

Paper Part II

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The Sources of Democratization: A Summary

Before beginning an analysis of the causes of democratization, a few clarifications could be of immense importance. First, democratization is different from democracy, thus, as Dankwart Rustow observes in his article “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model”, the factors crucial for the sustenance of democracy might be entirely different from the factors responsible for the bringing about of democracy (1999: 18). He argues that genetic analysis must be clearly distinguished from functional analysis and correlation shouldn’t be comfortably applied as causality (p. 19). Second, because democratization means that the preceding regime had been some form of non-democracy (authoritarianism, dictatorship, etc.), it must be recognized that “the factors responsible for the end of an authoritarian regime may differ significantly from those that lead to the creation of a democratic one” (Huntington, 1991: 35).

The outcomes of an analysis of the causes of democratization will inevitably depend on the definition of democracy one chooses as a criterion for the completion of the transition process. The normative, substantive definition of democracy will naturally lead to more stringent interpretation of the results of the transition process and will

require a bigger number of basic preconditions. A procedural, minimalistic definition of democracy is likely to produce less stringent, more “practical” requirements and lead to a democracy that the defendants of substantive democracy might label “formal”, or “virtual”. The widely accepted in political science today definition of democracy is the latter. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the literature on transitions enforces the conclusion that substantive ideals and necessary comparisons to long-standing Anglo-American democracies are still very much prevailing and are the major cause for the differences between the two leading schools of thought on democratization.

John Waterbury gives a succinct account of the underlying premises of the two schools. The structuralists stress either a broad-based middle class, private entrepreneurial groups and widespread literacy, or sustaining civic values as the necessary preconditions for the establishment of democracy (1999: 261). These preconditions imply a long preparatory phase in simply temporal terms. The other school, which Waterbury calls the contingency school, doesn't see a threshold of economic development, culture, or history as the causes of democracy. Whereas, according to them, a long preparatory phase may also occur, it is not necessarily of positive nature, thus democracy might be the result of a bitter struggle and ensuing “compromise between contending groups that have repeatedly failed to impose their will upon one another” (Waterbury, 1999: 262). Contending groups, either political elites or masses, often accept democracy as a second-best solution when the other alternative is failure.

Waterbury's analysis of the main divisions among the investigators of democratic transitions is accurate, though not detailed enough. Further subdivisions that merit mentioning inside of the structuralist and contingency schools have sprung up.

A summary of the structuralist school will inevitably start with the modernization theory – the oldest offered explanation of democratization. It was developed in the 1950s and 1960s. Its major proponents are Lipset and Cutright. It singles out economic development as the crucial factor of democratization. Economic development, embodied in a high GNP/capita as the single most important index, entails the emergence of a strong urban middle class and increase in literacy – characteristics considered to be powerful facilitators of democratization (Lipset, 2003: 56-64). Modernization, describes Przeworski (2003: 109), is the “progressive accumulation of social changes that make a society ready to proceed to the final one, democratization.” The weakness of the theory and of Lipset’s extensive statistical data, however, lies in the fact that it doesn’t specify a cause-and-effect relationship. Because the data has been gathered just for a single moment in time, it is impossible to tell whether economic development is the cause of democracy or it is exactly the opposite (Rustow, 1999: 18). As Przeworski has also observed (2003: 110), thereby once again stressing the crucial difference between genesis and function, democracy “tends to survive if a country is “modern”, but it is not a product of “modernization.”

The 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of another explanation of democratization within the structuralist school. The “culturalists” all proposed a wide spectrum of reasons whose unifying feature is the existence of certain civic attitudes among the population that need a long process of formation and thus fall into the category of structural factors. “Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism”, since the publishing of Weber’s book with the same title, have been pushed forward as the friendliest democracy-nurturing environments. Many scientists have taken little care to notice that such a precondition

automatically precludes the largest part of the world from having any chance of becoming democratic.

Myron Weiner (as qtd. in Ganguly, 1999: 219) follows a similar path in an attempt to explain India's democratization and argues that its success and stability are due to the democratic heritage of British colonial rule. It provided the Indian people with a long-lasting immersion not only in the intricacies of political discourse and "civilized" behavior, but also in the culture that made them possible.

Contemplating in similar fashion, Samuel Huntington stresses the importance of culture and especially religion for the emergence of democracy. His account on the reasons for the decline of legitimacy of Latin American authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and 1980s points out the changed policies of the Catholic church in these countries and its refusal to continue backing up the status quo. He goes on to assert that "[a] strong correlation exists between Western Christianity and democracy" (1991: 72) and "[d]emocracy [is] especially scarce among countries that [are] predominantly Muslim, Buddhist, or Confucian" (1991: 73).

Other important culturalists include Gabriel Almond and Robert Putnam who believe that the development of a civic culture is essential to the establishment of democracy. The role of the so-called "social capital" – the feelings of tolerance, mutual trust and cooperation, life satisfaction and willingness to compromise, fostered in non-political assemblies of citizens, such as bowling leagues and soccer clubs, has been extensively elaborated upon (Rustow, 1999: 15).

The international system is seen as a crucial factor for democratization by yet another group of structuralists. Samuel Huntington explains how important the changes

of the policies of external actors, such as the decision of the European Community to include other countries, the emphasis on human rights in American foreign policy in the 1970s, and the perestroika in the Soviet Union, have been for the democratization processes of the Third Wave (1991: 85-100). John Waterbury, although clearly falling in the contingency school of thought, doesn't omit to mention that "outside of Europe democratic transitions are not only elite-driven, but reactive to external threats and inducements" (1999: 267) and illustrates that with Uganda's democratization which was caused by the agency of external donors like the United States and the democratic experience of other African countries. He thinks that Rustow's exclusion of international influences only weakens his model of democratization. Huntington further develops the argument in favor of international agency by elaborating on snowballing as one of the major causes of democratization in Eastern Europe after the break-up of the Soviet Union (p. 104).

International financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, are also included in the agents of international influence. Their role becomes very important in economically underdeveloped regions such as Africa. Richard Joseph's analysis (1999: 237-261) of the democratization process in sub-Saharan countries shows how economic failure can facilitate the breakdown of dictatorships by increasing their dependency for loans on international financial institutions, which in turn exact the implementation of stabilization and structural adjustment economic reforms. Being highly unpopular among people, these programs erode the support for dictatorships.

The policies of the international financial institutions, often considered harsh and unrelenting by large segments of the populations of democratizing countries, shifted the focus of a group of scientists and economists toward the issues of income distribution in underdeveloped countries. The dependency theory, devised by Latin American economists in the 1970s and early 1980s, claims that the enormous inequalities inherited from Spanish colonial rule and the concomitant absence of an entrepreneurial class are the reason for the lack of democracy in Latin American countries. In their study of democratization in Latin America, Huber, Rueschmeyer and Stephens reach the conclusion that the three clusters of power shaping the conditions for democratization – the balance of class power, the structure of the state, and the transnational structures of power – are all unfavorable to the establishment of social democracy, the only form of democracy which, according to them, can address the issues of income inequality. They argue that the weakness of the subordinate classes, most notably the working class, and their inability to self-organize and locate their interests in the political discourse are “responsible for the deficiencies in formal as well as in participatory and social democracy” (1999: 177).

The other influential school of thought, the contingency school, as has already been noted, starts off from entirely different premises. Discarding all preconditions advanced by the structuralists, the originator of the contingency school, Rustow discusses that “we should allow for the possibility that circumstances may force, trick, lure, or cajole nondemocrats into democratic behavior and that their beliefs may adjust in due course by some process of rationalization and adaptation” (p. 19). Thus, successful economic development is more likely to be the result, not the cause, of democracy. He proposes

only one background condition – national unity, as necessarily preceding democracy. By national unity he means that the “vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political community they belong to” (p. 26), that is, divisions along ethnic, regional, or religious lines in which the integrity of the state is endangered, will dim the prospects for democracy. After national unity has been forged, the process of democratization unfolds in three phases: preparatory phase, decision phase, and habituation phase. Rustow defines the preparatory phase as “a prolonged and inconclusive struggle between well-entrenched forces” (p.26), thereby challenging the predominant notion that consensus on fundamentals is essential to democratization. In fact, he states, a people should have been in conflict specifically over an issue of fundamental importance, otherwise it wouldn’t resort to democracy’s “elaborate rules for conflict resolution” (p. 36). This polarization might be set off by different issues (he gives an example with the different direction of causality of economic factors in Sweden and Turkey) that vary from country to country and involve groups with different social composition (p. 28) but is crucial to the process of democratization because it serves as an impetus for the “warring” sides to accept democracy as the second-best compromise, one step short of killing each other. Rustow’s model explicitly excludes international influences and the example of developed democracies, because they might confuse and even forestall the development of local democracy. Instead, he argues, countries should honestly face their inner conflicts and devise appropriate procedures to solve them (pp. 28-29).

Whereas the preparatory phase may highlight the participation of large groups of the population, the decision phase which follows next is the arena reserved for political

leaders and their distinct choice to adopt the rules of democracy. According to Rustow, “[w]hat matters at the decision stage is not what values the leaders hold dear in the abstract, but what concrete steps they are willing to take” (p. 31).

The habituation phase is the period when, by applying them in everyday experience, people become habituated in the procedures of democracy. As with national unity, the rules of democracy needn’t be so much believed in as applied unthinkingly. The most troublesome in the habituation phase, Rustow predicts, will be issues of community along religious, national, ethnic or racial lines. Therefore, national unity will emerge as an even more important precondition to democratization (p. 36).

By introducing his dynamic model of democratization Rustow became the first major proponent of the contingency school, which emphasizes the agency of political elites. Nevertheless, he allows for a certain participation of the masses in the preparatory phase, and to a big extent, in the habituation phase. Another representative of the contingency school, Adam Przeworski, sees democratization entirely as an interplay between political elites’ interests (Hardliners and Reformers in the authoritarian elite and Moderates and Radicals in the opposition elite) and its outcome contingent upon the elites’ projections of their role in the post-authoritarian, post-compromise political stage. Situations in which regime change is at stake depend neither on economic or cultural development, nor on the role of the masses, but rather “something cracks in the authoritarian power apparatus; a group begins to feel that perhaps it would prefer to share power with consent rather than monopolize it by force, decides to make a move, and turns to eventual partners outside the regime in quest of assurances about its role under democracy” (2003: 80).

Przeworski distinguishes two phases of democratization: extrication from authoritarian rule and constitution of democratic regime. Extrication is necessary in regimes where the military was particularly strong and always results from understandings between Reformers and Moderates (p. 77). An entire set of different outcomes is possible, but for the stability of the subsequent democracy it is crucial to provide for the predominance of civil power over the military. Similar to Rustow, he doesn't see democratization as a one-way, irreversible process. In fact, he argues, the effort at democratization may be undermined and even abandoned when facing the inevitable high price that must be paid for economic restructuring (p. 85). This constitutes the most serious problem of dual transitions. The political leadership can best deal with economic hardships if it maintains good relations with the unions, because the role of the unions is crucial in disciplining their members and moderating their wage demands (p. 87). Once again, the emphasis is on the leaders of the unions, not on the masses themselves.

The masses, however, are an important factor in the democratization equation, as seen by another group of scholars from the contingency school. Collier and Mahoney (1999: 97-119) believe that collective actors have been unduly underestimated in the transition literature at the expense of elite and individual actors. They explore and assert the role of organized labor protest for aggravating the legitimacy problems of authoritarian regimes and ultimately bringing them down. The place of working class mobilization is especially prominent in the destabilization/extrication transitional pattern when the regime leaders have no exit project and labor-based parties have a better chance of entering the team of negotiators of the terms of the transition to democracy. Despite

according a more influential position to the masses, the two authors, however, recognize that “it would be wrong to treat labor organizations as the primary force behind democratization at the end of the twentieth century” (p. 114) and that they place their emphasis on an earlier period when organized labor protest can be effective in putting pressure on authoritarian regimes and hastening their giving up of power.

Nancy Bermeo (1999: 120-141), another defender of mass mobilization, sets as her task to deconstruct the moderation myth – the necessary requisite of the strategic game of political elites in determining the outlines of the future democratic system. She argues that the radicalism of popular organizations does not automatically sidetrack the possibility of democratization. In fact, she asserts, “there is much more leeway for “extremist” pressures than the literature on democratization leads us to believe” (p. 127) and that in many cases democracy emerges despite wide popular mobilization, extremist violence and even bloodshed. The crucial variable is the projections of pivotal elites of the danger from the “threat from below” and the costs of toleration. The costs of toleration are not “a simple function of the presence or absence of extremism” (p. 132), but also depend on elites’ expectations of the effects of future reform on their survival. If elites don’t perceive the costs as unbearably high, they can choose to democratize either because they acknowledge their inability to provide order in the face of widespread mass protest, or because they expect to subdue popular organizations in the upcoming elections. Although Bermeo’s analysis is logically sound and largely succeeds in dethroning the moderation myth, it doesn’t endow the “threat from below” with any constructive role in the democratization process and in essence treats popular movement

yet again as depending on political elites, thus rendering further credibility to the theories of Rustow and Przeworski.

As a conclusion, it is useful to cite Huntington (p. 38) in order to illustrate the notion that all the theories just summarized are by no means at war against each other, but rather a collective effort to make sense of the ever-changing realm of political relations and reasonably predict the future:

- (1) No single factor is sufficient to explain the development of democracy in all countries or in a single country.
- (2) No single factor is necessary to the development of democracy in all countries.
- (3) Democratization in each country is the result of a combination of causes.
- (4) The combination of causes producing democracy varies from country to country.

These words might seem overly cautious, too generalizing, and even shallow but confronted with the need to construct a theory encompassing as many cases as possible, we discover they are the ultimate guideline we can cling to. They sanction the existence of all the different explanations of democratization among which we have the right to pick as many as we see fit in order to explain a particular case of interest.

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