

The immense impact of hegemonic shocks stems from a potent synthesis—compelling ideas combined with dramatic material success. In this way the

15. Howard 1991:128.

16. Leffler 1995:189.

17. Furet 1999:349.

18. Laqueur 1955:17.

jostling of great powers that accompanies hegemonic shocks fundamentally (if temporarily) transforms both material and ideological motivations and opportunities for domestic reforms. Despite the vivid contrasts between the democratic, communist, and fascist waves of the twentieth century, each stemmed from similar underlying mechanisms that originated from the unique circumstances of hegemonic shocks. I examine each below.

Hegemonic Shocks and Mechanisms of Coercion

The first way in which shocks lead to waves is by increasing the likelihood of external regime impositions by rising great powers. By producing stark but temporary disparities in relative power, shocks create windows of opportunity for rising hegemons to impose their regimes abroad. Moreover, by discrediting the defeated elites, hegemonic shocks resulting from major wars temporarily increase the legitimacy of foreign occupations. Shocks can thus fundamentally alter the dynamics and outcomes of forcible interventions.

Great powers face a variety of incentives to export their regimes.¹⁹ Nevertheless, forcible promotion is a risky and costly endeavor. In most cases, if ideological imitation cannot be secured, loyalty will suffice. Democracy promotion is rarely altruistic; it is “opportunistic, not principled,” or contingent on low expected costs.²⁰ Hegemonic shocks change the preferences of the imposing states precisely because they temporarily lower the costs of foreign intervention. In the aftermath of military hegemonic shocks, the coercive apparatus needed for occupation has already been mobilized, and thus the fixed cost of mobilization required for territorial control has already been met. And in suspending the normal rules of the international order, hegemonic shocks provide a window of legitimacy for foreign military occupations. As John Dower argues in his book *Embracing Defeat*, the success of the postwar occupation of Japan was made possible at least in part by the nature of the war that proceeded it, and by the decisive defeat that brought the war to its end. People “at all levels of society quickly blamed their own militaristic leaders,” he writes, “for having initiated a miserable, unwinnable war.” The dramatic discrediting of wartime leadership gave the US occupation of Japan a legitimacy absent in its occupation of Vietnam, Iraq, and elsewhere.²¹ Japan’s vast institutional transformation, argue Ikenberry and Kupchan, became possible because “the pre-war system had been discredited by the disastrous consequences of Japanese expansion and aggression.”²²

19. See, e.g., Owen 2010 and Bader, Grävingholt, and Kästner 2010.

20. Narizny 2012:346.

21. Dower 1999; Dower 2003; Dower 2012:258.

22. Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990:306.

Likewise, the US occupation of Germany encountered little native opposition at least in part because of the nature of the war and the total defeat that accompanied its conclusion. Both the Germans and the Japanese, “having seen the vainglorious dreams of their leaders turn to ashes,” writes Ian Buruma, “were receptive to changes that were partly encouraged and partly imposed by the victorious Allied occupiers.”²³ These occupations were therefore afforded a measure of legitimacy through the unique circumstances created by the hegemonic shock.

These conditions are not unique to democracies. The Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe after World War II was also initially legitimized by the USSR’s military and moral victory. Before it became an instrument of oppression, the Red Army was welcomed as a force for liberation and social progress. In 1945, Milan Kundera recalls, the people of Czechoslovakia “showed great enthusiasm for Russia—which had driven the Germans from their country—and because they considered the Czech Communist Party its faithful representative, they shifted their sympathies toward it.”²⁴ In the weeks after liberation, the Poles “eagerly absorbed the Communist slogans.”²⁵ Early Soviet reforms in Hungary and elsewhere focused on land reforms desperately desired and therefore welcomed by the rural population. For the first time since the introduction of serfdom in 1514, “the rigid social system started to move,” wrote the political theorist István Bibó, “and move in the direction of greater freedom.”²⁶

While the Nazi occupations had obliterated pre-existing orders, postwar social conditions in the region produced an intense desire for change, creating a space where radical transformation was possible, even welcomed.²⁷ As the diplomat Silviu Brucan recalled in his memoirs: “We in Romania, gullible dupes and faithful believers in the new Soviet Man, proclaimed with pride: We brought about the revolution and with but little help from the Red Army.”²⁸ Outside the region, the circumstances of the hegemonic shock also legitimized the Soviet presence for some Western observers. “The clock of history has struck the Slavic hour,” declared a *Le Monde* editorial. “It was great Russia that saved the Slavs from servitude or destruction, and it is normal that they now show their gratitude toward it by grouping under its aegis.”²⁹

23. Buruma 2013:8.

24. Kundera 1979:8.

25. Micgiel 1997:96.

26. Quoted in Kenez 2006:107.

27. Judt 2005:199; Milosz 1953:viii; Vinen 2000:339.

28. Brucan 1993:ix. For Romanian anti-fascists, he writes (1993:33), communism offered “an essentially fantastic or mystical faith” that inspired courage in the face of struggle. Yet this faith was also emboldened by the brute calculus of power: “[W]hat counted most was that under German occupation our only hope was the Red Army.”

29. Quoted in Revel 1983:255.

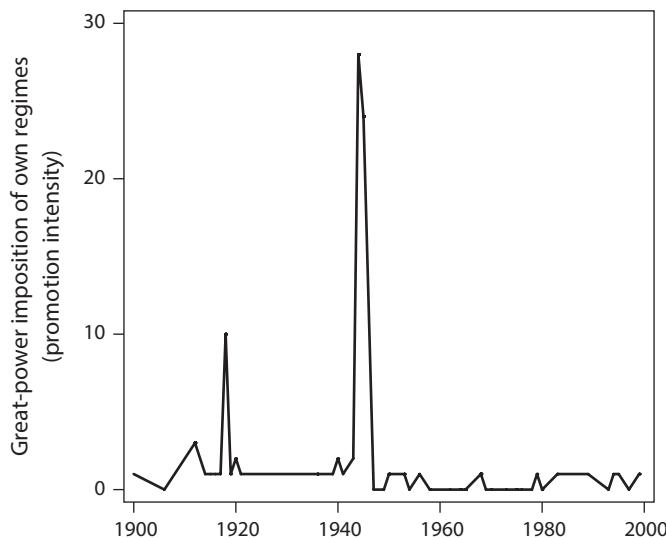


FIGURE 1.5. Impositions of their own regimes by great powers, 1900–2000. See appendix 2 for the full list of impositions and their classifications, as well as a discussion of the measures.

Shocks therefore create both material and normative opportunities for impositions of the hegemon's own regime. These factors simply do not come into play with interventions that occur in the absence of hegemonic transitions. Studies of external impositions, however, generally do not distinguish between impositions that occur in the wake of shocks and those that occur in the course of normal politics. If they did, we might expect that military hegemonic shocks should temporarily increase the likelihood that great powers would choose to promote their own regime. This can be tested empirically by looking at the rates and types of regime promotions over the twentieth century. As figures 1.5 and 1.6 show, the likelihood of great powers' imposing their own regimes increases significantly in the wake of military hegemonic shocks.³⁰

During the twentieth century, great powers were responsible for 72 of the 121 external impositions (about 60 percent). However, great powers nearly monopolize regime promotion in the wake of military hegemonic shocks, when they are promoters in 31 of 34 cases. Moreover, great powers are far more likely to promote their own regimes in the wake of shocks (94 percent of cases) than at other times (66 percent).³¹

30. Intervention types are classified according to Owen 2002 and 2010, and supplemented by several cases excluded from his list: Soviet Union in Mongolia (1921), United States in Guatemala (1954), United States and Britain in Iran (1953), and United States in Chile (1973).

31. The two exceptions are Japan's intervention in Russia (1918) and the Soviet Union's in Austria (1945).

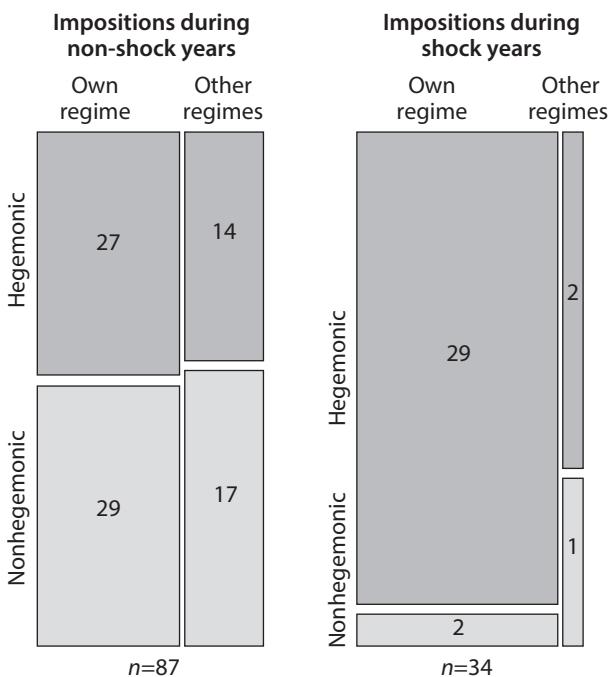


FIGURE 1.6. External impositions, 1900–2000, classified by type. Impositions are classified according to two variables—whether they were undertaken by a great power (dark gray) or not (light gray) and whether the imposers installed their own regime (left column) or not (right column). Hegemonic impositions of their own regimes dominate impositions in post-shock years. Years following hegemonic shocks are counted as the last year of the hegemonic war and the subsequent two years: 1918–1920 and 1944–1946. The area of each rectangle is proportional to the number of observations in each category.

Throughout its long history of external interventions, the United States has promoted democracy only about a third of the time.³² During the Cold War, the United States intervened repeatedly to install or prop up dictatorships in Iran, Guatemala, Vietnam, and many other states. Yet nearly all US interventions in the wake of hegemonic shocks have involved attempts to build democracy, however unsuccessfully.³³ In the long list of failed American attempts to impose democracy by force, Germany and Japan stand out as prominent exceptions. Their exceptionalism, it has been argued, derives from rare domestic circumstances—economic development, national unity, and past experience with democracy—that aided democratization. More generally, stud-

32. Peceny 1999:9.

33. Korea in 1950 and Somalia in 1993 being two possible exceptions.

ies of foreign impositions often focus on domestic factors in shaping their success.³⁴ Yet the importance of domestic forces may be contingent on the broader geopolitical environment in which these occupations take place.

As Owen has argued, foreign impositions often have their roots in broader systemic forces. The presence of rival ideologies, he argues, produces geopolitical insecurity that raises the strategic significance of regime imposition.³⁵ Like him, I find that external impositions cluster in waves, suggesting that systemic factors play an important role. However, at least in the case of the twentieth century, regime impositions have been shaped not only by ongoing ideological rivalries but also by the brief opportunities created by hegemonic shocks, which both heightened and reflected these rivalries. It is true that “a majority of forcible regime promotions in the twentieth century was part of the long transnational contest among advocates of liberal democracy, communism, and fascism.”³⁶ Yet this period also saw wide variation in the intensity of foreign interventions, despite the near-constant presence of ideological rivalries. The ideological contest of the twentieth century was not a continuous struggle but a fight with critical junctures whose outcomes changed the dynamics of external interventions. The key qualities of intervention were therefore shaped not only by ideological clashes but also by the decreased costs and increased legitimacy of occupations that accompanied hegemonic transitions.

During the past decade or so, inspired by America’s experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, the literature on democracy promotion has been pessimistic about the effect of foreign impositions on democratization.³⁷ And if successful impositions require great-power shocks, then most impositions are indeed doomed to fail. In a study of external impositions since the Napoleonic Wars, Edelstein finds that foreign occupations have historically led to democratization under only two conditions.³⁸ First, occupations require a sustained and serious commitment by the occupying power to build democratic institutions. A second condition is legitimacy: the occupiers must convince the local population that their overwhelming presence is justified. Since these prerequisites are difficult to fulfill, occupations rarely succeed.

Hegemonic shocks, however, temporarily make both conditions more likely. Post-shock interventions occur at a time when rising great powers are not only most committed to reshaping other regimes but also when they are

34. See, e.g., Downes and Monten 2013, who point to economic development, social homogeneity, and past experience with representative government as crucial for stable occupation-led democratization.

35. Owen 2010:24,27.

36. Owen 2010:166.

37. See, e.g., Berger et al. 2013, Downes and Monten 2013, Peic and Reiter 2011.

38. Edelstein 2004.

most capable of doing so. Moreover, the political space created by a major defeat provides a measure of legitimacy to the occupying forces. Examining twenty-four cases of occupation since 1815, Edelstein finds that only seven were successful—and that *six* of these took place in the aftermath of World War II.³⁹

In sum, the material and ideational costs associated with external impositions can change significantly in the wake of hegemonic shocks. Future research on foreign-imposed regime change might benefit from examining not only the domestic determinants of impositions but also their links to hegemonic orders, and to the international system more broadly.

Hegemonic Shocks and Mechanisms of Inducement

A second way in which shocks produce regime waves is by enabling rising great powers to shape the institutional preferences of foreign actors through a variety of inducements. These can sometimes take the form of sanctions and foreign aid, technical assistance, military exchanges, or diplomatic support. Sometimes the threats and promises of certain inducements are sufficient. “[W]e will hold in our hands the powerful weapon of discontinuance of aid,” wrote a US State Department official about the Marshall Plan, “[if] any country fails to live up to our expectations.”⁴⁰ Some inducements border on coercion—fomenting revolutions, supporting insurgent armies, or covertly sponsoring electoral candidates. Others unfold through more subtle channels of socialization, like cultural propaganda or the sponsorship of literary magazines. Inducement can therefore also be quite indirect. Rising hegemons may use their power to shape the preferences of domestic groups, who then put pressure on states to change their institutions accordingly—what Scott James and David Lake call “the second face of hegemony.”⁴¹

Whatever the specific method, hegemonic shocks temporarily magnify the importance of these hegemonic inducements. By producing new disparities in power, they create windows of opportunity for rising powers to exogenously shift the capabilities and institutional preferences of many domestic actors and coalitions at once. Rising hegemons may empower domestic actors that push for institutional reforms, or lower the willingness of opposition groups to con-

39. The occupation of France after the Napoleonic Wars—another case of a great power defeated in a hegemonic shock—is the other success story.

40. William L. Clayton, Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs, quoted in Lens 1971:352. Truman threatened to reduce Italy’s aid if the communists won the 1948 elections (Barnes 1981:412).

41. James and Lake 1989. For them, the “first face” is shaping the choices of states directly through sanctions or foreign aid; the “third face” is using ideology and propaganda to shape mass and elite opinion in other states. All three fall into the category of inducement as defined here.

tinue resisting such reforms. Fascist regimes of the 1930s, for example, metastasized not only through imitation by impressed observers but also through the inducements created by growing German power. The country's economic expansion drew states into its orbit and attracted converts through the expansion of trade ties, especially in regions lacking stable relations with Western powers like Latin America and south-central Europe. Trade with Germany appealed to the vast peasant populations of these largely agricultural nations, who had a ready market for their product at prices well above world levels. As German power grew, neutrality became an increasingly difficult proposition, creating opportunities for Germany to extend its political influence.⁴² A Romanian businessman warned that "If we continue a *laissez faire* policy, Germany will achieve the conquest of Romania *à la mode hitzlerienne*, that is to say, without a fight."⁴³

Conversely, in cases of sudden decline, shocks swiftly undermine the hegemon's ability to wield influence in other states through aid, patronage networks, or international institutions. In doing so, they shift domestic groups' institutional preferences away from the hegemon's regime. The Soviet collapse, for example, led to a number of changes in the incentives of both African elites and external actors with ties to African regimes. The implosion of the communist lodestar decisively undercut the legitimacy of state-led development as a viable path for African states. These countries now faced a stark choice between, as Timothy Garton Ash put it, "a set of ideas whose time had come" and "a set of ideas whose time had gone."⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the elimination of Soviet patronage damaged the neopatrimonial elite networks that had already suffered from the economic crises and structural adjustment of the 1980s.⁴⁵ As a result, the collapse of the USSR had the most pronounced initial effects on African countries closely aligned with the former superpower.⁴⁶ For all but a

42. As Hirschman (1945) argued, growing trade dependence increases the costs of potential conflicts and thereby leads to convergence on foreign policy. Examining the effects of Nazi Germany's growing trade with Eastern European states, he concluded that these states' creeping dependence on Germany led directly to their (sometimes willing) capitulation to Nazi policies in the years before the war.

43. Quoted in Hoisington 1971:480. "The economic stranglehold once established, Germany could use it for other than economic ends," writes Seton-Watson (1945:384). "Commercial and technical missions could provide useful cover for political and military espionage, and German buyers could use opportunities for political propaganda among the peasantry."

44. Ash 1990:136.

45. By mid-decade, "almost all sub-Saharan African countries introduced some measure of political liberalization, and a majority permitted competitive elections" (Joseph 1997:368).

46. Bratton and Van de Walle 1997:241. As Decalo (1992:18, 25) notes, "African states financially or militarily dependent upon the Soviet Union began collapsing first, as their patron withdrew its support.... [T]he more African autocracies resembled in their features the discredited regimes in Eastern Europe, the greater the challenge from below for total change, and a purge of

few stubborn holdouts, the USSR's disintegration represented the total exhaustion of communism as an alternative model of development.

At the same time, the Soviet collapse also transformed the nature of Western inducements dealing with foreign aid and security assistance. During the Cold War, geopolitical objectives reduced the credibility of Western conditionality, since threats to withhold aid might lead to loss of pliant clients in the developing world. After the collapse of the Soviet system, powerful states such as the United States no longer had to prioritize anticommunism over democracy promotion, thereby increasing pressure on African autocrats who had used superpower rivalry to stave off reforms. At the same time, international financial institutions and aid donors became more focused on supporting accountable government, making outside assistance contingent on democratic reforms. The surprisingly successful democratization of Benin—a country with a tiny middle class, no history of democracy, and a fragmented elite—was not driven by domestic factors; rather, the country “could no longer resist demands for comprehensive reforms by the external agencies.”⁴⁷ By the early 1990s, democratization “had become a precondition for credit-worthiness” in the global market.⁴⁸

As a result, Dunning notes, the end of the Cold War “marked a watershed in the politics of foreign aid in Africa.”⁴⁹ Since powerful donors like the United States were no longer bound by geostrategic considerations that had previously undermined conditionality, the end of the Cold War enhanced the credibility of threats attached to foreign aid. Outside assistance became a more effective tool for inducing domestic reforms in the wake of the Soviet collapse. In this way, the hegemonic shock greatly increased material pressures upon dictatorial elites even as it undermined the ideological basis of their rule. As Levitsky and Way argue, “Western liberalism’s triumph and the Soviet collapse undermined the legitimacy of alternative regime models and created strong incentives for peripheral states to adopt formal democratic institutions.”⁵⁰

Shifts in hegemonic power create opportunities to fundamentally restructure class coalitions and institutional preferences within states. Immediately after World War II, for example, communist parties appeared to be gaining ground across Western Europe. “For many Europeans,” argues Martin Walker, “the wartime feats of the Red Army blended with the still bitter memories of capitalism’s failures during the Great Depression and the mass unemployment

the past.” Early reforms did not guarantee regime turnover—in three of the above cases (Angola, Ethiopia, and Mozambique), the ruling coalition managed to retain power.

47. Joseph 1997:369.

48. Simensen 1999:401.

49. Dunning 2004:409.

50. Levitsky and Way 2002:61.

of the 1930s.”⁵¹ The result was a leftward shift in European politics, with the United States and Great Britain remaining “the only major nations in which Communism is negligible as a political force.”⁵² According to a 1947 US State Department official, “The trend in Europe is clearly toward the Left. I feel that we should try to keep it a non-communist Left and should support Social-Democratic governments.”⁵³

It was this sentiment that made the prospect of Soviet influence a real threat to American policy makers, necessitating the Marshall Plan. These statesmen fully understood the appeal of communist ideas, even if they rarely stated so publicly. Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson told a Senate committee that the Europeans “have suffered so much, and they believe so deeply that governments can take some action which will alleviate their sufferings, that they will demand that the whole business of state control and state interference shall be pushed further and further.”⁵⁴ The continent’s dollar shortage prevented it from buying American goods, endangering the recovery and opening the way to communist-led discontent. United States officials agreed that “long-term American prosperity required open markets, unhindered access to raw materials, and the rehabilitation of much—if not all—of Eurasia along liberal capitalist lines.”⁵⁵

At its core, the Marshall Plan was an unprecedented use of hegemonic inducement to secure the consolidation of regimes that copied the American model of capitalist democracy. The plan’s biggest impact was not through the aid itself but through the conditions attached to its disbursement—the dismantling of market controls, the imposition of exchange rate stability, and the liberalization of trade. Bradford De Long and Barry Eichengreen argue that the Marshall Plan was in fact the world’s “most successful adjustment program.”⁵⁶ Beyond providing money for short-term reconstruction, it fundamentally changed the institutional environment of European politics by shifting elite preferences away from centralized planning and toward American-style market allocation within a mixed economy. Along with collaborators in Western Europe, US aid officials sought to prevent national politicians “from being tempted to fall back on state intervention, planning, and closed economies.”⁵⁷ By pulling center-left parties from communism to

51. Walker 1994:30.

52. Hicks 1946:540. Even in Britain, the shift led to the replacement of Churchill with a Labour government that promised greater state involvement in society.

53. Quoted in Maier 1981:346. The war’s aftermath, writes Lowe (2012:278), saw “an explosion of left-wing expression that was effectively the rebirth of everything that had been so brutally suppressed during the Nazi occupations.”

54. Quoted in Leffler 1999:519.

55. Leffler 1984:358.

56. De Long and Eichengreen 1991.

57. De Grazia 2005:345–46. Lens (1971:358) describes American aid as a “mechanism for pushing the political center of gravity to the right.”

social democracy, the plan fortified American-friendly regimes while curbing Soviet influence.⁵⁸ It was “an economic program but the crisis it averted was political,” writes Judt.⁵⁹ By 1948, with the influx of American money and institutional infrastructure, communist parties had lost much of their support.

Major domestic party realignments have often been shaped by the inducements and opportunities created by hegemonic shocks. The Marshall Plan had a moderating effect on postwar German politics; the collapse of the fascist alternative weakened the radical right, while American influence limited the impact of the radical left. After 1947, American aid focused on preventing communist influence as part of a broader agenda of containment. As a result, Germany’s party system transitioned from fragmentation to moderation, with the Catholics and socialists transforming “from their previous confessional and class politics into national parties with mass appeal”—the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats.⁶⁰

Likewise, Latin American party realignments of the 1930s and 1940s repeatedly reflected the shifting contours of hegemonic relations. The Soviet-American alliance against Hitler led to the creation of broad anti-Axis coalitions and a general moderation of radical politics. (Communist parties reached their peak of power in 1945–46, and were not only legal but openly accepted as partners in government.) The end of the war led to a brief swell of democratic reforms empowered by temporary US support of democratization. But the defeat of a common enemy created a split in these fragile wartime alliances, and as the thrust of US policy shifted from anti-fascism to anti-communism, the reassertion of power by right-wing elites excluded the left by force.⁶¹ The US policy of aiding or tolerating undemocratic anti-communist forces culminated in the 1954 covert coup in Guatemala, by which point the democratic aspirations of the early postwar period had been all but forgotten. As in Eastern Europe after World War I, a brief but powerful wave of democratization proved unsustainable in the face of waning hegemonic support and unfavorable domestic conditions.

Comparative analyses of democratization often focus on the evolving nature of class cleavages and domestic coalitions. But in the wake of hegemonic shocks, such coalitions are themselves shaped by larger geopolitical shifts, often through the actions of great powers seeking to bolster or undermine particular domestic groups in order to further their influence. In these periods,

58. As a State Department official argued in 1946: “It is definitely in the interest of the United States to see that the present left movement throughout the world, which we should recognize and even support, develops in the direction of democratic as against totalitarian systems.” Quoted in Ikenberry 2000:202.

59. Judt 2005:97.

60. Reynolds 1996:660–1.

61. Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013; Smith 1994.

changing hegemonic inducements are refracted at the domestic level through shifting group rivalries and party realignments.

Shocks also provide a window for expanding hegemonic influence through the creation of new international institutions.⁶² By destroying old hierarchies and suspending existing relations, hegemonic transitions enable rising powers to reconstruct the global institutional architecture through which they exercise and maintain their power. While such institution building is normally a slow and inertia-laden process, the brief periods after hegemonic shocks temporarily wipe the slate clean, facilitating and intensifying the creation of new global orders. As a 1942 Council on Foreign Relations report put it, “the period at the end of the war will provide a *tabula rasa* on which can be written the terms of a democratic new order. The economic and political institutions of 1939 and before are clearly in suspension and need not be restored intact after the war.”⁶³ In the wake of the war, both the Soviet Union and the United States used their rising power to construct new institutional frameworks that helped them perpetuate control and influence over the states embedded within it. Shocks therefore temporarily increase rising great powers’ ability to manipulate the preferences of domestic actors via both bilateral and indirect influence, but also through the conduits of newly reconstructed global institutions.

Hegemonic Shocks and Mechanisms of Emulation

A third way through which shocks create waves is by encouraging states to adopt the domestic institutions of the rising great power. Institutional emulation is the process whereby a state deliberately and voluntarily imitates particular domestic institutions of successful and powerful states. Though great powers frequently attempt to persuade others of their virtues, shocks are unique in dramatically demonstrating which regimes perform better under duress, and thus credibly reveal hidden information about relative regime efficiency to foreign audiences. In doing so, they legitimize certain regimes and make them more attractive to would-be emulators.

Abrupt great-power transitions therefore encourage imitation by both highlighting successful regime models and offering a way to gain favor with a rising hegemon. “If the Danubian States begin now to put on the Nazi garb,” wrote the British Home Secretary in 1938, “it will be because imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and because they want to ingratiate themselves in

62. Ikenberry 2000. He also argues that the hegemon’s regime influences its capacity to build international orders as much as its material power, with democracies more capable of the strategic restraint required for building stable legitimate orders.

63. Quoted in Maier 1977:619.

time with their future master.”⁶⁴ By contrast, great powers whose fortunes suddenly decline because of a hegemonic shock will find their regimes discredited and abandoned by former followers and sympathizers. As a Zambian communist put it shortly after the Soviet collapse, if the “originators of Socialism” have rejected their own tenets, then “who were African imitators” to take up the cause?⁶⁵

Smaller states may imitate rising great powers for both self-interested and ideological reasons. Hegemonic shocks make both reasons more likely. They not only credibly demonstrate the real-world effectiveness of competing regimes but also legitimize the regimes of victorious great powers by virtue of their dramatic success, inspiring admiration and mimicry. As a Brazilian newspaper declared in 1945: “The moral and political atmosphere of the world has been decisively transformed” by “the triumph of the democratic systems.”⁶⁶

As a learning strategy, emulation can be a path toward both internal strengthening and external bandwagoning. First, emulation can be used to internally strengthen the state against both domestic and external threats. Emulating states hope to repeat some of the rising hegemon’s dramatic success and thereby improve their own institutional fitness.⁶⁷ The economic ascent of Nazi Germany attracted imitators who were repelled by its ideology but admired its ability to rearm and eliminate unemployment. As an economist noted at the time, fascism allowed “a central will capable of quick decision and armed with supreme authority” combined with “a highly disciplined organisation of the productive forces of the whole economy.”⁶⁸ Even the staunchly liberal *Economist* presented the country as a potential model for emulation in Britain: “The one great lesson that can be drawn from German economic experience in the past three years,” it argued in 1939, “is that well-organised control can secure the maximum utilisation of a country’s resources for the piling up of armaments.”⁶⁹

Second, imitating a powerful peer can allow a state to curry favor with it and to participate in the international system that the hegemon creates and maintains. In that sense emulation is a strategy of external bandwagoning, though a looser one than signing treaties or forging official alliances. As Markoff puts it, “Weak states depend on stronger ones and may bid for favor by

64. Hoare 1937.

65. Quoted in Decalo 1992:18.

66. Quoted in Bethell 1992:35.

67. This effect differs from inducement because there is no direct attempt by the great power to manipulate material preferences—instead, it alters institutional choices merely by its successful existence. In this way, shocks produce emulation even without a conscious effort by the hegemon.

68. Guillebaud 1939:215.

69. Quoted in Imlay 2007:1.

mimicking their political structures.”⁷⁰ Instrumental emulation may be less likely to be consolidated, since the norms associated with the regime are not internalized. Superficial transitions, as in some post-1991 “Potemkin democratizations” in Gabon or the Ivory Coast, are more likely to fail when emulation is done for the sake of cosmetic or self-interested bandwagoning rather than any true desire for regime reform.⁷¹ But institutions adopted for instrumental reasons may also acquire moral or material inertia over time. Even rigged elections, argues Lindberg, improve the chances of democratic transitions in Africa by imbuing societies with basic democratic norms.⁷²

Yet emulation, as the diffusion of best practices, is an ongoing historical process. Why should hegemonic shocks make such emulation more likely? They do so by removing uncertainty about the relative effectiveness of competing regime types. Despite the potential benefits of reforms, leaders face considerable uncertainty when choosing to rebuild their domestic institutions. Shocks encourage such reforms by dramatically demonstrating which regime types perform better under duress. In bargaining theory, war is said to reveal private information about actors’ capability and resolve—information that cannot be credibly verified through *ex ante* cheap talk. Similarly, hegemonic shocks reveal information about the relative strength of competing regime types. Hidden vulnerabilities become obvious, failed institutional models lose their legitimacy, and the giant’s clay feet are revealed for all to see. In this way, hegemonic shocks intensify opportunities for emulation by creating political space for domestic reforms. As Ikenberry and Kupchan argue, socialization becomes particularly likely after “periods marked by international turmoil,” when domestic elites seek alternatives to discarded and discredited ideas.⁷³ Great powers often attempt to attract followers by proclaiming the superiority of their regime, but in the absence of crises these claims are likely to be taken as cheap talk.

During the Cold War, for example, both sides extolled the virtues of their regimes to encourage converts from Third World states. But the true condition of Soviet domestic institutions, and the country’s ability to uphold a communist system outside its borders, did not become apparent to world audiences (and most scholars) until after the system’s dramatic collapse. Similarly, both

70. Markoff 1996:32. “Political change in small powers is not understandable merely as adaptation to socioeconomic change within narrow political boundaries, but must be seen as adaptation to the interest and rules of hegemonic powers in international regimes” (Janos 2000:411).

71. Many cases of African democratization, Schmitter (1994:60) argues, “may be more usefully viewed as improvisations by rulers who are buying time, waiting for the international climate to change so they can engineer a regression to autocracy.”

72. Lindberg 2006. In this way, the logic of consequences invisibly morphs into the logic of appropriateness.

73. Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990:283.

world wars offered a large-scale test of war-fighting effectiveness between democratic and nondemocratic states. In both cases, democratic victories repudiated Tocqueville's often-echoed assertion that democratic regimes would prove inferior to centralized ones on the field of battle. "If the Axis had prevailed in World War II," argues Starr, "it would have confirmed the ancient belief in the weakness and incompetence of democracies."⁷⁴ The outcomes of shocks thus provide compelling and credible demonstrations of regime quality to self-interested outside observers. When Turkey ended a long period of single-party rule in 1945 and began a stormy transition to multiparty democracy, future premier Adnan Menderes explained the shift in terms that clearly revealed the informational consequences of hegemonic shocks: "The difficulties encountered during the war years uncovered and showed the weak points created by the one-party system in the structure of the country," he declared. "No country can remain unaffected by the great international events and the contemporary dominating ideological currents. This influence was felt in our country too."⁷⁵

Hegemonic emulation is therefore not only a process of normative socialization; it also can be a conscious response to changed material incentives. For Waltz, in fact, socialization—defined as learning from the failures of others—is a key driver of change in international politics.⁷⁶ Yet emulation also cannot be reduced to a byproduct of quasi-rational updating. While hegemonic shocks decrease uncertainty and create opportunities to learn from the successes and failures of others, this does not mean the correct lessons will be learned. Institutional mimicry often leads to imperfect transplantations, and successful hegemons may be venerated without cause. But the *perception* of a link between regime type and success—a link that appears especially incontrovertible in the wake of shocks—is often more important for emulation than the actual presence of such a link.⁷⁷ The widespread acceptance of a Nazi economic miracle, as I discuss in chapter 4, contributed to the imitation of German institutions around the world, regardless of whether the recovery was real or had its roots in Nazi reforms.

The outcomes of hegemonic shocks serve as signals about the effectiveness of competing regimes. Whether the signals are correctly interpreted, or

74. P. Starr 2010:55.

75. Quoted in Karpat 1959:140.

76. The other driver of change being interstate competition. For the often-overlooked emphasis on emulation and socialization in Waltz, see 1979:74–77, 92, 118–19, 127–28.

77. As a German student leader of the 1968 movement (and later Marxian sociologist) Ulf Kadritzke noted, "Illusions, insofar as they guide political action, can have real historical consequences" (quoted in Müller 2011:172). Likewise, reflecting on the trend toward autocracy in the 1930s, Aldous Huxley (1937:65) noted that "nothing succeeds like success—even success that is merely apparent."

whether they accurately reflect the factors that created the outcome, is a different matter.⁷⁸ Hegemonic triumphs raise the prestige of the hegemon's institutions even if the victory had less to do with its particular institutions and more with the resources at its disposal. The result is unsuccessful emulation, or emulation by unlikely followers.

The dramatic nature of hegemonic shocks changes both the cost-benefit calculations and the normative perceptions of the legitimacy of particular regimes. The jubilant celebrations of democracy that accompanied Wilson's triumphant tour of Europe seemed to reflect not just a desire for American aid but a sincere belief in the emancipatory moral appeal of self-determination. For a brief moment, Wilson appeared to be "transfigured in the eyes of men," writes H. G. Wells. "He ceased to be a common statesman; he became a Messiah."⁷⁹ This normative authority quickly spread beyond the continent. In Korea, leaders of the March First movement drafted their own version of the Declaration of Independence; Ho Chi Minh's 1919 petition to Wilson (which Wilson duly neglected) to restore self-rule in French Indochina also made its case with quotes from the American declaration. The Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore dedicated a new volume of his works to Wilson. And Chinese students in Beijing massed outside the US embassy, chanting "Long live President Wilson!"⁸⁰

Yet even such earnest admiration of democracy's virtues was undergirded not only by its inherent appeal but also by the power it now wielded through its American paragon. "The United States is the one who won the war," an Egyptian journalist was told by a friend. "Therefore, she will enforce the right to self-determination and enforce the [British] withdrawal."⁸¹ Likewise, Indian nationalists repeatedly argued that their country's success at the peace conference was "intimately tied to the recent ascendancy of the United States and its president in world affairs."⁸²

78. For a prominent example of "irrational" or dysfunctional emulation, see the "world society" literature, e.g., Meyer et al. 1997. Unlike them, however, I do not view emulation as a process of convergence on a single model, not only because of the inevitable mutations that accompany mimicry but also because hegemonic shocks repeatedly alter the legitimate standards of emulation.

79. Wells 1933:82.

80. Manela 2007:55, 103.

81. Quoted in Manela 2007:63. As he notes (2007:71), "[t]he perception of Wilson's prominence and power in the international arena led Egyptian nationalists to turn directly to him for support in their campaign against British intransigence."

82. Manela 2007:95–96. As he concludes (2007:10), America's moral and material appeal was intertwined; its stature was "just as important as the content of the president's wartime proclamations in creating the impact of the Wilsonian moment in the colonial world." As a result, the

Motivations of power and prestige are often linked in cases of emulation. Sharp hegemonic defeats, military or otherwise, create both material and ideological incentives for reform. Ayse Zarakol, for instance, argues that Turkey after World War I, Japan after World War II, and Russia after the Soviet collapse—all cases of great-power defeats—were especially susceptible to institutional reform “meant to signal an understanding and acceptance of international norms that stigmatized them.”⁸³ Defeated states change both as a response to rational incentives and because they seek to reestablish prestige and respect. However, even when states are motivated by nonmaterial factors like prestige, status, respect, and acceptance, the pursuit of these goals makes reforms more likely only in the wake of material decline and defeat. In the cases above, embracing fundamental transformation required not just fresh ideas but material catastrophe.

In most cases, therefore, institutional emulation in the wake of shocks involves the pursuit of both efficiency and legitimacy, power and prestige, rational learning and normative socialization. The overall effect is that hegemonic shocks intensify both learning and socialization, contributing to the subsequent regime wave. And while democracy has been the default model of emulation in recent decades, states have admired and mimicked any regime that emerges triumphant in a great-power struggle. Until 1939, the interwar wave of fascism was driven not by conquest but by the increasing appeal of fascist institutions. This appeal, in turn, stemmed from the elimination of unemployment and economic growth in Nazi Germany, particularly at a time when the major democratic states were plagued by crisis and corruption. As Schivelbusch writes:

In the wake of global economic disaster, there was no particular reason to prefer the political system most closely associated with capitalism—liberal democracy—to new systems that promised a brighter future. On the contrary, people were more inclined to ask themselves whether democracy was inevitably doomed by the economic breakdown of liberal capitalism.⁸⁴

“The 1930s and 1940s were the period of fascist success,” writes the historian Hugh Seton-Watson. “Inevitably fascist policies and institutions were aped by others.”⁸⁵ Such imitation extended to democracies as well. Berman concludes that several “critical ‘innovations’ championed by fascists and national

“story of the Wilsonian moment in the colonial world is one about the role of power, both real and perceived.”

83. Zarakol 2011:12.

84. Schivelbusch 2006:11.

85. Seton-Watson 1979:365.

socialists—such as the notion of a ‘people’s party’ and an economic order that aimed to control but not destroy capitalism—became central features of Europe’s postwar order.”⁸⁶

Similarly, the Soviet Union inspired followers after World War II because its victory over Nazi Germany, “a country most observers had seen in 1939 and 1940 as an industrial giant, suggested that the Soviet system had considerable real-world vigor.”⁸⁷ This victory, which “legitimated and reinforced the Stalinist system,”⁸⁸ played a key role in communism’s attraction in the years following the war. As Raymond Aron observed in 1944, its performance in the war “has refuted some classical arguments on the inevitable decadence inherent in a bureaucratic economy.”⁸⁹ The victory seemed especially impressive because the Red Army was “universally underestimated” before the start of the war.⁹⁰ The general staffs of both Britain and the United States expected a swift defeat, a view reinforced by Russia’s poor performance in the 1939 winter war against Finland. Churchill predicted that the Soviets would “assuredly be defeated,” while British commander Alan Brooke did not expect them to resist for more than a few months.⁹¹ The low expectations of communist military efficiency both dampened the regime’s appeal in the 1930s and bolstered it after the war’s end. “Stalin had emerged from his victory over Hitler far stronger than ever before,” writes Judt, “basking in the reflected glory of ‘his’ Red Army, at home and abroad.”⁹²

The outcome of the hegemonic shock allowed the USSR to credibly present itself as an enticing alternative to capitalist democracy in a way that no Soviet exhortations could have done before the war. The Soviet victory over fascism lent communism a moral authority lacking before the war, transforming the regime into “a viable form of political modernity, as significant a threat to democracy as fascism had ever been.”⁹³ This gave the rising hegemon the power not only to coerce but also to attract, whether the source of the attraction was ideology or material success. “No one can deny [that] the ruthlessness of the Soviet leaders paid dividends,” wrote Hicks, a lapsed Marxist who had renounced communism after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. “I grow impatient with those who argue that the Soviet regime must be virtuous because it triumphed in war, but there can be no argument about its power.”⁹⁴

86. Berman 2006:151.

87. Stokes 1993:8.

88. Strayer 1998:57.

89. Aron 1944:194.

90. Haffner 1978:30.

91. Ferguson 2006:415.

92. Judt 2005:174.

93. Smith 1994:186.

94. Hicks 1946:537.

The Varieties of Hegemonic Engagement

The three mechanisms examined above clearly do not operate in isolation, but can interact and reinforce each other. Openness to emulation creates the opportunity for inducements, and vice versa. But they can also operate at cross-purposes. Reliance on coercion can weaken the impetus for emulation—as was the case in Eastern Europe after 1945, when the fastest way for a young believer to reject communism was to experience it.

The relative importance of mechanisms has also varied across cases. The democratic wave after World War I, for example, was driven primarily by emulation, as the United States remained largely unwilling to engage in direct inducements or to impose democracy by force. The fascist wave culminated in coercive impositions but began through inducement and emulation—encouraging philofascist movements, pulling states into the fascist camp through German trade expansion, and serving as a successful alternative to an apparently stagnant democracy. In the years after World War II, the United States relied primarily on various mechanisms of inducement while the USSR, after a brief postliberation honeymoon in Eastern Europe, employed coercion in that region and emulation elsewhere. After the Soviet collapse, emulation and inducement were the primary mechanisms of democratization, the latter through various levers of economic statecraft, such as aid conditionality, and the former through the ascendancy of capitalist democracy as the only “legitimate” remaining regime model.

For rising great powers, emulation is perhaps the least costly mechanism of post-shock engagement, since it requires little hegemonic inducement beyond some encouraging rhetoric and cultural diplomacy. Emulation alone, therefore, is unlikely to produce sustained democratic reforms, as proved to be the case after World War I. Inducement, on the other hand, requires a greater degree of hegemonic engagement, since it requires rising powers to actively involve themselves in other regimes through a variety of economic, political, and diplomatic measures ranging from bilateral treaties to development assistance to the creation of international organizations. Coercion, finally, is the most resource-intensive form of post-shock engagement, since it requires the physical occupation of foreign countries, and sustained economic and political effort to reshape their domestic regimes.

Conditions of low constraint and low threat, as was the case for the United States after the Soviet collapse, pulled incentives for hegemonic engagement in opposite directions. On one hand, the United States now encountered fewer limits in its ability to shape other regimes through its foreign policy. Set loose from geopolitical constraints, it was now free to apply substantial diplomatic and economic pressures on regimes around the world. On the other hand, the end of Soviet-American rivalry also removed any critical threats to the United

States, weakening the need to pursue aggressive foreign engagement. The result was a moderate level of post-shock engagement in which the United States focused primarily on economic and diplomatic methods of regime change. This phase of its foreign policy ended with the attacks of 9/11, which led US policy makers to see themselves as now living in a low-constraint, high-threat world—a combination that engendered a more aggressive policy of global hegemonic engagement, including the policy of shaping foreign regimes through unilateral imposition.

In general, a low-constraint, high-threat world results in intense post-shock engagement, as was the case for both superpowers after World War II. Both the United States and the USSR faced few constraints on the exercise of their power (particularly in their respective zones of influence, but also in contested regions like Asia), and both felt that the other represented a serious threat to their interests.⁹⁵ As a result, during the Cold War, both countries undertook aggressive hegemonic engagement, employing a broad spectrum of measures that included a variety of tools of coercion and inducement. These factors may also help explain why the United States did not undertake another Marshall Plan to overhaul the international system after 1991: the unipolarity that followed the Soviet collapse resulted in fewer constraints on American behavior but also produced far fewer threats, dampening American incentives for intensive engagement or fundamental institutional rebuilding.⁹⁶

The “translation” of shocks into waves is therefore far from an automatic process, since it depends not only on choices made by rising and declining great powers but also on the structural consequences of the shock, and the filtering of these consequences through domestic circumstances. The overall effect of shocks is to increase the propensity for regime transitions, but the relative salience and effectiveness of coercion, inducement, and emulation will still depend on a number of factors. Coercion, for example, has been effective only under narrow circumstances: where the state is weak or defeated after a war, and where the previous regime has been decisively discredited. The effectiveness of inducement is likely to depend on the distribution of power among domestic groups: where pro-democracy groups are strong, external factors are likely to be reinforcing but superfluous. Where pro-democracy groups are weak and incumbent forces are strong, external influence is unlikely to overcome domestic constraints. But where the balance of domestic forces are relatively even, external influences can provide the critical

95. As Richard Overy (1998:312) puts it, the “hardening of Soviet attitudes to the West” after 1946 was “a product of Soviet vulnerability as much as Soviet strength.”

96. The implosion of communism “at once vindicated liberalism while removing the strategic imperative that had pushed a liberal variant of development into an important role in U.S. strategy” (Ekbladh 2010:258).

push toward democratization. Emulation has accompanied every hegemonic shock, as a natural byproduct of dramatic triumphs, but in the absence of hegemonic engagement or other material incentives, emulation by itself appears unlikely to create lasting democratization.

Conclusion

Over the course of the twentieth century, democracy spread from a few isolated outposts to most corners of the world. But it would be a convenient mistake to accept the victory of democracy as a historical morality play, the foreordained triumph of good over evil. Democracy's ascent, notes Mazower, is "a story of narrow squeaks and unexpected twists, not inevitable victories and forward marches."⁹⁷ The twentieth century was one of nearly constant struggle—a protracted and world-defining conflict between democratic, fascist, and communist visions of the modern state. The outcomes of hegemonic shocks became the critical junctures of this struggle, creating waves of domestic reforms that reshaped prevailing conceptions of modernity.

The legacies of hegemonic shocks demonstrate that democratic optimism cannot rely on the intrinsic moral appeal of democracy. Robert Conquest, for example, dismisses fascism and communism as "mental aberrations."⁹⁸ But to do so ignores the status they had achieved as ideological and material examples of success. Communism, for instance, captured the imagination through a seductive and materially potent promise of a universal utopia. As Arnason writes, it was "a distinctive but ultimately self-destructive version of modernity, rather than a sustained deviation from the modernizing mainstream."⁹⁹

Since both fascism and communism are now dead, "we have trouble recalling a time when they were far more credible than the constitutional democracies which they jointly despised," writes Tony Judt. "Nowhere was it written that the latter would win the battle of hearts and minds, much less wars."¹⁰⁰ Their attractions were real, and this means rescuing them from what E. P. Thompson, referring to the English working class, calls "the immense condescension of history."¹⁰¹ Their appeal, moreover, was deeply linked to the changing structure of hegemonic power. Laying bare the connections between hegemonic shifts and domestic reforms can therefore allow us to examine not only the spread and retreat of democracy, but also the fundamental forces that shaped the massive ideological battles of the twentieth century.

97. Mazower 1998:xii.

98. Conquest 1999:3.

99. Arnason 2000:61

100. Judt 2012:395.

101. Thompson 1963:12.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

In the next chapter, I examine the causes of failed consolidation embedded in democratic waves. These failures, I argue, happen because the same systemic pressures that create powerful bursts of regime change also spread to countries that are unlikely to sustain any reforms once the shock passes. That chapter therefore combines two large but rarely intersecting literatures—on democratic waves and on democratic reversals—into a single explanatory framework.

Chapters 3 through 6 present case studies of the four hegemonic shocks of the twentieth century. Chapter 3 examines how the outcome of the Great War demonstrated democracy’s effectiveness on both the battlefield and the factory floor, leading to a short-lived but intense period of democratization on the European continent and beyond. I then examine how the overstretch of the postwar wave contributed to the collapse of democracy and set the stage for a series of confrontations between rival institutional arrangements. Chapter 4 examines the crisis of liberal capitalism and the fascist cascade of the late interwar period. The wave of fascism that swept the world after 1933 was the result of a growing disparity in relative power between the declining democratic powers—Britain, France, and especially the United States—and their vibrant nondemocratic rivals, with Nazi Germany at the forefront. During these years, fascist institutions penetrated the governments of many self-proclaimed authoritarians but also left a lasting legacy on the structure of modern democratic regimes. Chapter 5 examines the early Cold War period, focusing on how the two triumphant superpowers oversaw institutional waves that embodied their competing visions for the world. Chapter 6 looks at the democratic wave that accompanied the dissolution of the Soviet system, its consequences for democratic legitimacy, and its ambiguous long-term effect on modern hybrid regimes.

The concluding chapter examines the argument’s consequences for today’s global order. Since the mid-1990s, and despite occasional outbursts, democratization seems to have reached a Great Plateau. For some observers, democratic capitalism is in the process of being supplanted by state capitalism—a rival regime embodied by China and characterized by a capitalist system of production combined with state ownership and guidance. I examine China’s potential rise from the historical perspective of shocks and waves, and end by discussing the argument’s broader implications for democracy and the global order.