

# H-Diplo | ISSF

Roundtable, Volume X, No. 22 (2019)

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**Seva Gunitsky. *Aftershocks: Great Powers and Domestic Reforms in the Twentieth Century*.** Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. ISBN: 9780691172330 (hardcover, \$95.00); 978069117234 (paperback, \$29.95).

Published on **28 January 2019**

Permalink: <http://issforum.org/roundtables/10-22-aftershocks>

PDF URL: <http://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-10-22.pdf>

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## Introduction by Susan Hyde, University of California, Berkeley

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Some policy-relevant books grow less relevant as time passes from the moment they are published, much like the value of a new car once the owner drives it off the lot. Seva Gunitsky's *Great Powers and Domestic Reforms in the Twentieth Century*, published in 2017 by Princeton University Press, is a book that has grown significantly more relevant and important since it was written, making the author prescient, lucky, or both. In 2016, for example, few public commentators predicted that the U.S.'s status as a leader of the liberal international order would decline with such rapidity. Similarly, U.S. support for democracy in other countries was not a top foreign policy priority (also true for most of U.S. history), but nor was it being consistently undermined by the U.S. president and his administration, as it is at present.

In the last two years, the prospect that the world is or will soon experience a hegemonic shock has become less of a distant concern of mostly theoretical interest and more of a daily debate. Even if you are a skeptic about contemporary claims that the U.S. is facing the end of its status as the dominant global power and, in some circles, the leader of the free world, it is hard to argue persuasively that U.S. claims to support democracy in other countries (and their freely elected leaders) has much remaining credibility. These two changes, either individually or jointly, will have consequences not only for the structure of the international system but, as Gunitsky's book suggests, for the percentage of the world's population living under democracy or authoritarianism in the near future.

There are many books on the role of great powers in the international system, and there is a growing amount of empirical work on the importance of international factors in understanding democratization processes.<sup>1</sup> Gunitsky does more than anyone before him to bring these two literatures together in an elegant theoretical framework that includes both international system-level changes and global trends in waves of domestic political reforms and the frequent backlash against them.

The reviewers of his book express considerable enthusiasm for the importance of this work and its practical relevance in light of current U.S. foreign policy. Kyle M. Lascurettes writes that it is "an emphatic reminder that the wall between comparative politics and international relations is more analytic than actual," and David Edelstein notes that this book may hold "significant implications not only for international relations theory, but also for the evolution of the contemporary international system."

As Lascurettes's review summarizes, Gunitsky's central argument is that "rapid changes in the distribution of power between the leading states of the international system, or 'hegemonic' shocks," can account for a surprising amount of the regime outcomes within states across the system. All else being equal, we can expect

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent examples from a large literature on great powers in the international system, see, for example, David M. Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017); Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Nuno P. Monteiro, *Theory of Unipolar Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Bear F. Braumoeller, *The Great Powers and the International System: Systemic Theory in Empirical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For examples on international factors in understanding democratization, see Jon C. Pevehouse, *Democracy from Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization* (New York: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Daniela Donno, *Defending Democratic Norms: International Actors and the Politics of Electoral Misconduct* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Judith G. Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy: When International Election Observation Works, and Why It Often Fails* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

to see significantly *more* of a quickly rising great power's regime type across the international system...and significantly *less* of the regime type of a dramatically declining great power." Through coercion, inducement, and emulation, rising powers change the distribution of democracy and autocracy in the international system.

Both reviewers raise questions about the book, most of which are additional questions provoked by the research rather than challenges to Gunitsky's central argument. Edelstein and Lascurettes both raise questions about the character of hegemonic shocks, and whether the end of the Cold War was in some sense unique given that it was not the result of a major war, which has implications for future hegemonic shocks. Both reviews also raise the interesting question of reverse causality, particularly in the case of Soviet decline. As Edelstein writes, "can hegemonic shocks be the product, in addition to the cause, of domestic reforms?"

One of the more pressing critiques and questions involves where Gunitsky ultimately comes down on the question of democratic exceptionalism. Is it, as Lascurettes asks, an ideology like any other? Or is it perhaps distinctive in its "seemingly boundless capacity to adapt"? We can hope to see more from Gunitsky on this and other topics.

### Participants:

**Seva Gunitsky** is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto. His work has appeared in academic journals such as *International Organization*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Theory*, and *Perspectives on Politics*, among others, as well as in popular outlets like *The New Republic*, *The American Interest*, and *Washington Quarterly*.

**Susan D. Hyde** is Professor of Political Science and Avice M. Saint Chair in Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley. She earned her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California, San Diego in 2006. She is the author of *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm* (2011, Cornell University Press) and has published many journal articles on democracy promotion and the global diffusion of elections. She is currently working on several projects related to her role as the Executive Director of the Evidence in Governance and Politics research network, and continues to study election violence, the consequences of democracy promotion efforts, and the role of regime type in international relations.

**David M. Edelstein** is Associate Professor in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service and the Department of Government at Georgetown University. In addition, he is a core faculty member in Georgetown's Security Studies Program and Center for Peace and Security Studies. He received his Ph.D. and M.A. in Political Science from the University of Chicago and his B.A. from Colgate University. His research and teaching focus on international security, international relations theory, and U.S. foreign policy. His first book is entitled *Occupational Hazards: Success and Failure in Military Occupation* (Cornell University Press, 2008). In addition, his research has been published in *International Security*, *Security Studies*, and *Survival*. He is currently engaged in two major research projects. One is on the time horizons of political leaders in international politics, and the other examines exit strategies from military interventions.

**Kyle M. Lascurettes** is Assistant Professor of International Affairs at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, where he specializes in global order, international institutions and IR theory. His recently-completed book manuscript investigates why powerful actors have promoted vastly different visions of international order throughout history.

**Review by David M. Edelstein, Georgetown University**

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I doubt that Seva Gunitsky was thinking about a Donald J. Trump administration as he was crafting his thoughtful, provocative, and important *Aftershocks*. His book, however, may hold significant implications not only for international relations theory, but also for the evolution of the contemporary international system. Gunitsky persuasively argues that waves of domestic reform often follow hegemonic shocks in the international system. Whether it be the interwar period, the early Cold War, or the post-Cold War period, to the victors go not only the spoils but also the domestic imitators, both willfully and under duress. As with other cycles in international relations, however, these waves of domestic change have their limits, eventually meet resistance, and frequently coming crashing to an end. Is the United States today enduring a self-inflicted hegemonic shock? Does it foretell a wave of domestic reform, albeit one promoted by the American president himself?

Fundamentally, this book reminds us of the important effect that international change can have on domestic political structures. While some might be inclined to look internally to identify sources of domestic change, Gunitsky argues that the origins of such change often lie in the international system. When hegemonic shocks—“moments of sudden rise and decline of great powers” (2)—occur, waves of domestic reform often follow. Gunitsky attributes these reforms to three mechanisms: hegemonic coercion, inducement, and emulation. Eventually, these waves of domestic reform, especially democratic reform, often ‘crest and collapse.’ Once the euphoria of new democracy wears off, it is likely to be followed by sobering forces that make it difficult for states without the institutional or societal bases to sustain democracy. The end result is one of ‘democratic overstretch,’ leaving the progress of democracy less substantial than had been originally imagined. Domestic reforms that may seem attractive in the short-term, especially when pursued via coercion, are likely to degrade over time, with potentially violent and destabilizing consequences.

Empirically, the book provides a focused review of the ebbs-and-flows of hegemonic shocks followed by waves of domestic reform over the course of the twentieth century. Starting with World War I, through the tumult of the interwar period, and on to the beginning, middle, and end of the Cold War, Gunitsky’s empirical material is not necessarily new, but his theoretical arguments cast familiar evidence in a new light. By the end, the reader comes to understand how international political change in the twentieth century meaningfully shaped the waves of domestic reform that followed.

While compelling, Gunitsky’s analysis left me with four lingering questions. First, to what extent is there variation in the waves that follow different types of domestic reforms? Gunitsky demonstrates that the waves in the aftermath of hegemonic shocks are not necessarily limited to democratic waves, but also include the fascist wave of the 1930s and the communist wave that competed with the democratic wave after World War II. But are all waves created equal, and do the waves follow similar trajectories of rise and fall? One could actually imagine alternative answers to this question. On the one hand, perhaps fascist or authoritarian waves would be more inclined to rely on the coercive mechanism of regime transformation, imposing authoritarianism on weaker states whether they are inclined to emulate the victorious state or not. As a consequence, one might expect such waves to meet quicker and more violent resistance from domestic populaces. The rise of such waves may be more abrupt and the declining wave may crash more dramatically. On the other hand, victorious democratic states have not been shy about exerting themselves in an effort to spread democracy to other states. While the ideals and values of democracy may be inherently more attractive to some and lead to more emulation, there has been plenty of coercion in the attempt to spread democracy

around the world. Such efforts may only lead to push back that is as significant and as violent as the resistance to authoritarian waves.

Second, will the pattern of behavior observed in the twentieth century necessarily continue into this century? Like any century, the twentieth century had its share of unique developments: two catastrophic world wars, the development of nuclear weapons, and the tremendous growth of the global economy. It might be reasonable to expect to see the rise and fall of domestic reform in the wake of such dramatic hegemonic change. But what if the hegemonic change that is more likely now differs in both form and magnitude. That is, what if the experience of the world wars together with the spread of nuclear weapons has made it more likely that future hegemonic change occurs with a whimper rather than a bang? To the extent this is true, it may be the case that the victor coming out of hegemonic change may be less evident and, therefore, less assertive than past hegemonies who were so dramatically pitted against an enemy and an alternative domestic system associated with that enemy.

Alternatively, what if the leaders of great powers have actually learned from the experience of post-hegemonic shock regime waves in the twentieth century? Perhaps having witnessed the rise and fall of such waves, victorious great powers of the twenty-first century will be more modest in their efforts to promote domestic regime transformation following their victories. Myself, I am skeptical.<sup>1</sup> Great power hubris seems a recurrent phenomenon in international politics. It predates the twentieth century and is likely to persist into this century. But if great powers or the leaders are capable of learning, one lesson they might learn is that the effort to spread their regime type, especially through coercion, is unlikely to succeed over the long-term and may only prove to be detrimental to an overstretched great power.

Third, Gunitsky's argument invites the question of whether hegemonic shocks may be the product, in addition to the cause, of domestic reforms. Understandably, Gunitsky does not provide a detailed account of the causes of hegemonic shocks—a substantial project in and of itself—but a cursory account of some well-known cases suggests that such shocks are often the product of a combination of domestic and international developments or perhaps international developments driven by domestic factors. Most obviously, consider the end of the Cold War during which the Soviet Union disappeared from international politics and the United States emerged triumphant. While the hegemonic shock itself was of an international nature, the causes were a combination of international, in the form of American economic, military, and political pressure, and domestic, in the form of Soviet internal political and economic disintegration. In turn, this Soviet collapse contributed to the hegemonic shock of the end of the Cold War and the subsequent wave of democratic domestic reform. Thus, it may be that the international transformation of the hegemonic shock is itself caused by domestic processes underway. What starts with domestic reform in one great power ends with domestic reform in other countries.

Fourth and finally, how do we know a hegemonic shock when we see it? Hegemonic shocks are easy to identify in retrospect. They radically transform the international system whether the shock involves a major war or not. But how do we know if such a transformation is in the process of taking place? Consider the contemporary international system. For the last few decades, Chinese capabilities have been rising absolutely even as questions remain about China's rise relative to the United States. Its rise threatens a hegemonic shock

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<sup>1</sup> David M. Edelstein, *Occupational Hazards: Success and Failure in Military Occupation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

inasmuch as it could transform the international system from a unipolar to a bipolar system. If such a transformation takes place, Gunitsky's argument suggests that it may be followed by domestic reforms, including potentially imitation and emulation of Chinese authoritarianism. Not far behind lays the dangerous prospect of conflict between western liberal democracies and states inspired by Chinese authoritarianism. But how do we know if such a process is truly underway, and will we know for sure until we can look back retroactively and identify that a shock has occurred?

All of which returns me to two of the questions with which I started regarding the current Trump administration in the United States. First, are we currently witnessing a self-induced hegemonic shock? As the Trump administration seemingly relinquishes much of the traditional leadership role that the U.S. has played in the world, will this create a shock to the system and open up the possibility of alternative hegemons and, following Gunitsky's argument, alternative dominant domestic political systems? Second, if this is a hegemonic shock, will it clear the way for the rise of alternative domestic political systems?

The sum implication of these questions, however, is to reinforce the significance of Seva Gunitsky's *Aftershocks*. The argument refocuses our attention on the critical relationship between international and domestic change, and in doing so, poses central theoretical questions with important contemporary implications.

Review by Kyle M. Lascuertes, Lewis & Clark College

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Seva Gunitsky's outstanding book makes a number of significant contributions to the study of regime diffusion and great power politics. In this review, I highlight a few of its obvious and important strengths before briefly exploring three instances where the book raises provocative questions that I believe it does not fully answer.

*Aftershocks* is, first, an excellent marriage of the subfields of international relations and comparative politics. Gunitsky's primary thesis is essentially that a popular variable in international relations—hegemonic rise and decline—can explain a variable central to the study of comparative politics, the regime types of states. More specifically, he argues that rapid changes in the distribution of power between the leading states of the international system, or 'hegemonic shocks,' can account for a surprising amount of the regime outcomes within states across the system. All else being equal, we can expect to see significantly *more* of a quickly rising great power's regime type across the international system after a dramatic shift in the distribution of power and significantly *less* of the regime type of a dramatically declining great power.

Second, the three causal mechanisms connecting cause to outcome are lucid and illuminating. Gunitsky shows that there are a variety of diverse ways in which hegemonic shocks tend to diffuse the regime type of the empowered hegemon. At many times, rising great powers find themselves with new opportunities to coercively impose their regime over others ('coercion'). At other times, hegemons view 'inducement'—often through economic aid—as a more attractive way of promoting particular domestic institutions. In still other circumstances, the hegemons themselves do relatively little directly, yet still exercise influence indirectly through the example their success sets for others ('emulation').

Third, these mechanisms are ably used to reinterpret particular historical eras and international developments in a new light. The democratic spirit of idealism that took hold across Europe in the wake of the First World War is treated as an attempt to *emulate* the surprising success of the American democratic model in that conflict (77-87). The Marshall Plan is recast as the ultimate instance of a hegemon successfully *inducing* polities to embrace one regime type, democracy, while rejecting another, communism, in exchange for historic amounts of economic aid (182-184). Soviet imposition of an Iron Curtain across Eastern Europe in the late 1940s is effectively interpreted as a straightforward case of hegemonic *coercion*, while the abrupt ending of the Brezhnev Doctrine in the late 1980s is employed to convincingly demonstrate what happens when such coercion is rapidly lifted. Beyond their usefulness for illustrating these mechanisms at work, it is also worth noting that the empirical/historical chapters of *Aftershocks* are simply a pleasure to read. Rarely do they feel like sterile tests of social science theories, instead reading more as fascinating intellectual histories replete with engaging narratives and illuminating anecdotes. Great care was taken in constructing these narratives, and it shows.

These strengths notwithstanding, there are a number of areas where I would like to probe a bit further. More to the point, I submit that *Aftershocks* raises but does not itself fully answer three additional and important questions.

*First, are all hegemonic shocks created equal?* The two World Wars seem to provide the purest examples of 'shock' to which Gunitsky is referring, and the victories of the United States after the First and the United States and Soviet Union after the Second (chapters 3 and 5) offer the strongest instances of shocks producing regime expansion in *Aftershocks*. The other two shocks (chapters 4 and 6) are more ambiguous, however.

The first of these non-war shocks—the Great Depression—purportedly allowed for the rise of fascist regimes given Germany’s impressive economic recovery in the 1930s. I was initially skeptical of Gunitsky’s treatment of this instance as a hegemonic shock. After all, Germany never actually surpassed the United States in relative power during this period, impressive as its rise in the 1930s might have been. That said, Gunitsky provides impressive process evidence throughout chapter 4 demonstrating the prestige the Nazi model achieved at this time, and often at the expense of the United States since “the Great Depression was instantly associated with the faults of the American system” (119). While I still wonder whether economic shocks of this sort are as dramatic or illuminating as great power victory or defeat in major war, the chapter provided surprising but compelling evidence for the power of widespread international *perceptions* of regime performance. Yet do such perceptions always conform so closely to reality? Might international society sometimes radically misinterpret regime success or failure?

More significant complications come with the second case of a non-war shock, the end of the Cold War, when the sudden decline of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s is purported to have caused the subsequent disappearance of communist regimes both in Europe and across the globe. Two aspects of this interpretation appear questionable, however.

First, was the end of the Cold War definitively a hegemonic shock of the same magnitude as the others? Gunitsky uses Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) scores to measure hegemonic power and code hegemonic shocks. Yet this case is only 1 of 2 out of 5 where he does not graphically depict the changing CINC scores of the relevant great powers.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is the case because the CINC data paints a more complicated picture of changing power at the end of the Cold War than in the other instances of hegemonic shock. To get to the heart of the matter, plotting the U.S. and Soviet CINC scores for this period complicates Gunitsky’s contention that a definitive hegemonic shock took place in the mid-to-late 1980s. In fact, the USSR actually held a *higher* CINC score than the United States in the mid-1980s, only declining very slightly between 1985 and 1988 and then more precipitously after that (particularly between 1988-1989 and especially between 1990-1992). To the extent that there *was* a sudden shock in this period, it thus came later—mostly between 1990 and 1992—and from the USSR *voluntarily* surrendering its power in Eastern Europe and then within the Soviet Union itself, rather than unwillingly losing it through poor performance in war or crisis, as in the other instances of hegemonic shock.

This raises an additional complication for this case. In each of the prior instances of shock, hegemonic performance in war or crisis—the independent variable—clearly preceded cresting or collapsing regime waves—the dependent variable. In this case, however, the two phenomena more messily coincided with one another. Worse than simply coinciding, one could even make the case that regime conversion away from communism—the purported dependent variable—actually preceded and at least partially caused the most important drop in Soviet power between 1990 and 1992, the purported independent variable. Upon closer inspection, this case thus begins to look significantly different than those it is being held up against.

The fact that the Soviet Union’s behavior over its subordinates played such a large role in this particular shock leads to the second important question that I believe is not addressed in *Aftershocks: why do hegemonic actors*

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<sup>1</sup> A check on the other case where CINC data is not graphically depicted, America after World War I, reveals that this data supports Gunitsky’s contention that there was indeed a significant hegemonic shock that favored the United States at that time.



*often but not always seek to promote their own regime type abroad?* After all, two out of three of the book's causal mechanisms—hegemonic coercion and inducement—rest upon the assumption that great powers sometimes see great value in imposing their own type of regime onto other polities. Yet Gunitsky never offers a theory of hegemonic motivation for behaving in this way. Do elites of hegemonic states act out of a genuine commitment to the normative rightness of their domestic ideology? Or are they instead motivated by instrumental considerations, only pretending to truly champion a particular ideology for the purpose of enhancing their state's security or power? Or might it be some combination of these competing motives?<sup>2</sup> *Aftershocks* does not provide definitive answers to these queries.

This logical gap becomes particularly important in the last case study, when the sudden decline of the Soviet Union is purported to cause the subsequent disappearance of communist regimes throughout the world. Gunitsky freely admits the importance of Soviet decisions to stop promoting and protecting communist regimes in Eastern Europe for the subsequent systemic transformations that followed (205-212). Yet if my observation from earlier is also correct—that the USSR's voluntary surrender of control over its satellites and subordinates in large part caused its sharp decline in power—then it is the question of variation in hegemonic behavior that becomes most important and, in this case, most puzzling. The most crucial questions of the case are no longer 'why did the Soviet Union decline?' and 'why did communist regimes disappear?' but instead 'why did the USSR *voluntarily* choose to forsake promoting its own ideology abroad, thereby decimating its own power and influence?' More broadly, one wonders after reading *Aftershocks* why great powers sometimes see it as worthwhile to promote their own regime type abroad while at other times find that the game is not worth the candle.<sup>3</sup>

While these issues are no doubt important, the most fundamental question that I believe *Aftershocks* leaves unanswered has to do with whether or not the particular regime type we are most interested in today, liberal democracy, is truly exceptional in human history. More specifically, is *liberal democracy an ideology just like any other, subject to the same pressures and dynamics as, say, fascism and communism? Or is it instead a fundamentally exceptional form of government capable of transcending the pitfalls experienced by all others before it?* At various times, Gunitsky tips his hat to each side of this important debate.

On the one hand, the book's central framework strongly suggests that democracy *is not* fundamentally different from other regime types. Indeed, the very premise of *Aftershocks* is that regime types often become more or less ubiquitous based not on their intrinsic properties, but upon the relative performances of the great powers. Democracy is treated as being no different in this regard throughout the book: when the United States was ascendant in the twentieth century—immediately following both World Wars and the end of the Cold War—democratic regimes also experienced a corresponding spike. Gunitsky even criticizes existing theories of regime diffusion for focusing too specifically on *democratic* diffusion at the expense of regime

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<sup>2</sup> An account that seems to embrace the first of these possible explanations is Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). The second is adopted by John M. Owen IV, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change, 1510-2010* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), while the third probably fits best with the approach taken in Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Another puzzling case of hegemonic inaction in this way comes in chapter 3, where Gunitsky highlights the curious reticence of the United States to actively promote and foster democracies abroad in the interwar period.

diffusion more generally (56). And in what is a logical prediction entirely consistent with the book's core thesis, he argues in the conclusion that "One clear lesson of past hegemonic shocks is that a sudden decline in American power poses a much greater challenge to global democracy" than other dynamics or developments (240).

On the other hand, there are also select passages—as well as one major section of the book—where Gunitsky seems to suggest that democracy is actually quite exceptional compared to other ideologies. He notes that while the other regime types examined in *Aftershocks* thrived in "conditions of misery, uncertainty, and insecurity," democracy "has always appeared to be civilization's paramount luxury good, most compatible with—and to some extent dependent upon—a condition of relative safety and prosperity" (242). Yet if democracy has exceptional origins, is it not reasonable to assume that its dynamics of diffusion and dissolution might also be exceptional?

To this last point, Gunitsky concludes the book—surprisingly, in my opinion—by positing that democracy's inherent attributes could in the future actually overwhelm the structural forces he has spent the vast majority of *Aftershocks* highlighting. "Even without a structure of hegemonic power that favors its persistence," he argues, "democracy possesses certain advantages that may prove to be crucial in the long run," predominantly its "seemingly boundless capacity to adapt" to the best features of alternative ideologies while not compromising or destabilizing its democratic core (243). This may well be true, and only time will tell if liberal democracy can avoid falling by the wayside as other regime types have. Yet this conclusion falls entirely outside the book's central argument, and indeed challenges its very premise that we can explain a lot about regime diffusion *without* reference to the specific content of the regime types under examination.

Beyond these passages, *Aftershocks* most directly appears to endorse some version of democratic exceptionalism in chapter 2, which acts as the book's second theory chapter and seeks to explain the phenomenon of regime backsliding after a period of hegemonic shock-fueled diffusion has subsided. More specifically, Gunitsky argues in this chapter that following each instance of shock-fueled diffusion, we should expect to observe a fair amount of regime recidivism across a number of states. Documenting this trend and investigating its causes is a logical and compelling extension of the book's core theory, and Gunitsky should be commended for taking on yet another perplexing but important phenomenon related to regime diffusion in a single monograph. What is curious, however, is that unlike chapter 1's theory of hegemonic shocks, chapter 2's theory of counterwaves is framed solely around *democratic* backsliding. In other words, chapter 2's theory is made specific to the regime type of democracy, while chapter 1's theory applies to *all* regime types regardless of their particular ideological content.

What explains this puzzling decision to lump democracy in with other ideologies in one chapter only to single it out in the next? There are of course good reasons for focusing exclusively on democracy in chapter 2: 1) first, it is the regime type that experienced by far the most backsliding in the period of focus in *Aftershocks*, the twentieth century; and 2) second, it is the regime type of most interest for a western academic audience in 2017-2018. Nevertheless, the end result is still that the reader is left wondering whether democracies are unique in backsliding after hegemonic shocks fade or if we should expect other regime types to experience similar losses should they encounter similar circumstances.

My own view is that the mechanisms Gunitsky uses to account for democratic backsliding in chapter 2 should, for the most part, apply equally well to regime types other than democracy. More specifically, three of the four mechanisms he highlights appear to be generalizable beyond democracies: waning hegemonic control

over and interest in spreading the hegemon's own regime type ('shifting hegemonic pressures'); the adaptation over time of elites from contrary regime types to better deal with the challenges posed by the challenge of a new regime type wave ('autocratic adaptation'); and the fading of revolutionary euphoria and hope in places where the underlying conditions were not really in place for consolidation around a new regime type ('bounded rationality'). Only one mechanism highlighted in the chapter seems less easily generalizable beyond democracies: the collapse of ad hoc political coalitions over time, since at least a tacit agreement amongst a diverse coalition of actors to play by the rules of democratic institutions appears to be a prerequisite of regime consolidation unique to democracies. Overall, however, if these are indeed the mechanisms that truly explain backsliding after a period of regime diffusion, it seems fair to expect that other non-democratic regime types should suffer similar rollback over time.<sup>4</sup>

These ambiguities notwithstanding, *Aftershocks* is both a fantastic book and a significant achievement. It serves as an emphatic reminder that the wall between comparative politics and international relations is more analytic than actual, and that what happens within states is often a product of what takes place above and between them. At its best, it suggests that the fate of liberal democracy and the fate of America's global power position—two of the most important issues for world politics in the twenty-first century—should not be considered separate phenomena, but are instead questions that will remain intimately connected in the decades to come.

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<sup>4</sup> That said, Gunitsky at one point argues that communism hardly experienced any rollback after its initial shock-fueled wave (200), suggesting, perhaps, that these countercyclical tendencies will *not* always apply to non-democracies.

## Author's Response by Seva Gunitsky, University of Toronto

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My immense thanks to David Edelstein and Kyle Lascurettes for their extremely thoughtful comments, and to Susan Hyde for chairing the roundtable. Completing a book is both liberating and constraining—constraining because the finished text cannot help but remain mute about its tensions and complications. Continuing this conversation through close critical engagement is the best outcome an author can hope for, and I thank H-Diplo for providing me the opportunity to do so.

Both Edelstein and Lascurettes ask about variation among the waves. These are not, after all, monolithic entities, but complicated events marked not only by common patterns but by idiosyncrasies and contingencies. While each of the waves stems from a combination of the three mechanisms outlined in the book—hegemonic coercion, inducement, and emulation—the relative importance of these mechanisms varies across cases. The post-World War I wave, for instance, was driven primarily by emulation, as the rising hegemon remained largely unwilling to engage in direct regime promotion. The fascist wave culminated in a spasm of violent coercion, but began years earlier through inducement and emulation—the encouragement of philofascist movements, the expansion of German economic influence, and the rise of fascism as an appealing alternative to a stagnant democracy.

Two broad distinctions can be made here. The first is between waves that follow armed hegemonic clashes (the World Wars) versus waves that follow peaceful hegemonic transformations (the Great Depression and the Soviet collapse). In postwar waves, coercion plays a key role for reasons outlined in the book—a hegemonic war temporarily decreases the costs and increases the legitimacy of military occupations. Second, democratic and autocratic waves vary in their long-term dynamics. Lascurettes, for instance, asks whether democratic waves are somehow unique, and here he identifies an important tension between democratic and non-democratic waves. As he correctly points out, much of the book emphasizes the similarities and recurring mechanisms across all regime waves, whether democratic, fascist, or communist. But while the *transitions* that accompany waves share remarkable similarities, regime *consolidations* that follow democratic waves are markedly different from their autocratic counterparts. As I note in the second chapter, the failures of democratic consolidation detailed in the book do not apply to fascist and communist waves, since they were either overturned from outside (in the fascist case) or upheld by force (in the communist case). The ‘overstretch’ argument thus only applies to democratic waves. While democratic waves share important common features with autocratic waves, they are unique in showcasing the features of the failed consolidation that follow waves. I find Lascurettes’s suggestion that mechanisms of failed consolidation might also apply to autocratic waves intriguing and worthy of more exploration. They were not on display in the wake of the autocratic waves examined in the book, but the framework could be applied to examine the consequences of failed autocratic transitions more generally. (An additional issue is that the failure of an autocratic transition often begets another autocratic transition.)

Relatedly, Lascurettes wonders if the book could do more to explain the individual actions of hegemonic states. Why do rising powers sometimes retreat into isolationism and at other times actively promote their interests? Since the book focuses on the structural effects of hegemonic clashes, the individual actions and motivations of great powers remain under-explored. Doing so would be a legitimate extension of the argument, but would also require a significantly longer manuscript. In the book I limited myself to some brief comments about the drivers of hegemonic action, but consciously chose to focus on their consequences rather than their causes.

That said, descriptively speaking we can glean some broad patterns of hegemonic engagement based on two features of the post-shock order: the level of constraint and the level of threat faced by the rising hegemon. After World War I, the U.S. remained relatively constrained in Europe, while facing no significant threats from other great powers. Both factors mitigated against intensive engagement. After World War II, on the other hand, the U.S. found itself both less constrained and more threatened by the other superpower, leading to high levels of engagement. Interestingly, at the end of the Cold War, these two pressures worked against each other. The unipolarity that followed the Soviet collapse resulted in even fewer constraints on American behavior but also produced far fewer threats, dampening American incentives for intense engagement such as military impositions or fundamental institutional rebuilding. (This phase of its foreign policy ended with the attacks of 9/11, which led U.S. policy makers to see themselves as living in a low-constraint, high-threat world—a combination that engendered a more aggressive policy of global hegemonic engagement, including the shaping of foreign regimes through unilateral imposition.)

A proper treatment of hegemonic foreign policy would require more work. My goal in the book was to focus on the continuities linking shocks to waves, in order to produce a structural theory of regime change. But as I stress in the book, the translation of shocks into waves is not an automatic process. Structures do not mechanistically determine outcomes, but act as powerful constraints on state action. By increasing the salience of systemic pressures, hegemonic shocks temporarily raise the general probability of regime transitions. But these effects vary across waves, and depend both upon hegemonic behavior and domestic circumstances.

Edelstein also asks whether the pattern of shocks and waves observed in the twentieth century can still apply in the twenty-first century. Indeed, the past century may have been uniquely volatile in its recurring superpower confrontations and hegemonic transitions. If the coming century remains free of sudden great power crises, the argument will not apply. However, there are strong reasons to believe that the rise and fall of great powers, particularly those that embody particular regime ideologies, will have spillover effects on the trajectory of domestic institutions. Today, the rise of China has already sparked debates about the viability of democracy as the most effective and appealing domestic regime. If that gradual rise turns into a sudden one—perhaps via another economic crisis that undermines democracy’s credibility—we should not be surprised to see more countries abandoning democratic institutions in favor of stronger centralized rule. Like Edelstein, I am skeptical that rulers are quick to learn from history, or that humility will replace hubris as the motivation behind great power behavior. So far, China has been a largely non-proselytizing rising power, preferring economic inducements and business partnerships over regime promotion or direct imposition. We shall have to see if that remains the case in the future, but the history of other rising powers suggests that such bashfulness is unlikely to continue.

Both reviewers also ask whether shocks may be products of domestic reforms as much as they are its drivers. In the book I remain largely agnostic about the causes of shocks. This is partly out of narrative coherence—to discuss explanations for the causes of World War I would require significantly more space and time than one volume could cover. I bracketed the causes of my independent variable so that I could focus on its effects upon the dependent variable of interest (i.e. regime waves). Yet it is a fair question to raise, in the sense that the causes of these waves might influence their effects as well. To a large extent, this is a question of variation among the waves, as discussed above. That is, the nature of the shock influences the nature of the wave. For the Soviet case, I am perfectly willing to stipulate that Soviet domestic reforms were the cause of the century’s last hegemonic shock (as Lascurettes notes). Yet the effects were broadly similar regardless of the cause—a hegemonic decline led to a wave of domestic transformations in ways that echoed previous cases. In other words, the causes of hegemonic shocks might include factors like domestic changes within hegemonic states.

(Although I disagree that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had purposely moved toward ‘regime conversion’; rather, he wanted to modernize communism in order to save it.) My dependent variable in the case studies was the effect of these transformations upon non-hegemonic states. More generally, the goals of the book were to focus on the underlying parallels in order to draw out a general framework for understanding these recurring shocks. But the variations within them are also crucial, and deserve more elaboration.

This brings me back to Lascault's final question: is democracy somehow unique? As I note above, it is certainly unique in the dynamics of failed consolidation. But is there something special about the regime itself, something that sets it apart from other twentieth-century ideologies? From the perspective of the book's argument, the similarities are undeniable—both autocratic and democratic waves are tightly linked to rising hegemonic powers. The pessimistic conclusion, then, is that democracy's success, while appearing inevitable, was actually the result of extremely unusual circumstances—the rise of two democratic superpowers that were at least partly shielded from systemic threats. And historically, speaking, democracy is a deeply unusual form of government. In Aesop's fable “The Frogs Who Desired a King,” the frogs are given a choice between a log that cannot rule them and a stork that rules by eating them. This has been the choice faced throughout the course of most human history: political life oscillating between chaos and despotism. As the French poet Paul Valéry observed, the two dangers constantly threatening the world are order and disorder. It might be the case that democracy requires something else—that the conduct of politics under democratic rule requires a higher degree of social consensus than found in other regimes. The need for consensus about the underlying ‘rules of the game’ is what makes democracies both strong and fragile. When politics take place in a structure where everyone respects the fundamental rules, the result can be stability and prosperity. But when that shared social consensus fragments, democratic institutions fray and collapse.

In other words, democracy is not unique when we examine the hegemonic mechanisms that drive institutional waves. But those mechanisms are themselves contingent on the ability of powerful democratic states to triumph in hegemonic contests. In that sense, democracy may be unique in that its global success *requires* the presence of powerful and appealing hegemonic models—a pre-requisite not demanded of autocratic regimes.

Edelstein concludes by asking whether identifying shocks requires the benefit of historical hindsight. Namely, are we unwittingly witnessing the unfolding of another hegemonic shock? In previous episodes, transformations of the international system were identified as such by contemporaries. They were intense, visible, important, and recognized as such at the time. If the next hegemonic shock takes the form of a dramatic American decline (especially an absolute rather than relative decline), it would not be hard to identify it as such. But can the Trump administration bring this about? Will decreased American engagement lead to a wave away from democratic regimes? We are entering the realm of speculation, but I am not so sure. Over the twentieth century, America's crucial contribution to global democracy has rarely been through direct efforts at democracy promotion. Instead, its most important role has been as a powerful example worth emulating. The greater danger, therefore, may be not decreased American engagement but the loss of its status as the paragon of democratic success. Whether that comes about through internal change (the decline of American democracy) or external change (the loss of American hegemony), the result would likely be the same—failures of democratic consolidation and a turn to more appealing non-democratic alternatives.