

'Asian sensibilities and motivations *in their own right*' (p. 3), it would have benefited the book as a whole had the concept of 'Asia' been systematically defined and discussed in a more coherent way. Another problem is the unbalanced coverage—Turkey was included, but not Vietnam or Indo-China. Overall, it would have made the work much stronger if it had devoted more space to the issues that affected all of Asia through a global perspective—such as colonialism, internationalism, national development and globalization. This kind of systematic treatment would have ensured not only that most Asian nations were included, but, more importantly, it would have made the book's central theme clearer, connecting the chapters more coherently and systematically.

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Governance, law and ethics

Aftershocks: Great Powers and domestic reforms in the twentieth century. By Seva Gunitsky. Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press. 2017. 304pp. £49.25. ISBN 978 0 69117 233 0. Available as e-book.

The debates about the decline of American hegemony and the reversal of the global spread of democracy have become intense in the last couple of years. This makes the publication of this perceptive work by Seva Gunitsky very timely. In *Aftershocks*, he argues that 'the history of modern democracy cannot be completely understood without taking into account the effects of hegemonic shocks' (p. 232). His central argument is that these 'moments of sudden rise and decline of great powers', whether caused by war or economic crisis, 'act as powerful catalysts for cross-border bursts of domestic reform [by creating] incentives for domestic reform even in countries that have little to do with the great powers themselves' (pp. 2–3). For Gunitsky, ideas about the most desirable political order—however attractive—cannot generate waves of change on their own. For this to happen, there has to be a change in the hegemonic configuration of the international system. In this unabashed structural approach, even the intentions or actions of rising or declining hegemonies who are championing their particular form of government are not crucial—what matters is the disruption produced by the rebalancing of power between them.

Gunitsky identifies three mechanisms that interact to connect hegemonic shocks to waves of regime change: coercion, inducement and emulation. In short, these shocks increase the likelihood of external regime imposition by a rising power and enable it to shape the institutional preferences of others through inducements. Furthermore, the shocks encourage other states to copy the political institutions of the rising power. Separate chapters map out how the hegemonic shocks caused by the First and Second World Wars, the Great Depression and the collapse of the Soviet Union produced the structural conditions that enabled subsequent periods of political volatility and cross-national trends towards or away from democratic forms of government. In doing so, *Aftershocks* puts forward a compelling argument and backs it up with case-studies built on a wider range of sources than one tends to find in much of the literature on democratic (and autocratic) waves.

Gunitsky's engagement with the manner in which these waves crest and retreat is one of the most important contributions of this book. *Aftershocks* goes beyond the range of usual explanations for democratic advances and for backsliding, seamlessly integrating them into a single phenomenon. Gunitsky makes a convincing case for his argument that the forces producing democratic waves after hegemonic shocks carry within them the seeds for the failures of many such transitions. The 'extremely powerful but temporary incentives for

democratization' that are created lead to 'an artificially inflated number of transitions'. Therefore, transitions attempted during a post-shock wave are 'systematically more fragile than democratization driven purely by domestic forces' (pp. 5–6). At first, the impact of the hegemonic shock overwhelms the various domestic conditions that normally prevent democratic change. But as this effect gradually weakens, home-grown factors reassert themselves and lead to the failure of democratization. Furthermore, with the passage of time, hegemonic pressures shift, autocratic regimes adapt and learn, and initial ad hoc national democratic coalitions break up. All this adds up to a strong explanation of the ebb and flow of regime type tides in the international system.

If there is perhaps one shallow spot in Gunitsky's account of this phenomenon across the last century or so, it concerns the current trend towards so-called hybrid regimes. By now, it is well established that the optimism about the forward march of democratization following the end of the Cold War was not entirely justified, with many countries that enjoyed a moment of progress showing clear signs of reversal or becoming stabilized in a zone of minimal democratic form and anaemic democratic substance. While *Aftershocks* does address this issue, it could have devoted more space to it, not least because of its connection to the weakening of western hegemony. In particular, it would have been good to read more about what happened in Russia and other post-Soviet countries since they are central to the story of hybrid regimes.

This aside, *Aftershocks* is an important, well-argued and well-written contribution to the literature on the international dimension of change in political regimes across different countries. Not only does it clarify the processes that led to today's world, it also raises necessary questions about where we may be heading. Gunitsky is correct in saying that the link between capitalism and democracy may not be as unique as some argue; the coming decades may well show autocratic or illiberal states growing in power on the back of capitalist economies. As we are beginning to see, this will abet the spread of non-democratic forms of government through strength of example and a balance of power that tilts more towards autocratic powers. Ultimately, whether this happens will depend a lot on the shape of the next hegemonic shock. Gunitsky convincingly argues that the experience of the last 100 years shows that prospects for global democracy are tightly bound with the health of the most powerful democratic state: 'American power and success serves to legitimate the regime that it embodies and creates powerful incentives for leaders around the world to place themselves in the U.S. camp' (p. 241). Based on the book's core argument, Gunitsky warns that a sudden decline in American power—the potential next hegemonic shock—would be worse for global democracy than the gradual rise of undemocratic China. This is not a cheering thought for those already worried about the impact of the ongoing slow and soft rebalancing of power away from the United States and its western democratic cohort.

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Political trials in theory and history. Edited by **Jens Meierhenrich and Devin O. Pendas**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2016. 430pp. £81.00. ISBN 978 1 10707 946 5. Available as e-book.

When facing charges, both President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi accused their judges of being instruments of political retaliation. They are not alone: even O. J. Simpson's defence attorney argued that his trial was politically motivated. Were they right? Politicians, commentators and members of the public will hold contrasting views,