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**Getting to  
Democracy**

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# Behind The *Headlines*

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# Getting to Democracy

GLENYS A. BABCOCK

The current wave of democratization rose inauspiciously in the mid-1970s and peaked dramatically in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the end of the Cold War, demise of the Communist empire, and the break up of the Soviet Union. Of those states which set their sights on democracy, more than three dozen have resolutely achieved their goal. But all paths to democracy are perilous, and newborn democracies are extremely fragile. Some transitions ended where they began – in some form of authoritarian rule – others lurched back and forth between authoritarianism and democracy. And of those nations which initiated political reforms after the Cold War, not all have completed their odyssey. Many transitions are ongoing and their outcome – authoritarianism or democracy – is still uncertain. Each attempted transition has lessons for would-be democratizers. The recent 'third wave of democratization,' to use Samuel Huntington's phrase, resolutely debunks several long-standing beliefs about preconditions for democracy and has turned attention to the key players and processes during the transition and consolidation phases of democratization.

## *Eye on the prize*

Transitions from authoritarian rule typically unfold amid confusion, disruption, and apprehension, not just in political life but also in economic, social, and cultural spheres. These facets of society are not isolated from each other. A change in one may reverberate in the others. With so much turbulence, it is a challenge to keep an eye on the prize. In a study of democratization, which changes count? Which indicate a step toward, or away from, democracy?

Democracies come in many packages. With an assortment of institutional arrangements and processes and a wide array of rules and regulations, what they have in common is easily obscured. Although debates rage about what democracy is, could be, and should be, there is broad agreement on some essential (if minimal) elements of any democratic state in the contemporary world.' One fundamental principal underlying democracy (literally 'rule by the people') is that those who govern should be responsive to the wishes of their citizens. The process through which all modern democracies have sought to achieve this elusive goal is the 'free and fair' election of key government decision-makers. Elections must be competitive and involve more than one candidate for each position and must be held regularly to give citizens the opportunity to remove the governors from power. Rulers rule with the consent of the governed. No large segment of the population may be excluded from voting or from standing for office. In an election period, the opposition must be able to compete for public attention, be free to disseminate their political platform, have media access, and not feel threatened. To ensure that citizens are able to form their own opinions about the various candidates, elections must take place in the context of broad civil liberties, including freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of association.' Elections – regular, competitive, with full citizen participation and in a context of broad civil liberties – are a necessary element of a modern democracy.

The second fundamental principal of democracy is that the power of the governors is limited with respect to each citizen.' 'Free and fair elections' is an inaccurate, if convenient, shorthand for 'democracy.' In Guatemala 'electoral democracy' has coexisted with state-sponsored murder of the political opposition and of indigenous Indians, while in many Latin American states military rule has coexisted with competitive elections. Without limits on the rulers' use of power, the benefits associated with democratic elections and government responsiveness cannot be attained. The elected government is the supreme decision-making body (subject to specific constraints usually written down in a constitution).

An authoritarian state is identified by the absence of one or more of the key elements of democracy: consistent government responsiveness to citizens; regular, competitive elections; broad civil liberties; right to vote and run for office; and limitation on state power with respect to every citizen equally. Because of restrictions on political opposition and debate, an authoritarian regime could, theoretically speaking, respond extremely quickly and effectively to the wishes of its citizens to be a 'benevolent dictatorship.' But the judgment of history is clear: democracies, flawed as they are, are more *consistently* responsive to their citizens and more consistent protectors of civil and political liberties over time.

During a period of 'democratization' the rules of governance are in flux

as the missing pieces of democracy are put in place. Not all transitions from authoritarianism successfully arrive at democracy. A fledgling democracy often has a fleeting existence, and cheers are withheld until its consolidation. The rule of thumb for proclaiming the consolidation of a democracy is the peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected government to another. Over the past twenty years more than three dozen countries have celebrated the birth of democracy and many others are poised to join them before the century is out.

### *Rise and fall of the third wave*

In April 1974 a military coup brought down Portugal's civilian dictatorship; a few months later, in Greece, citizen disaffection over the Cyprus crisis decisively terminated the military's capacity to rule; and in November 1975, the death of General Franco removed the one insurmountable obstacle to political reform in Spain. Within a couple of years of each of these pivotal events, new constitutions and competitive elections inaugurated lasting, if sometimes troubled, democracies. The third wave of democratization had begun.

Military dictatorships were replaced by democratically elected civilians in Nigeria, the Central African Republic, Mali, Ecuador, Argentina, Thailand, and Bangladesh. Jerry Rawlings, the military dictator of Ghana since his 1979 coup, was democratically elected as president in 1992. The elected government in Guatemala continues its struggle for civilian oversight of the military and reduction of systematic and extensive human rights abuses. South Korea took the slow road from military rule towards liberal democracy. The personal dictatorship of Fernando Marcos in the Philippines finally ended in 1986 after 21 years of uninterrupted rule.

The demise of communism and the break up of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s brought multi-party democratic elections to Russia and most but not all of its 14 successor states, to the newly freed states of eastern Europe, and to Mongolia. In the early , one-party rule was replaced by multi-party contested elections in the African states of Cape Verde, Sao Tome e Principe, Zambia, Malawi, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Togo. In Benin, democracy followed a remarkable 'national conference' of grass-roots organizations.

South Africa finally put an end to apartheid, its unique form of non-democratic rule which excluded the majority black and coloured populations from meaningful political participation. In the 1994 national elections the entire adult population, regardless of race, was permitted to run for office and to vote.

The end of the Cold War also facilitated reconciliation and democra-

tization in Namibia, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. The peace process is under way in Angola, but it will take time for this relic of the Cold War to get to democracy.

Semi-democratic elections, a familiar sight in this third wave of democracy, were held in Gabon, Cote d'Ivoire, Zaire, Senegal, and Tanzania.

Cycles of transition were also common. Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Uruguay, Chile, and Haiti all bounced between democracy and authoritarianism. Over the course of the third wave (1976 to 1993) Burundi went from one-party state, to military rule, to non-contested presidential elections in 1982, to repression of civil liberties, to military coup, civil war, and then in 1993 to presidential and legislative elections, and, later, a four-day military coup followed by a re-installation of the democratic government.

And there were several reversals of fortune – in Kenya, Gambia, and Peru. In late January 1996, a military coup ended a three-year experiment with democracy in Niger. Kenya's democratic election of 1992 appears to be a fleeting aberration in 27 years of one-party rule.

This remarkable variety of experiences with political transitions over the past two decades has failed to expose any universal truths, but it has resolutely debunked several long-standing beliefs about the development of democracy.

### *Conventional wisdom undone*

On the eve of the third wave of democratization, it was believed that a country had to possess a certain set of characteristics to be 'ripe for democracy.' There were three distinct but compatible categories of preconditions: a modern society, a civic culture, and a stable liberal economy. Conventional wisdom had it that unless these necessary preconditions were in place, a country could not democratize. In general, both the notion of preconditions and the specific requirements directly influenced international assistance to developing countries and to non-democracies. Belief in these necessary preconditions was persistent and lingers still despite strong contrary evidence from the third-wave transitions.

#### The Push of Modernization

Modernization theories of the 1950s and 1960s had a direct and consequential influence on beliefs about the development of democracy. The 'modernization' perspective of the world contrasts the post-World War II Western nations with 'traditional' societies. Among the most commonly cited factors distinguishing the two are levels of economic wealth, education and literacy, urbanization and industrialization. There is a strong deterministic flavour here: the 'lesser developed' nations would inevitably undergo the same social, economic, and political changes that Western

states had gone through. It was a package deal. Development in all three dimensions was inexorable and desirable.

In 1959 Seymour Lipset linked the key indicators of modernization to democracy.' He compared the Western democracies to Latin American dictatorships and found that the democracies consistently placed higher on the modernization scale. Logical explanations followed. From Aristotle on, it had been argued that only in a wealthy society could people appreciate and participate in politics. Education provides the necessary cognitive skills for individuals to orient themselves in the system of politics; education breeds rationality and tolerance, preventing widespread support for extremist political doctrines. Urbanization fosters a sense of citizenship necessary for democracy. Industrialization decentralizes wealth which devolves power and decision-making and creates a middle class with independent political interests. These four key factors were found to be highly correlated, reinforcing the belief that 'modernization' as a whole was a necessary precondition for democracy. If democracy is the outcome of modernization, then Western states wishing to assist the advance of political pluralism and democracy abroad could do so through the development of education and literacy, economic growth and industrialization, or, alternatively, let history play itself out.

The unfolding of history during the third wave of democratization has mocked efforts to correlate modernization indicators with observed instances of transitions to democracy. Countries which scored poorly in the established macro indicators became democracies while more likely candidates remained authoritarian. The course of transitions in Latin America proved particularly peevish. From 1976 to 1983 Argentina, considered a likely candidate for democracy, reverted to military rule, while in the same period Peru and Ecuador, with low scores on the modernization scale, established democracies. The cycle of states into and out of democracy (for example, Chile, Uruguay, Burkina Faso, and Burundi) irrevocably undermined the notion of modernization as a unidirectional force of history.

### Civic Culture

A second set of assumptions about the necessary preconditions for democracy focusses on the attitudes and values of individual citizens. In a stable democracy, it is argued, individuals must be tolerant of opposing points of view, trust the government, participate actively in society through membership in associations, be well-informed about political affairs, have a personal sense of civic responsibility, and value such basic civil liberties as freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The correlation between a 'civic culture' and democracy was demonstrated by cross-national surveys in the 1960s." In precisely the same manner as socio-economic correlations were widely assumed to imply causation, so a well-developed civic culture was assumed to be a necessary precondition for democracy. Every-

day observers of struggles with democratization do not need a host of academic studies and theories to offer the sentiment: 'they've always lived under authoritarian rule' or 'they like a strong hand.' Unstated, but implied, is that 'they will have democracy when they want democracy'

Third-wave experiences have not revealed a consistent relationship between level of civic culture and the onset of democratization. The relatively quick pace of the cycles into and out of democracy undercut the notion of deeply ingrained culture determining the type of political regime.

While civic culture is not correlated with the onset of democratization, it continues to be highly correlated with the existence of stable democracies. This implies that democracy *produces a civic culture*. That is, the right to join associations or to participate in associations (likely the latter) leads individuals to value freedom of association, while a broad choice of media reports leads people to value a free press and free speech. It may be that democracies provide incentives for democratic behaviour. Recent advances in the field of behavioural psychology confirm that attitudes and beliefs can follow behaviour, reversing the assumption that civic culture would necessarily precede democracy and opening up the possibility that democracy may produce a civic culture.

#### Liberalizing Economic Reform

Authoritarian regimes tend to be economically poorer, have higher state involvement in the economy and less stable economies than do democracies. There is remarkable agreement (the so-called Washington consensus) on the ingredients for the long-term sustainable growth enjoyed by most of the stable, well-established democracies: fiscal responsibility, liberal international trade, a competitive foreign exchange rate, privatization of state enterprises, a broad tax base, and free-market mechanisms for pricing and interest rates. Since all established democracies have liberal economies, it is expected that an authoritarian state with a non-liberal economy will undergo economic reform if it democratizes.

An enduring conventional wisdom of democratization and an unassailable tenet of international aid has been that economic reform of the type proposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) must *precede* democratizing reforms. It is argued that liberalizing economic reforms require the incubator of an authoritarian regime and, fortuitously, that a liberal economy inherently creates pressure for liberalized politics.

Typically, with the harsh austerity measures demanded by the IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programmes come mounting unemployment, frozen wages, and an end to subsidies. In the short run the costs of reform are concentrated, intense, and immediately felt by specific groups in society who, in many instances, descend precipitously into poverty, or who start out in poverty and plunge lower still. Strong political

opposition results. The benefits of rapid economic reform, on the other hand, tend to be diffuse and take longer to materialize. Because the identity of future benefactors is uncertain, a constituency for economic reform is generally weak and poorly organized. With the fragility of new democracies, there is great incentive for individuals to discount potential future gains in favour of short-term strategies. In the context of regular democratic elections, politicians must be sensitive to voter demands. In new democracies, politicians are highly sensitive to public opposition, social unrest, and mass demonstrations, and simply cannot ignore cries for an end to harsh austerity measures. A transition to a liberal market economy must precede a transition to democracy because a democratic society simply will not accept the pain of the liberalizing economic adjustment.

Working the equation backwards, it is inherently believed that economic liberalization will increase pressure for political liberalization. Privatization and a freer market will decentralize decision-making, multiply the centres of power, and strengthen civil society. Liberal economics is expected to create a middle class with interests distinct from the authoritarian ruling elite. The diffusion of power is incompatible with stable authoritarian rule and thus, inherently, a source of pressure for the diffusion of political power.'

This 'economic reform first' model is also referred to as the east Asian model, the exemplar cases being South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand where the stability of authoritarian rule permitted the gradual withdrawal of the state from the economy, which in turn created gradual political liberalization. In Chile, another much-cited example, General Augusto Pinochet's firm rule from 1973 to 1990 allowed him to ignore public pain and to institute successfully harsh economic austerity measures. The outcome was a stable, liberal economy (although not everyone finds the logic of 17 years of brutal repression either palatable or convincing).

The most recent transitions have laid siege to the 'economic reform first' orthodoxy. Democratizing reforms were initiated prior to IMF-style economic reform in Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Turkey, the Philippines, Uruguay, the Soviet Union, its successor, Russia, and most of the other newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. Political and economic reforms then proceeded concurrently. In the Czech Republic and Poland, iterative successes of political and economic liberalization were clearly mutually reinforcing. Many policy-makers and scholars are preaching a new lesson: the optimism, excitement, and hope during a transition from authoritarianism may give new democratic leaders a honeymoon period in which the population is willing to bear the burden of difficult economic reform. Furthermore, it is now being argued, a democratic leadership has the advantage of legitimacy in implementing unpleasant policies. 'Shock therapy,' a policy of conservative economists, is intended, in part, expressly to make the most of the democrats' honeymoon.

The alacrity with which many states, most notably those of eastern Europe and the Baltic region, have switched political systems has tempered praise for the comparative snail's pace of democratizing reform in east Asia. Examples of economic reform without democratization, as in China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Mexico, are being cited more and more often.

A second criticism of economic reform first has been raised continually and vehemently from within the democratizing states themselves, but is only now being given its full due. In the past, the IMF and World Bank were willing to extend economic aid to authoritarian rulers but withheld it from some democratizers who could not gain the consent of their people for distasteful reform medicine. Worse, as Claude Ake observes of the African experience, to qualify for economic aid from the IMF/World Bank and other international finance institutions in order to sustain an economic reform agenda, 'African regimes have become more, not less, authoritarian.' "

Two clear conclusions emerge from recent experiences with democratization. There is no clear relationship between type of regime – authoritarian or democratic – and the successful implementation of economic reforms. And although economic liberalization has usually preceded political liberalization, the reverse is possible and twin transitions are currently quite common. The strength of the past relationship between economic reform first and democratization has, in part, been a self-fulfilling prophecy with international assistance predicated on prior economic reform.

Surprise is about the only thing everyone agrees on when it comes to explaining which countries initiated democratizing changes over the past twenty years and which did not. Each logical sequence of causal links between 'conditions' and democracy had an equally plausible and logical reverse order. Theories and past experience provide clues about which countries are more likely to democratize, but none is beyond the pale. What are the necessary pre-conditions for democracy? There aren't any ... that we know of.

### *Lessons learned*

Recent efforts to understand transitions from authoritarian rule eschew entirely the search for pre-conditions for the onset of democracy and instead focus on the actual processes of transition and consolidation of emergent democracies. Today's researchers are tackling a different question from their predecessors: Why do some states attempting a transition to democracy reach their destination while others revert to some form of authoritarian rule? As yet, there are no conclusive answers or sweeping generalizations, but we can begin to identify some of the central processes

which appear especially important in determining the fate of a transition. The international community can play an important role in helping along many of these processes.

### Elections

The first democratic national elections mark a critical juncture on every road to democracy. Elections do not a democracy make and not all elections are democratic. In the late twentieth century every authoritarian government is subjected to international and domestic pressure for full civil and political liberties. Many countries experimenting with democracy for the first time have ample experience with elections and voting – but not with free, fair, and contested elections. Pretenders abound. Rigging elections, jailing opposition candidates, intimidating voters, controlling the media, and electing impotent legislatures are only a few of the tricks used to construct the facade of democracy. Leaders, whether reform-minded or compelled by society or circumstance, who have sanctioned elections under the rubric of democracy open a window for international assistance. In fact, the international community has a unique role to play as an informal jury in proclaiming elections free, fair, and contested – or not.

Poll-watching gained ground in the 1980s but really took off only after the United Nations became involved when it despatched its first formal observation team to Nicaragua in February 1990. International and regional organizations (for example, the Organization of American States), non-governmental organizations (for example, the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government and the international Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development), and official teams of observers from various countries, both partisan and neutral, now monitor every national election in new democracies.

International monitoring reassures a sceptical public that the vote will be fair. This encourages a large voter turn out and reduces the inclination of opposition forces to call for an election boycott. The presence of international observers reduces incentives to and opportunities for corruption by officials and increases the prospect that the election process will conform with basic democratic standards. The election outcome is known and is seen as fair by all parties and accepted by them. International monitors often conduct a parallel count of ballots or oversee a parallel count by the opposition.

Usually, international observers find themselves confirming the election of the opposition to the existing authoritarian regime, thereby precluding the incumbents from falsely claiming victory. On the other hand, international poll-watching may confirm the election of the incumbent ruler or ruling party. Without the affirmation of international observers, it is likely that the international community and domestic opposition would have

repudiated the election of incumbents in South Korea in 1987 and the Dominican Republic and Bulgaria in 1990. And, of course, the international poll-watchers can declare the election process or outcome to be a sham, as they did in Panama and the Philippines. International observers of Russia's December 1995 parliamentary elections were more concerned with vote rigging at individual polling stations and in each riding than with national improprieties and partiality.

A note of caution. Transition period elections frequently fall between the neat categories of democracy and sham. The international Community must be careful not to over- or under-react. If the elections are rejected outright, the process of change may come to an abrupt halt as the only 'legitimate' government is likely to be the standing authoritarian one. If the shortcomings are not reported, domestic forces for full democracy may be undermined. In some sense, half-way elections may be a face-saving mechanism for rulers to hand over power peacefully – and the only way they would submit to elections at all. For example, in 1984 Uruguay held both parliamentary and presidential elections. The former were 'semi-democratic' because the military rulers had proscribed some major opposition candidates, but all parties participated, the presidential elections were democratic, and governance was handed over to civilians. Over the course of the following nine years and three more sets of elections, a stable democracy was established.<sup>9</sup> If a significant degree of power is transferred to the opposition, such elections may mark a critical step towards democracy, even if they do not signify the attainment of it. In many instances 'semi-democratic' elections may be a necessary check-point on the road to democracy as incumbent authoritarian leaders are often in a position to say 'elections my way or no way.'

In every transition, there are domestic opponents to change, and in the first democratic elections there are usually candidates who represent the authoritarian regime. In societies which have been deeply divided by civil war, elections simply will not be universally accepted without confirmation by the international community, and such elections may be the only way out of war.

#### Government Effectiveness - Economy and Social Services

Economic decline is one of the most common and serious threats to the consolidation of a new democracy. Authoritarian regimes with good, stable economies rarely undergo political transitions. In Africa, virtually all emerging democracies have inherited disastrous economies. The general turmoil of a political transition – especially if it includes civil unrest, strikes, and violence – is bound to upset the economy. Wary foreign investors quickly withdraw from countries in political turmoil. Related economic decline, economic reform, and changes in the political system, a breakdown of such basic social services as availability of potable water,

education, health care, and housing are experienced by most transitional democracies.

The transition leadership faces an enormous challenge. In emergent democracies citizens tend to make full use of new rights to express their demands and petition the government. Economic distress, a declining standard of living, and increased unemployment are easily translated into dissatisfaction with democracy. In established democracies a dissatisfied public will change governments; in new democracies the tendency is to change the governmental system. When the deliberative process of democratic decision-making has difficulties resolving the new economic problems, there are always calls for the re-centralization of power.

The swift stabilization of the economy and resumption of social services in relatively short order are vital to the consolidation of most democracies. The conventional IMF approach to economic stabilization and growth is pitted against the public's impatient and insistent demands for employment and social services. As already discussed, the question of economic reforms first is moot and the appropriateness of IMF/World Bank austerity measures varies from case to case. Not only are the timing and feasibility of Washington consensus reforms under fire, so too is their very desirability. In Latin America and the Caribbean, market-oriented economic reforms are highly divisive politically as they widen the existing gulf between rich and poor. Using the World Bank's own data (but not its analysis), it is very difficult to discern a correlation in African countries between the implementation of World Bank policies and economic growth. On specific aspects of economic reform, such as inflation control, the results are almost perfectly inverted: the countries with the best economic performance had the highest levels of inflation! One element of the orthodox prescription – exchange rate reforms to eliminate protectionism and promote trade – correlate as expected with economic growth in individual countries.<sup>10</sup>

With the Washington consensus breaking down, what policies should new democracies pursue to stabilize their economies while simultaneously protecting their new political system? As critical as this question is, there are very few answers because twin economic and political transitions have burgeoned only in the past few years. Uruguay offers one example of how to get from here to there without riding the IMF train. In 1984, Uruguay's elected government was faced with poor economic growth and high inflation. The political reformers chose to reject IMF orthodox policies aimed at inflation control and chose instead to address economic growth. They reasoned that they had to keep a lid on unemployment to prevent social unrest and, in the words of the elected president, 'to avoid jeopardizing the entire transition process.'" This policy saw Uruguay through the rough transition period and now a stable democratic government is in a position to implement more difficult economic reforms to address the (worsened)

inflation problem. Shock therapy may be the shortest and ultimately least painful route to economic growth and stability, but it simply may not be feasible without overthrowing democracy. A second best route might give democracy a chance.

One suggested generic solution to the critical economic and related social services problems is 'effective government.' Re-examination of economic reform efforts has begun to suggest that government efficiency, regardless of regime type, is behind economic growth successes. Efficiency is democracy's achilles heel. Democracies are not inherently more efficient than authoritarian regimes; indeed, authoritarian states with their lack of competing political interests and their concentrated political power can be highly efficient. It may seem rather banal to promote government efficiency – who's against it? – but the reorientation of attention from macro stability to micro problem-solving may increase the usefulness of international aid.

With a lack of disposable income and a plethora of issues to address, the international community might be able to alleviate some of the burden to get the democratizing state through the short-term hurdles. Even if the new government leaders do not have sufficient political consensus at home to push through shock therapy for the economy, it still might be better not to encourage them to re-centralize power. The consolidation period for a democracy is usually rather short, from one democratic election to another, but it can be prolonged, as in Russia where the political system continues to undergo significant changes. A reasonable policy approach may be to prevent and extinguish brushfires. We may decide that the continuation of children's education is the most important issue, but if a certain locality is alarmed by electricity outages, then that's where attention should be. Listen to the demands/needs as articulated by the public. They will vary from region to region. Getting public consent for long-term structural changes may require short-term economic aid. If the democrats don't turn the water on/get the trains running on time, you can be sure advocates of centralized control will promise to do so.

### Civil Society

'Civil society' refers to the totality of voluntary, non-governmental associations in any country. They include cultural, economic, civic and service, religious and ethnic organizations. Political parties and other organizations which seek to govern are usually excluded. Civil society may be a force of pressure for political liberalization, but it is not necessary for the onset of democracy. In fact, it is possible, albeit unusual, for a civil society to co-exist within a stable authoritarian state. In Africa, the authoritarian regimes in Senegal and Ghana permitted local associations to develop, not to extend civil liberties but as a means of diffusing societal pressure from them. Kenya has one of the most well-developed civil societies but 'these

grassroots organizations do not appear to have brought about, as of now, any substantial decentralization of power, and they have not diminished the state's arbitrariness and coercion.'

Often one of the steps a leader takes on the road to democracy is to expand civil liberties. A sudden loud eruption and mobilization of the public quickly ensues. Although the new freedoms are to be celebrated, the evidence is mixed on whether the rapid mobilization of the public helps or hinders the subsequent development of democracy.

Evidence from the third wave of democratization indicates that a vigorous civil society has an important and unambiguous role in facilitating the consolidation of a new democracy. It seems that a strong civil society provides an invaluable force against the reinstatement of authoritarian rule. Political transitions are often leadership led, but ultimately consolidation of democracy requires citizen support. Membership in autonomous associations gives ordinary citizens a direct stake in the new system and creates a broad-based constituency for its continuation. In societies that have been under authoritarian rule for many decades, independent organizations are a valuable training ground for future political leaders. Civil society communicates public demands and interests to the new leaders and expresses public reaction to government decisions which may increase the accountability of the newly elected politicians and the new political system. Finally, a profusion of autonomous associations serves a stabilizing function by cutting across the stark political, cultural, and ethnic cleavages that often afflict societies in transition.

Non-governmental associations are a good access point for the international community into a process of democratization. Although governments can be very sensitive to interference by outsiders in their political life, assistance from the world's democracies is generally welcomed by the recipient state during the consolidation stage of a transition. Strengthening civil society can be politically risk-free for the assisting state. I say 'can' because excessive support of groups deemed 'radical' or 'threatening' by the recipient government or society will not be appreciated and could be deleterious to the stabilization process. A little judgment can prevent such a mistake.

The focus of foreign aid should be primarily on the vigorous life of independent association and secondarily on their specific activities. Foreign donors may also choose to target groups in rural areas and the hinterland to help spread the roots of democracy beyond major metropolitan areas.

Foreign aid may include funds for groups to gather and network. Depending upon the country this may include buying or supplying pencils, pens and paper, typewriters, computers or computer accounts, or rent for meeting halls. Funding for regional, national, and international networking among like-minded voluntary organizations strengthens the

ability of civil society as a whole to fight back should political reforms falter and can be expected to diminish the constituency for leaders who would roll-back civil liberties.

Many new public groups arise in response to some unmet social need such as environmental protection, soup kitchens, care of the elderly, disabled, and orphaned. A common feature of many recent transitions is the temporary breakdown of the delivery of social services, especially if there is a concurrent economic transition. International assistance to such groups will foster community-building, and the development of civil society will also relieve some pressure from an overburdened government. Foreign aid to civic associations may involve very small amounts of money or in-kind donations. Small sums to small community groups contribute enormously to a vigorous civil society.

With so many third-wave transitions still on-going, and many emergent democracies yet to be consolidated, new evidence will become available in the coming years to confirm or challenge the role of civil society in stabilizing and consolidating new democracies. In the meantime, this seems to be an economically and politically affordable way to help confirm the place of one more country on the list of democracies.

#### Other Considerations

The recent focus on democratization and consolidation has yielded a long list of issues, players, and processes which are pivotal for a few, some, or many transitions. Choices made during a transition are often heavily constrained by circumstance or a result of bargaining among domestic players. Even if the optimal outcome is known, there simply may be no way to get there and no role for the international community along the way.

The military has proven a threat to many a new democracy in transition from military rule or from one-party rule. Given the number of times a new democracy has been overthrown by a military coup, it is clear that policies for neutralizing the military are easier said than done. The military might be bought off with toys, as Huntington suggests, but military toys tend to be expensive and new democracies rarely have the necessary cash. It is best, of course, to de-politicize the military, but sometimes democratization is predicated on concessions to the outgoing military leaders. The resulting balance of power may not allow a delicate democracy to downsize the military or intrude on its internal organization.

Studies of Latin America's experience has spawned much discussion about the relative merits of parliamentary and presidential systems for the consolidation of democracy. This line of research may be purely academic. The precise institutional configuration of a new democracy is the reflection of the balance of powers and interests at the moment of change, and the balance of institutional power may undergo significant changes during consolidation as the balance of power among leaders settles. As such, the

'objective' merits or any particular institutional arrangement are beside the point for most key players.

In many societies, torture, murder, disappearances, and systematic human rights abuses have been perpetrated under the auspices of the prior authoritarian regime. Westerners are quick to call for justice. But justice and national reconsolidation, justice and peace, are frequently two incompatible options for leaders of a fledgling democracy. Most often, as a compromise, a few top officials are punished. For the sake of national reconciliation, Chile, South Africa, South Korea, Guatemala, and Haiti have, for the most part, eschewed punishment. Instead, they established 'truth commissions' to bring to light atrocities committed under previous regimes. The international community can be helpful in providing asylum to dictators, thus removing them from the scene without inciting their domestic supporters. In a unique approach to this explosive issue, a national referendum in Uruguay decided the fate of the military personnel charged with human rights abuses. The people voted for reconciliation – that is, for full amnesty. The issue of justice and retribution is a deeply personal and private affair for each country. In its desire to establish a firm peace in the former Yugoslavia, the international community would be wise to take their cue from the sentiments of the people. While democracy cannot tolerate human rights abuses, it can leave unpunished crimes from a predecessor regime.

Recent experience has taught us to be a little less gloomy about backsliding and cycling in and out of democracy. Some quick reversals of fortune have favoured democrats as well as dictators. But more importantly, it seems that backsliding is not so much a failure of democracy as a feature of a long-term transition of a polity and perhaps a society. By Samuel Huntington's count, 2<sub>3</sub> of 2<sub>9</sub> countries that democratized between the mid-1970s and 1990 had prior experience with democracy. A failed transition to democracy only increases the likelihood that there will be a future episode of democratization and the likelihood that it will take root. The third wave of democratization is now receding, leaving in its wake a host of stable democracies, many fragile new democracies, and, yes, some new authoritarian regimes.

The past twenty years of experience leaves countries like Canada in a better position than ever to play a positive role in the development and consolidation of new democracies. One of the most important lessons we have learned is that, contrary to our expectations and intentions, support of authoritarian regimes in the name of economic liberalization can be detrimental to the development of democracy, and liberal economies are compatible with stable authoritarian rule. In focussing on the consolidation phase of democratization, it is evident that more attention should be paid to citizen satisfaction with the new regime in the short term, rather than focussing exclusively on the long-term needs of a democracy. The

needs of a developing or a consolidating democracy are different from those of a stable democracy.

There are so many problems and potential problems to attend to during a transition period it is hard to keep an eye on the prize. If we want democracy, we should support democracy and the democratic process. That means supporting a presidency, but not a president. It means supporting a parliamentary decision-making process, not the decisions themselves. It means keeping careful watch on the rule of law and civil liberties. In the past, primarily because of faith in the 'economic reform first' orthodoxy the re-establishment of authoritarian ways could be supported. Now we know better. Some leeway may still be granted to new leaders who do not behave like model democrats in the face of a profusion of issues and enormous public expectations, but this leeway is very limited. If we want to get to democracy, for security, humanitarian, and economic reasons, then we must support democratic processes.

#### Notes

- Samuel P Huntington, *Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1991).
- 2 For discussion of the conceptual development and historical varieties of democracy, see Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago it: University of Chicago Press 1956); David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Cambridge MA: Polity Press 1987); and Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, vols I and II (Chatham NJ: Chatham House 1987).
  - 3 Robert Dahl's *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* is the classic exposition of this conception of modern pluralist democracy and the conditions necessary for its attainment (New Haven CT: Yale University Press 1971).
  - 4 Sartori focusses extensively on this facet of democracy, providing detailed history of its roots and importance, in *Theory of Democracy Revisited*.
  - 5 Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Some social requisites of democracy: economic development and political legitimacy,' *American Political Science Review* 53 (March 1959).
  - 6 Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba published the seminal and most highly influential exploration of this thesis in *The Civic Culture* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press 1963).
  - 7 For an excellent discussion of the diverse explanations and evidence for economic and democratizing reform, see Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kauffman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press 1995).
  - 8 Claude Ake, 'Rethinking African democracy,' in *Journal of Democracy* 2 (winter 1991).
  - 9 Tanzania held its first, if fraudulent, parliamentary and presidential

- elections in October 1995; there is hope that a second round of presidential elections scheduled for 1996 will do better.
- to Sayre P Schatz, Structural adjustment in Africa: a failing grade so far,' *Journal of Modern African Studies* 32 (December 1994), 679-92.
- it Julio Maria Sanguinetti, President of Uruguay, 1985-1990, in Diamond and Plattner, eds, *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, 57.
- 12 Ake, 'Rethinking African democracy,' 37. In some Latin and Central American authoritarian states, non-governmental associations were permitted to exist and flourish under the tacit agreement that they would not step across the state's invisibly demarcated boundaries of control.

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