

foreign policy behavior of states is shaped primarily by the anarchic structure of the international system, that is, by the absence of a supranational authority capable of effectively providing for the security of individual states. For realists, so long as the international system is anarchic, violence will remain latent, if not always overt, in world politics regardless of the internal characteristics of individual states (e.g., their regime type). Thus, to the extent that a perpetual state of peace indeed prevails among liberal democracies, its emergence contradicts realist expectations and undermines the position of realism as the leading theory of international relations.

The popularity of the democratic-peace idea has not been confined to the academy. The foreign policy rhetoric of the Clinton administration featured many appeals to this thesis. Spreading democracy throughout the globe was a principal aim of President Bill Clinton's foreign policy, and administration officials used the democratic-peace idea to justify this policy—if the formerly autocratic nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union democratized successfully, the argument went, the United States and its West European allies would no longer need to contain these nations militarily because democracies do not fight each other.

The democratic peace has also been embraced by the neoconservative thinkers and officials who critically shaped the George W. Bush administration's foreign policy in the Middle East in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks. The belief that a zone of democracy equaled a zone of peace and security buttressed the neoconservatives' desire to use force to topple Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and their expectation that the democratization of Iraq would result in the spread of democracy throughout the Middle East.

*Ido Oren*

*See also* Democracy; Democratization; Kant, Immanuel; Liberalism; Perpetual Peace

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## DEMOCRATIZATION

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Democratization is the process through which a political regime becomes democratic. The explosive spread of democracy around the world over the last 35 years radically transformed the international political landscape from one in which democracies were the exception to one in which they are the rule. Interest in democratization is high among academics, policy makers, and activists alike, in large part due to the strengthening of international norms that associate democracy with many positive attributes, from human rights to economic prosperity to security. After briefly describing historical trends in democratization, this entry first explores definitional issues and then examines alternative explanations of democratization.

### Waves of Democratization

Transitions to and from democracy tend to occur globally in waves, meaning they are clustered in both space and time rather than distributed randomly. Samuel Huntington identified three main waves of democratization. The first wave (1826–1926) accompanied the expansion of suffrage, principally in Europe and the United States. The collapse of many European democracies after World War I marked the first reverse wave (1922–1942).

The second wave (1943–1962) occurred through the postwar occupation of Axis powers, attempts at democratization in former British colonies, and the spread of democracy in Latin America. The second reverse wave (1958–1975) came with the reversion to military rule in much of Latin America

and the collapse of young democracies in Asia and Africa.

The third wave began with the overthrow of the military regime in Portugal in 1974. Over the following 25 years, there was a dramatic expansion of democracy worldwide. Democracy first spread through southern Europe and Latin America, then to eastern Europe and Asia, and finally to Africa. During this period the number of electoral democracies grew from roughly one quarter to nearly two-thirds of all countries. Most analysts agree that the third wave has crested if not reversed. Rather than reverting to authoritarianism, however, many third wave democracies have become mired in hybrid or mixed regimes that combine elements of both democracy and authoritarianism.

### Defining Democratization

Democratization is difficult to define in practice, in large part due to disagreements over how to define democracy. For example, there is no consensus on where to mark the beginning and end points of the democratization process. One approach defines democratization as the period between the breakdown of an authoritarian regime and the conclusion of the first democratic national elections. Others mark earlier beginning points, such as the initiation of liberal reforms by authoritarian regimes or structural changes that weaken authoritarian regimes enough for opposition groups to push for democratic reforms. Some democratic theorists similarly assert that democratization continues long after the first elections because, by themselves, elections do not ensure a functioning democracy. The problem with this approach is that it is not clear when the democratization process stops. If measured against the ideal of a perfect liberal democracy, all countries may be viewed as perpetually being in a process of democratization. This limits the utility of democratization as an analytical tool.

Disagreement over definitions of democracy also makes it difficult to measure where a country is in its democratization process. One common measure is the Freedom House score, which measures political rights and civil liberties and reflects a liberal definition of democracy. Another indicator is the Polity score, which measures the authority characteristics of governing institutions and is

more consistent with procedural definitions of democracy.

### *Transition Versus Consolidation*

One common approach to specifying the democratization process is to differentiate between two phases: (a) the initial transition from an authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regime to an electoral democracy and (b) the subsequent consolidation of the democracy. The transition to and consolidation of democracy are often viewed as distinct processes driven by different actors and facilitated by different conditions. The transition process is oriented around the undermining of an authoritarian regime and the emergence of nascent democratic institutions and procedures. The consolidation process entails a much broader and more complex process of institutionalization of the new democratic rules for political life. As the reverse waves of democratization suggest, a transition does not always lead to consolidation.

### *Modes of Transition*

Democratization theorists have identified different patterns of interaction among social groups that shape the way democratization unfolds in a particular environment. Numerous such modes of transition have been identified, reflecting variations in the role of elites and masses in confronting the authoritarian regime, the degree to which the transition is managed by elites from the old regime, the speed with which the transition occurs, and the degree to which the new democratic regime breaks dramatically with the old regime. In all cases, transitions occur when a democratic opposition becomes strong and united enough to confront the authoritarian regime, and the authoritarian regime is too weak and divided to control the situation, either by co-opting the democratic opposition or cracking down through force.

Three very general modes of transition include pacted transitions, bottom-up transitions, and top-down transitions. In pacted transitions, moderate members of a weakened authoritarian regime negotiate the conditions of a transition with moderate leaders of a prodemocracy movement. These transitions tend to occur relatively rapidly and result in power-sharing arrangements that preserve

elements of the old authoritarian regime. Examples include the democratic transitions in Spain and Chile.

In bottom-up transitions, social groups develop a broad-based, grassroots movement for change that weakens the authoritarian regime through mass protests and ultimately forces the regime to relinquish power. These transitions often result in a radical break with the old regime. Examples include the democratic transitions in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

In top-down transitions, leaders of an authoritarian regime implement democratic reforms because they become convinced they are necessary for regime survival. Sometimes, these reforms produce protracted transitions in which the new democratic regime does not break dramatically from the old regime, as in the case of Mexico. In other cases, the reforms may produce more rapid and dramatic transitions, sometimes unintentionally, as in the case of the Soviet Union.

There is debate over whether certain modes of transition have a differential effect on the prospects for consolidation. Scholars who favor a strategic choice approach argue that there is little effect. They see actors as forward looking and only marginally affected by historical legacies. Others argue that the prospects for consolidation are enhanced when the balance of power between authoritarian and democratic forces is roughly equal because it provides pressure for compromise and moderation on all sides. A third argument is that there is no one best mode of transition. Rather, the conditions and strategies that facilitate a successful democratization process tend to vary by region due to a number of historical and contextual factors that shape perceptions of power relations and levels of uncertainty during the transition period. These factors include previous experience with democracy, traditions of civilian control over the military, levels of mass mobilization, and learning effects from previous successful cases of democratization.

### *Definitions of Consolidation*

Consolidation may be defined either in terms of democracy's sustainability or the deepening of its quality over time. These different understandings of consolidation reflect different definitions of

democracy. For minimalist definitions, which understand democracy as a dichotomous variable, consolidation is merely the survival of an electoral democracy. For broader definitions, which view democracy as a continuous variable, consolidation means going beyond an electoral democracy to include characteristics of a liberal democracy. In either case, it is difficult to know how consolidated a democracy is.

Conceptually, a country's democracy is consolidated when there is no longer a chance that it will revert to authoritarianism. This is difficult to know because only failures can be measured directly, and these only in hindsight. One common indicator is two consecutive turnovers of power. Another is when one political group agrees to give up power to the former opposition because this indicates a willingness by incumbents to settle disputes through the democratic process and to spend periods of time out of office. However, these measures are tautological because the processes that define a democracy are used to measure its persistence.

An alternative strategy is to measure the legitimacy of the democratic regime among citizens under the theory that a democracy is consolidated when all political actors recognize democracy as the best system for their society. Consolidation represents a shift in political culture as democratic behaviors become routine and taken for granted. This happens over time through the institutionalization of democratic procedures and the ability of the system to perform effectively.

### *Hybrid Regimes and Consolidation*

Sustainability and quality of democracy were long thought to go hand in hand—the higher the quality of democracy, the more resistant it will be to reversal. Although this may be true, the assumption that the longer a democracy survives, the more likely it is to improve its quality over time is increasingly criticized as overly deterministic and teleological. This assumption is undermined by the prevalence of hybrid or mixed regimes produced during the third wave of democratization. Rather than leading to the consolidation of liberal democracies, the third wave resulted in the rise of regimes that share elements of both democracy and dictatorship. This reality contradicts the assumption that countries will inevitably take one of two

paths, either toward a consolidated liberal democracy or back into authoritarianism. The fact that many of these mixed regimes appear to be stable has led some scholars to question the utility of analyzing countries in terms of movement along a continuum between authoritarianism and liberal democracy.

### Explaining Democratization

Not surprisingly, arguments regarding the sources of democratization responded to developments in the real world as the third wave evolved. There are two main approaches to explaining democratization: one that emphasizes favorable structural conditions and another that stresses elite choice. Each has benefits that compensate for the drawbacks of the other. The favorable-conditions approach allows a detailed explanation of the democratization process in particular countries, but it tends to produce a long list of factors that matter, making it difficult to produce a general model of democratization. By contrast, the elite-choice approach is theoretically concise and useful for making generalizations, but it lacks the richness of structural explanations. The rest of this section presents each approach, devoting more space to the favorable-conditions approach because it is theoretically less concise. Due to space limitations, this entry focuses on domestic explanations rather than international factors while recognizing that their importance is demonstrated by the fact that democratization occurs in waves.

Regardless of which approach one adopts, there are two areas of general agreement. First, there appear to be many paths to democracy. In some countries, democracy evolved gradually over centuries (e.g., Great Britain) whereas in others it emerged much more rapidly (e.g., the Baltic states). Some countries inherited democratic institutions from Britain as a result of colonialism (e.g., Canada and Australia), whereas others finally became democratic through foreign intervention following war (e.g., Germany and Japan). Second, democratization does not occur in a linear process. Rather, it is a long, slow, and conflictual process, often with frequent reversals. Viewed historically, the democratization process in a given country is shaped by the accumulation of experience with democracy over time. Each successive democratic

experience builds on the institutions and expectations of the previous experience while also shaping those of the future.

### *Elite-Choice Explanations*

During the early 1980s, many scholars were intrigued by the rapid expansion of democratic transitions in southern Europe and Latin America, which challenged the conventional wisdom that authoritarian regimes were robust. Democratization theorists of the period understandably focused on explaining these transitions. The third wave brought democracy to places where it was least expected, suggesting that there were no preconditions for democracy and that democratization could occur anywhere.

The wide variety of conditions surrounding democratic transitions suggested that the specific causes of democratization in a particular country might vary over time and space, making efforts at generalization difficult, if not impossible. Because the timing of transitions was highly contingent on contextual factors, many early democratization theorists framed general explanations in terms of the strategic interaction among elites, which produces a decision to adopt democratic procedures and institutions once the opportunity arises.

According to this approach, democratization is ultimately explained by elites' decision to establish institutions that generate incentives for them to voluntarily comply with the democratic process. Transitions are successful to the extent that elites perceive themselves as better off in the long run under the new system, either by ensuring the possibility of future access to power or by providing material gains through greater stability. The only necessary conditions are that elites view themselves as members of the same nation and agree on the borders of the state. These conditions induce elites to resolve their conflicts through bargaining rather than breaking off into separate political groupings. This is not to say that ethnic homogeneity guarantees democracy or that heterogeneity prohibits it; there is little evidence to support either proposition. Rather, elites must simply accept that they belong to the same nation-state and therefore seek to resolve political conflicts within that context.

The advantage of the elite-choice approach is that it is theoretically concise and overcomes the



problem of multiple causality inherent in structural explanations. However, it does not account for the origins of elite preferences or the conditions that shape negotiations. A related criticism is that it understates the importance of the masses, particularly labor and civil society organizations, in pressuring authoritarian elites to liberalize and providing credibility to demands by the democratic opposition. In addition, the fact that democratization occurs in waves suggests that transitions are not entirely contingent but are shaped by international structural forces.

### *Structural Conditions*

Over time, the third wave of democratization provided many more cases to study and to test various theories. Two trends revitalized explanations emphasizing conditions that facilitate democratization. First, the democratic transitions that occurred in Latin American and East Asia in the wake of rapid industrialization renewed interest in modernization theory. Second, as the third wave wore on, the focus of research switched from transitions to the problems of consolidation faced by many young democracies. Proponents of structural explanations point to the difficulty of democracy promotion efforts in places like Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as well as the failure of many third wave democracies to consolidate, as evidence that democratization requires more than elite consent. There is no consensus on which conditions are most important or exactly how they function to promote democratization. There is, however, broad agreement that the following conditions should not be viewed as deterministic but rather probabilistic in the sense of making democracy more likely to flourish.

#### **Economic Development**

The correlation between democracy and economic development is one of the strongest in political science. However, there is much debate over the nature of the relationship as well as the causal mechanisms behind it. Early modernization theorists noted that the most successful and enduring democracies at the time were also the richest, whereas most poor countries had difficulty developing democracy. Many interpreted this correlation as evidence that economic development, usually

measured as per capita GDP, lays the foundation for democratic transitions. Some even saw democratization as the final stage of the modernization process. The basic argument is that economic development produces an educated and entrepreneurial middle class with an interest in demanding greater influence over governance issues and the capacity to do so. Eventually, even the most repressive governments must bow to this pressure.

A large middle class is widely viewed as a stabilizing and moderating force that guards against authoritarian tendencies. The assumption is that large inequalities in society exacerbate class conflicts. In extreme cases, both the rich and poor are willing to use authoritarian measures to impose their will on the other. The middle class balances these extremist positions due to their interest in economic security and stability. As property owners, they seek to protect their economic, political, and social rights through the rule of law and accountable government. Middle-class pressures for democratic reforms were crucial to the democratization processes in places as diverse as Britain, the United States, Latin America, South Korea, and the Philippines. However, it is also true that members of the middle class do not always support democracy. Examples from Germany in the 1930s, Chile in the 1970s, and China today suggest that the middle class will back authoritarian regimes when they see it as suiting their economic interests.

A similar argument is that experience with capitalism promotes democratization as economic freedom creates pressures for political freedom. Private enterprise generates a business class with interests separate from the state and the resources to make demands on the state. The business class inevitably organizes and begins to demand a say on issues that affect them, such as taxes, regulations, and the protection of property rights. It pushes for responsive and accountable government to protect its interests. In contrast, the absence of economic freedom reduces the incentives and ability for citizens to organize independent of the state or hold the state accountable, making authoritarianism more likely.

For supporters of this argument, the emergence of a strong business class can explain the difference between countries like Britain and the United States, where industrialization coincided with democratization, and countries like Germany,

Japan, and Russia, where industrialization coincided with authoritarianism. However, in cases like Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Singapore, Taiwan, and the Philippines, the business class supported authoritarian regimes that respected private enterprise. The Chinese government has become quite skilled at permitting economic freedoms and private enterprise while maintaining strict limits on political freedoms, contradicting the conventional wisdom that economic liberalization will necessarily lead to political liberalization.

Education appears to be particularly important. Although education levels tend to rise with economic development, many scholars credit education as a key reason why democratization is viable in poorer countries. Educated citizens are better equipped to understand political issues and are more likely to be active in the political process. They are more attentive to public affairs and demand both inclusion and accountability. In addition, better educated people are more likely to hold values in line with democracy. Of course, whether education promotes democracy depends in large part on the content of what is taught and discussed in the education system. Citizens must be given the skills, resources, and freedom to analyze and evaluate different political ideas if education is to facilitate democratization.

A major criticism of explanations emphasizing economic development is that it is not clear whether the relationship between economic growth and democracy is positive or negative. The modernization process produces political instability and frequently leads to authoritarian regimes, such as the fascist regimes in Europe during the 1930s or the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes in South America in the 1970s. Therefore, conditions other than economic growth must explain variation in the success of democratization. Other scholars acknowledge the relationship between economic growth and democratization but argue that it is not causal. They point to the wave of democratic transitions in poor countries around the world during the 1980s and 1990s as well as the persistence of wealthy authoritarian regimes in countries like China and Saudi Arabia as evidence that wealth is neither necessary nor sufficient for democratization to occur.

There is broad agreement that while a country's level of economic development may not explain

the timing of a democratic transition, it does determine the prospects for consolidation once democracy is established. Democratic transitions occur in poor and rich countries alike, but the probability of consolidation is considerably higher in rich countries. High levels of per capita GDP virtually guarantee that democracy will endure. However, there is no agreement on why this is the case.

One common argument is that to function well, democracies require the consent of citizens, which is based on the legitimacy of the system. This legitimacy rests on effective performance, which is usually defined in terms of economic development. A criticism of this argument comes from studies of Eastern Europe and Latin America, which suggest that economic decline does not necessarily reduce popular support for democratic governance. In addition, the loss of popular support is not a necessary or sufficient condition for democratic breakdown; democracies tend to be overthrown by elite conspiracies rather than popular revolt.

#### Political Culture

Some democratic theorists believe a democratic political culture is necessary for democratization to succeed. There is no consensus on exactly which attitudes and values comprise a democratic political culture, but most scholars acknowledge the importance of a tolerance of diversity, the belief that other citizens are basically trustworthy, a belief in reciprocity, a willingness to cooperate and compromise, a respect for freedom and equality, and a belief that all members of society have both the right to be included in the political system and the capacity to participate effectively. This collection of values and attitudes is often referred to as a civic culture. There is less agreement over whether other values, such as individualism, security, or a commitment to economic welfare, are also essential.

The above values contribute to democracy in a variety of ways. They encourage a willingness among competing groups to resolve their differences peacefully through the political process even when they do not achieve all of their goals. Average citizens are more willing to abide by state decisions even when they do not agree with them. At the same time, these values promote citizen participation in the democratic process by fostering an interest in public issues and a willingness to work

to solve collective problems. They also help citizens organize in independent associations that can check state power and make it more responsive and accountable. In short, a civic culture maintains the delicate balance required by a democratic system in which citizens recognize and obey the authority of governing elites while also pressuring them to be responsive and accountable.

There is considerable debate over whether a democratic culture explains democratic transitions. One argument is that countries with high levels of the values and attitudes listed above are more likely to adopt democracy than countries that lack these values, regardless of the level of economic development. Interpersonal trust is crucial to elites accepting the rules of democracy. Losers of elections must trust that the winners will not use their advantage to keep the opposition permanently out of power. Citizens must trust that their elected leaders will generally represent their interests or that they will at least have the opportunity to shape leaders' decisions on issues that matter most to them.

Supporters of this argument point to statistical studies based on survey data that show a strong correlation between the attitudes and values of a democratic culture and the number of years a country has experienced democracy. Other scholars criticize these studies for assuming the causal arrow moves in one direction, from culture to democratic institutions. In contrast, they argue that a democratic culture is the product of prolonged experience with democracy. Transitions occur for a wide variety of reasons specific to each case rather than the attitudes of the general public. The success of democracy over time increases levels of democratic attitudes and values as a rational, learned response to the experience of living under a stable democratic regime.

Regardless of whether a democratic political culture comes before or after the transition to democracy, it is widely recognized as essential to the consolidation process. How nondemocratic countries overcome the chicken-and-egg problem and develop a democratic political culture is not well understood. A number of factors are frequently mentioned, including education, changes in the social structure that accompany the modernization process, and particularly the density of social ties constructed through civic associations.

### Civil Society

The idea that an active and engaged civil society is conducive to democratization is widely held. However, there are different explanations for why this is the case, some of which are contradictory. One argument is that civil society fosters democratic habits and values. Dense networks of voluntary associations through which citizens organize independent of the state are a primary source of the civic culture essential to the functioning of a democratic society. Particularly when these associations are not political in nature, citizens develop ties that cut across political, economic, and social cleavages. These social ties promote a level of moderation in society that encourages tolerance of diversity and prevents political conflicts from escalating into violence. Citizens also learn habits of organization and develop a sense of community. As society becomes linked together at the grassroots level through a dense network of associations, citizens increase their level of social trust and develop norms of reciprocity that allow them to cooperate to solve many community problems on their own. In this way, an organized citizenry is able both to ease the burden on the state, allowing it to be more effective, and to limit the state's power by keeping it accountable.

A different argument links civil society much more explicitly to democratic transitions. Rather than a source of moderation and apolitical cooperation, civil society is viewed as a site of active resistance against the state. In authoritarian regimes, it is difficult to contest state power through the state, so the values of resistance are developed within civil society. The active resistance of civil society groups weakens the authoritarian regime enough for a democratic transition to occur. Supporters of this view cite as evidence the role of civil society in challenging communist regimes in Eastern Europe and military regimes in Latin America during the 1980s.

These different arguments have prompted a great deal of debate over the type of associations that should be considered part of civil society and the mechanisms by which they facilitate democratization. To best serve democratization, should civil society be characterized by moderation, cooperation, and apolitical associations of equal actors linked through horizontal relationships? Or do highly political and confrontational groups of

people mobilized through hierarchical structures better promote democratization? These contradictory views of civil society show that the link between civil society and democratization is not well understood. Furthermore, critics of the civil society approach note that not all civil society organizations are rooted in democratic values. The purpose of associations and the norms they promote matter; not all civic associations inculcate norms of tolerance and equality. Organizations like the Ku Klux Klan demonstrate that citizen associations do not always involve people in harmless efforts and that group involvement does not always cut across existing social cleavages. A second criticism is that an active civil society can just as easily destabilize democratic regimes as authoritarian regimes. Hitler came to power in part through the mobilization of civil society that characterized Germany in the 1920s. This civil society was highly politicized and contributed to the polarization of politics, drawing people apart and fueling hatred of different social groups, undermining democratic values.

#### Institutions

Institutional arrangements play an important role in shaping the prospects for both democratic transitions and consolidation. Institutional arrangements matter because they shape elite incentives and their ability to overcome collective action and coordination dilemmas. This can affect the prospects for democratic transitions by determining the durability of authoritarian regimes. For example, highly institutionalized political parties allow authoritarian leaders to maintain a cohesive coalition able to suppress advocates of democratic governance by managing elite conflicts through party mechanisms. In the same way, the institutional design of democracies affects the prospects for consolidation.

There is general consensus that parliamentary systems are more conducive to democratic consolidation than presidential systems. However, there is disagreement on why this tends to be the case. One common argument is that parliamentary systems are better able to manage political conflict by allowing representatives of a broader spectrum of society to participate in government institutions as well as reducing the incentives and capacity for chief executives to circumvent or suspend

democratic procedures. Another argument is that leaders who design new democratic institutions during the transition often see themselves as leaders of the nation and seek strong control to build the new state. They often choose presidential systems for instrumental reasons to enhance their control, which increases the likelihood of undemocratic tendencies. Of course, the prospects for democratic consolidation are affected by a number of other institutional features, including the electoral and party systems, independence of the judiciary, and legislative powers vis-à-vis the chief executive.

#### Structured Contingency

One way to reconcile the influence of both strategic choice and structural conditions is to adopt a path-dependent approach. A number of structural factors, domestic and international, shape the strength of both an authoritarian regime and a democratic opposition and thus the strategic interaction of elites. However, the transition to a basic democratic framework is ultimately contingent on the decision of elites. This process of elite interaction, in turn, determines the institutions and structures that shape competition among social groups in the future and thus the prospects for a well-functioning democracy.

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*See also* Civil Society; Culture; Democracy; Democratic Peace; Elite Theory; Modernization Theory

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## DEPENDENCY THEORY

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Dependency theory is a body of ideas about the role of developing countries within the global economic system, about the nature of development, and about patterns of unequal power. It dominated much Latin American social science (including the analysis of the region's international role) in the 1960s and 1970s. Its popularity was increased by the vociferous criticism in both North and South America of U.S. interventionist policies, especially the Vietnam War and the U.S. role in deposing the Salvador Allende government in Chile.

Dependency theory formed one part of the broad critique of liberal and Western ideas of economic development (modernization theory), which argued that the less developed parts of the world could and would follow essentially the same growth path as the industrialized world and that participation in the global economy was fundamentally positive. More precisely, the emergence of dependency theory from the mid-1960s reflected both growing dissatisfaction with the ideas of national-developmentalism associated with the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA, CEPAL in Spanish) and ongoing debates within Marxism as to the nature of capitalist development in peripheral societies. Leading theorists at ECLA such as Raul Prebisch had stressed the need for a conscious and planned strategy of national development built around a major role for the state, import substitution, and a cross-class coalition led by a modernizing national bourgeoisie.

By the mid-1960s, the limits of such policies were becoming clearer: limited growth, a failure to reduce social inequalities, recurrent balance of

payments crises, and the support of industrialists and the middle classes for the wave of military coups that were sweeping the region. Dependency theorists argued that the bourgeoisie was in fact not national but deeply connected with both the economic interests and anticommunist objectives of the core capitalist countries.

Dependency theory is best seen as a broad approach or perspective encompassing a variety of writers from different backgrounds and with different concerns. Some theorists (such as André Gunder Frank) tended to view dependency theory in terms of a rigid law of underdevelopment and argued that participation in the international economy served only to perpetuate inequality and underdevelopment. Others (such as Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Peter Evans) developed a more case-specific historical structural approach, which accepted the fact of economic development but nonetheless argued that the character of that development remained indelibly marked (and distorted) by the dependent status of the region. By the early 1970s, the focus had shifted from the notion of the “development of underdevelopment” to the analysis of “dependent development.”

Dependency theory is concerned with the dynamics of the world capitalist system. Many of the external structures of dependency—the high levels of dependence of developing countries on the United States and its allies for trade, investment, aid, and technology—can be readily incorporated into other theories of international relations that stress the importance of power inequalities. However, what is distinctive about dependency theory is the emphasis on the links between internal and external forces and the coincidence of interests between dominant classes within Latin American and other third world societies and those in the core capitalist economies. Dependency theorists accepted that development was taking place and that some Latin American countries in the 1970s were adopting more assertive foreign policies. However, they insisted on the need to recognize (a) the degree to which this development and this apparent foreign policy assertion was constrained within an overall triple alliance between state technocrats, multinational companies, and local capital; (b) the continuing powerful external constraints on the region and the degree to which effective control lay with the industrialized states;