

## **BOOK REVIEW**

Benjamin R. COLE, *Democratization and the Mischief of Faction*  
(Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2018)

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# Democratization and the Mischief of Faction

**Benjamin R. Cole**

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*Democratization and the Mischief of Faction* by Benjamin R. Cole is a comprehensive book, filling the salient gap in the literature by providing the complete theoretical work on the relationship between factionalism and democratization processes. It also makes an important contribution to the literature with the critical empirical mapping of this link by analyzing every episode of factionalism in the world between 1946 and 2015 with the Polity IV dataset. As Cole said, factionalism is not a new term or concept but reflects a common phenomenon behind all apparent social cleavages, polarization, and sectarian violence, among other outcomes, that have been well researched previously by scholars from different subfields by using different terms (p.5) The novelty of this book is that it strikingly reveals two facts: firstly, factionalism is a common and nearly universal phenomenon in democratizing states and young democracies as they inherit a factional legacy from autocratic predecessors; and secondly, factionalism is one of the reasons for the failure of democratization processes. The empirical findings on divergent practices of different states to manage or mitigate factionalism provide new insights into debates in the democratization literature.

The book is well structured and well written so that each chapter is constructed in connection with the others and tries to fill the missing parts of the whole research design. The book has seven chapters. In Chapter 1, Cole tries to deal with the factionalism phenomenon in every aspect by offering a comprehensive literature review. A critically important point here is the argument that while autocracies can keep latent factionalism from manifesting in its overt form through key authoritarian governance strategies i.e., suppression and repression as its modus operandi (p.10), the political liberalization process paves the way to make factionalism inherited from the preceding autocratic regime in democratizing states and young democracies visible. In fact, the manifestation of factionalism in liberalizing society is expected to occur via mass protests, political riots, and electoral boycotts. However, as Cole argues, this kind of polarization can be dangerous for young democracies, as they lack fully functioning conflict-resolution institutions such as an independent judiciary, an effective checks-and-balance system on the executive, rule of law, and the necessary experience to manage the polarized society (p.12) Thus, the primary goal of the book is “to determine the ways and practices how states – espe-

cially young democracies – can manage factionalism short of political violence, strife, or autocratization or better avoid factionalism altogether” (p.20).

The theoretical framework for the conceptualization of factionalism provided in Chapter 1 was used to analyze all episodes of factionalism throughout the world from 1946 to 2015. Chapter 2 looks at specific types, onsets and endings, factionalism manifestations, and changes in governance structures. Five types of factionalism, namely social identity (ethnic, religious, and tribal), economic, personalistic/clientelistic, policy/issue-based, and regional/geographic are identified and determined as frameworks that are then used for the analysis of each case in the following chapters.

In Chapters 3 through 6, Cole proposes a panel of the four most-different systems (MDS) comparative case study analyses, organized by their substantial differences but common management strategies and factionalism outcomes. In Chapter 3, Cole analyzes the cases, including Senegal, Taiwan, and Uruguay, that have had successful and peaceful transitions to democracy without experiencing factionalism. Despite their differences in terms of history, cultures, strategic environments, economies, and levels of ethnic and economic diversity, these cases share commonalities such as a gradual and guided transition to democracy, common strategies, and international pressure to explain the roots of how they avoided factionalism.

In Chapter 4, Cole examines other three country cases with their divergent factionalism outcomes, including Bangladesh, Bolivia, and Zimbabwe, all of which have experienced similarly persistent and destructive factionalism since their independence. In Chapter 5, he focuses on the divergent cases of Chile, Comoros, Estonia, and Tunisia, where factionalism ended in democratization even when these cases were not fully consolidated in the end. In Chapter 6, Cole provides a different picture of factionalism episodes from previous cases, which ended in autocratization as happened in Belarus, Egypt, and Thailand, or the collapse of the central government in the case of the Central African Republic.

In Chapter 7, Cole synthesizes the results from Chapters 3 through 6 and considers the most-different systems comparisons across those chapters, searching for smart practices for countries in a democratic transition that try to avoid or mitigate the effects of factionalism. Suffice it to say that through these comparative cases, Cole develops an intellectually powerful argument about the relationship between the management strategies of states and similar factionalism outcomes. Inductively, Cole comes to the conclusion that three factors are significant in explaining divergent factionalism outcomes: (1) decisions by individual leaders; (2) the history of interactions among opposition and government factions, which he calls path-dependent interactions; and (3) structures that incentivize or disincentivize disruptive political tactics (p.176)

Cole’s detailed case studies and carefully developed analysis of the strategies of states in managing factionalism constitute a distinctively innovative account of factionalism in the democratization processes. The study is theoretically insightful, empirically rich, and methodologically rigorous, combining comparative cross-country in-depth analysis on factionalism. It greatly contributes not only to the international relations field but also to all other subfields in which factionalism has been debated as a research subject. I highly recommend this book to scholars who are interested in the role that factionalism plays in the democratization process in international relations and comparative politics alike. Readers in many different fields will greatly benefit from reading the book, which is full of interesting details about factionalism in country cases with different aspects.