

After Twenty Years: The Future of the Third Wave

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Some five hundred years ago a small group of Portuguese leaders and thinkers--including King John II, Prince Henry the Navigator, Bartholomew Dias, and Vasco da Gama--acting with courage, determination, and imagination, inaugurated a new phase in human history, the age of discovery. They set an example that Spain, France, Britain, and the Netherlands were to follow. Slightly more than two decades ago, Mário Soares and his colleagues, acting with comparable courage, determination, and imagination, inaugurated a new phase in human history, the age of democracy. They too set an example that Spain, Greece, Brazil, and many other countries have followed.

This result, however, was not foreordained. Chaos and conflict existed in Portugal in the months following the military's overthrow of the dictatorship in April 1974. At that time the prospects for democracy did not seem bright, and many thought that Portugal's Stalinist communist party would come to power. This pessimism was shared by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. When Mário Soares, then foreign minister in the provisional government, visited Kissinger, the latter **[End Page 3]** berated him and his government for not taking a stronger line against the communists.

"You are a Kerensky," Kissinger said, "I believe your sincerity, but you are naive."

To which Soares replied: "I certainly don't want to be a Kerensky."

And Kissinger shot back: "Neither did Kerensky."¹

Mário Soares and his colleagues, however, proved Kissinger wrong. In Portugal, the Kerenskys won, democracy was consolidated, and Mário Soares went on to be prime minister and later president. The third wave of democratization that Portugal initiated literally created the age of democracy, in which for the first time in history more than half the countries in the world have some form of democratic government.

Let us briefly look at the record. The first, long wave of democratization that began in the early nineteenth century led to the triumph of democracy in some 30 countries by 1920. Renewed authoritarianism and the rise of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s reduced the number of democracies in the world to about a dozen by 1942. The second, short wave of democratization after the Second World War again increased the number of democracies in the world to somewhat over 30, but this too was followed by the collapse of democracy in many of these countries. The third wave of democratization that began in Portugal has seen democratization occur much faster and on a scale far surpassing that of the previous two waves. Two decades ago, less than 30 percent of the countries in the world were democratic; now more than 60 percent have governments produced by some form of open, fair, and competitive elections. A quarter-century ago, authoritarian governments--communist politburos, military juntas, personal dictatorships--were the rule. Today, hundreds of millions of people who previously suffered under tyrants live in freedom. In addition, since democracies historically have not warred with other democracies, there has been a major expansion of the zone of peace in the world and a reduction in the likelihood of interstate

conflict. This dramatic growth of democracy in such a short time is, without doubt, one of the most spectacular and important political changes in human history.

But what about the future? Will democracy become consolidated in the countries where it has recently emerged? Will more countries become democratic? Are we about to see a world in which democracy is not only the predominant system of government but the universal system of government?

Economics and Culture

The answers to these questions, I believe, depend largely on two factors: economic development and the receptivity to democracy of non-Western cultures. **[End Page 4]**

First, as we all know, an extremely high correlation exists between levels of democracy and levels of economic development. Setting aside the oil-rich states as a special case, all the wealthiest countries in the world, except Singapore, are democratic, and almost all the poorest countries in the world, with the notable exception of India and perhaps one or two others, are not democratic. The countries at intermediate levels of economic development are in some cases democratic and in other cases not. Yet correlation, as we know, does not prove causation. Hence we are left with a set of questions: Does economic growth produce democracy? Does democracy produce economic growth? Or are economic growth and democratization both products of some other cause or independent variable?

As Seymour Martin Lipset pointed out decades ago, the evidence is overwhelming that economic development has a strong positive effect on democratization.² In short, if you wish to produce democracy, promote economic growth. There are several reasons for this relationship. Economic development involves higher levels of urbanization, literacy, and education. It also involves a shift in occupational structure, with a decline in the size and importance of the peasantry and the development of a middle class and an urban working class. The latter groups increasingly want a voice in and influence over policies that affect them. With higher levels of education, they are able to organize trade unions, political parties, and civic associations to promote their interests. Second, economic development produces more resources, public and private, for distribution among groups in society. Politics becomes less of a zero-sum game, and hence compromise and toleration are encouraged. Third, economic growth produces a more complex economy that becomes increasingly difficult for the state to control; as we have seen in the case of the command economies, state control can only be maintained at the price of economic stagnation. Fourth, the easing of state control of the economy leads to the creation and growth of independent centers of power, based on private control of capital, technology, and communications. The bourgeoisie who hold these assets want a political system in which they can exercise influence, one that is not dominated by a military junta, a politburo, or a dictator and his cronies. Finally, while in the short term rapid economic growth often exacerbates income inequalities, in the longer term it produces greater equality in income distribution. Democracy is incompatible with total economic equality, which can be achieved only by a coercive dictatorship, but it also is incompatible with gross inequalities in wealth and income. Economic growth eventually reduces these inequalities and hence facilitates the emergence of democracy.

As a result of this positive effect of economic growth on democratization, it is possible to identify what in *The Third Wave* I called a "transition zone."³ As countries grow economically and enter into this **[End Page 5]** zone of intermediate levels of economic development, pressures develop within them to open up and democratize their political system. Most of the 40 or more transitions to democracy that have occurred in recent decades have been in countries that were in this transition zone. One would expect that future transitions to democracy will occur in those areas of the world, such as East and Southeast Asia, that are experiencing rapid economic development.

At this point, however, it is necessary to introduce the cultural element. Modern democracy is a product of Western civilization. Its roots lie in the social pluralism, the class system, the civil society, the belief in the rule of law, the experience with representative bodies, the separation of spiritual and temporal authority,

and the commitment to individualism that began to develop in Western Europe a millennium ago. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these legacies generated the struggles for political participation by the aristocrats and rising middle classes that produced nineteenth-century democratic development. These characteristics may individually be found in other civilizations, but together they have existed only in the West, and they explain why modern democracy is a child of Western civilization.

Europe, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has said, is "the source--the *unique* source" of the "ideas of individual liberty, political democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and cultural freedom These are *European* ideas, not Asian, nor African, nor Middle Eastern ideas, except by adoption."⁴ The great achievement of the Third Wave has been to ensure the universality of democracy in Western civilization and to promote its manifestations in other civilizations. If the Third Wave has a future, that future lies in the expansion of democracy in non-Western societies. The central issue is: To what extent can modern democracy, a product of the West, take root in non-Western societies?

Elections and Democracy

This question raises the issue of the meaning of democracy to people of different cultures. Since the Second World War the dominant trend has been to define democracy almost entirely in terms of elections. Democracy is viewed as a means of constituting authority and making it responsible. In other political systems people become rulers through birth, appointment, examination, wealth, or coercion. In a democracy, in contrast, either the rulers and ruled are identical, as in direct democracy, or rulers are selected by vote of the ruled. A modern nation-state has a democratic political system to the extent that its most powerful decision makers are selected through fair, honest, periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually the entire adult population is eligible to vote. This procedural definition of democracy received its most significant modern exposition over 50 years [End Page 6] ago in Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, and has been generally accepted by scholars working on this subject.⁵ According to this definition, elections are the essence of democracy. From this follow other characteristics of democratic systems. Free, fair, and competitive elections are only possible if there is some measure of freedom of speech, assembly, and press, and if opposition candidates and parties are able to criticize incumbents without fear of retaliation.

Are elections, however, all there is to democracy? In a brilliant article last year in the *Journal of Democracy*, Larry Diamond elaborated a key distinction between liberal democracy and electoral democracy.⁶ Liberal democracies not only have elections. They also have restrictions on the power of the executive; independent judiciaries to uphold the rule of law; protection for individual rights and liberties of expression, association, belief, and participation; consideration for the rights of minorities; limits on the ability of the party in power to bias the electoral process; effective guarantees against arbitrary arrest and police brutality; no censorship; and minimal government control of the media. Electoral democracies have governments resulting from reasonably free and fair elections, but they lack many of these other safeguards for rights and liberties that exist in liberal democracies. As Diamond points out, the number of electoral democracies has grown greatly in recent years, but the number of liberal democracies has been relatively static. According to the most recent survey by Freedom House, 118 countries qualify as electoral democracies. Only 79 of these countries, however, are rated by Freedom House as "free"--that is, as liberal democracies. Some 39 countries with elected governments are judged only "partly free," including such important countries as Russia, India, Ukraine, Turkey, Brazil, Pakistan, and Colombia.⁷

As a result of this distinction, some people have begun to question the identification of democracy with elections. They have talked of "the fallacy of electoralism" and "the free-elections trap." One distinguished American scholar has even suggested that elections may be superfluous in a democracy: if people have the freedom to protest, criticize, organize, demonstrate, and lobby their rulers, elections will not be necessary.⁸ Another critic has argued that it is "more important for democratizing societies to have a free press than free elections." He, of course, was a journalist.⁹ This disillusionment with elections stems from various sources, but in large part from the extent to which the results of elections in non-Western countries have differed from those in Western societies.

First, elections in non-Western societies may lead to the victory of political leaders or groups that seriously threaten the maintenance of democracy. Elected chief executives in Latin American countries and in former Soviet republics have often acted in arbitrary and undemocratic ways, suppressing their opponents, and ruling by decree. Zviad **[End Page 7]** Gamsakhurdia in Georgia was an early case in point, and Alberto Fujimori in Peru is a later one. Other elected chief executives in Latin America have subordinated their legislatures and forced through constitutional amendments allowing them to extend their term in office. In non-Western societies lacking the liberal tradition of the West, governments formed by elections may often pay little attention to individual rights, discriminate against minorities, curtail press freedom, and tolerate or even encourage police brutality.

Second, elections in non-Western countries provide incentives to politicians to make appeals that will win them the most votes, and these are often appeals of an ethnic, religious, or nationalist nature. Such appeals may exacerbate divisions within the country and may also result in the victory of anti-Western political leaders and policies. Paradoxically, the adoption by non-Western societies of Western democratic institutions often encourages and gives access to power to nativist and anti-Western political movements. Democracy is a parochializing, not a cosmopolitanizing, process. Politicians in non-Western societies do not win elections by demonstrating how Western they are. Religiously-oriented parties challenging Western secularism have scored electoral successes in Turkey, India, Israel, and the former Yugoslav republics. The Algerian military canceled an election that the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front was certain to win. The Turkish military forced out of office a government led by the Islamist Welfare Party. In some Muslim countries the choice appears to be between antidemocratic secularism and anti-Western democracy.

In the West, electoral democracy rests on and developed out of a liberal political heritage that included individual rights and the rule of law. Electoral democracy may also play a role, however, in nonliberal, non-Western political systems. Consider the case of Iran. It is a fundamentalist state. Ultimate power is in the Supreme Ayatollah and a Council of Guardians composed of religious leaders. Criticism of the revolution, the regime, or its religious leaders is rigorously suppressed. The media are either controlled by the government or subject to ruthless censorship. Religious minorities are harassed and some, such as the Bahai, are persecuted. Arbitrary arrests are frequent, and torture of prisoners is reportedly widespread. Dismemberment is a form of criminal punishment. There have often been large numbers of political prisoners. Iran is clearly a country far removed from the Western liberal model.

Yet Iran is, in some respects, an electoral democracy. In the 1997 presidential contest, Mohammed Khatemi scored a stunning upset victory over the establishment candidate, winning 69 percent of the vote in an election in which 88 percent of the adult population voted. In 1993, **[End Page 8]** Hashemi Rafsanjani won with 63 percent of the vote in a hotly contested election against three other candidates. In the 1992 elections for the Majlis or parliament, the Council of Guardians disapproved more than a thousand aspiring candidates, but the remaining two thousand vigorously competed against one another for the 270 seats. In 1996 the Council disapproved two thousand Majlis aspirants, but that left three thousand competing for the 270 seats. While political parties are banned, candidates in both elections were affiliated with two semi-party political groupings representing more moderate and more fundamentalist views, respectively. Women both voted and ran for office, and in 1997 they made up 5 percent of the Majlis. The Majlis moreover, has significant power. It has refused to approve the president's nominations for cabinet positions, and it has on occasion forced the resignation of cabinet ministers. It has hotly debated economic policies and other issues, and in 1994 and 1995 it effectively blocked many of the reforms that then-President Rafsanjani was attempting to put through. The Majlis is arguably the liveliest parliament in the Middle East after the Israeli Knesset. Electoral contestation has been more intense in Iran than in any Arab state and in all but one or two other Muslim states. Iran thus combines contested elections and some checks and balances with fundamentalist repression and gross violations of individual rights. In the Persian Gulf, Saudia Arabia, America's closest ally, is the least democratic country, while Iran, America's greatest antagonist, is the most democratic country.

The Influence of the West

Liberal democracy, rooted in the concept of individual dignity, is a Western product, and some have argued that liberal democracy is impossible outside the West. In fact, however, at least one liberal democracy exists in almost every other civilization. Liberal democracy, in short, is not inherently incompatible with major non-Western cultures. Yet the extent to which non-Western societies are receptive to either liberal democracy or electoral democracy varies with the extent to which they have been influenced by the West. The 39 countries that have governments produced by reasonably open and fair elections, yet also lack the full range of political liberties and civil rights, include ten Latin American, eight African, five Orthodox Christian, and five Muslim countries. Electoral democracy in these countries is not necessarily a step on the road to liberal democracy. India, Turkey, and Sri Lanka, to take but three examples, have been electoral democracies for almost half a century, yet they still remain deficient in the extent to which they protect the rights and liberties of their citizens.

The great civilizations of the world differ significantly in the degree to which their cultures are similar to that of the West or have been **[End Page 9]** influenced by the West. Latin America is clearly a close kin of the West and, according to some, should even be considered a member of the Western family. Orthodoxy is a much more distant and more difficult relative. In Africa, Western rule was brief and its impact, outside South Africa, much more limited. The degree of Western influence among Muslim countries has varied, but in the Arab heartland of Islam it also has been limited. The same is true for China. Overall the extent to which non-Western societies have proven receptive to either electoral democracy or liberal democracy tends to vary directly with the extent to which those societies have been subject to Western influences.

Democratic development occurs when political leaders believe they have an interest in promoting it or a duty to achieve it. Such elites are missing from many parts of the world. In most Muslim countries authoritarian rulers are in control and show no sign of opening toward democracy. In those few democracies that do exist in the Muslim world, the rulers often rule in undemocratic fashion and show little interest in moving from electoral democracy to liberal democracy. Perhaps even more importantly, in virtually all Muslim countries not governed by fundamentalist regimes, fundamentalist movements dominate and often monopolize opposition to the regime. Liberal democratic opposition groups are notable for their absence. "In one Muslim society after another," Fouad Ajami has observed, "to write of liberalism and a national bourgeois tradition is to write obituaries of men who took on impossible odds and then failed."¹⁰ In addition, it is widely recognized that democracy depends on a vigorous civil society. A vigorous civil society is emerging in Muslim countries, but it is a fundamentalist civil society, not a secular and liberal civil society.

The elites of China and many other Asian societies have no use for liberal democracy. Indeed, it has been argued by some Western scholars that Asia is the home of "illiberal democracy," the product of a cultural heritage that stresses the tutelary and disciplining role of the state and the law as guides for citizen behavior rather than as protectors of individual rights.¹¹ In China political leaders vigorously oppose democracy; the emerging bourgeoisie is likely to be too intertwined with the state to challenge state power; and students and other dissidents lack any secure social base. The concept of human rights that limit the state is weak in East Asia; to the extent that individual rights are recognized, they are usually viewed as rights created by the state. Harmony and cooperation are preferred over disagreement and competition. The maintenance of order and respect for hierarchy are viewed as central values. Conflict between ideas, groups, and parties tends to be viewed as dangerous. Hence electoral democracy, to the extent that it develops in Asian societies, is likely to be designed to produce consensus rather than choice, to have different characteristics from electoral democracy **[End Page 10]** in the West, and to lack the penumbra of the liberal practices and institutions that go with Western democracy.

A Strategy for Democratizers

The practical issue comes down to this: In the current phase of the Third Wave, should those concerned with the promotion of democracy give priority to extending electoral democracy to the more than 50 unfree countries of the world that lack any form of democracy? Or should priority be given to promoting liberal democracy in countries that are already electoral democracies? Obviously, in some measure it is

desirable and necessary to do both. At this time, however, I believe that greater emphasis should be put on the transformation of electoral democracies into liberal democracies. The place to start is Latin America, where liberal democracy has taken root in several countries, and where there are ten electoral (but not liberal) democracies. Latin America's electoral democracies have been variously labeled as "delegative," "protected," "restrictive," "corporatist," and "quasi" democracies.¹² Yet Latin American culture closely resembles Western culture. Latin Americans speak Western languages and are overwhelmingly Catholic (and increasingly Protestant) in their religious beliefs. Migration and the expansion of trade are creating close ties between Latin America and North America. Economically, most Latin American countries are at middle levels of economic development. Latin American elites are far more committed to the liberal democratic values of the West than are the elites of other non-Western civilizations. All these factors dictate that a top priority should be countering the tendencies toward executive arrogation of power and transforming Latin American electoral democracies into liberal democracies. By similar reasoning, the next priority should go to Orthodox countries.

A second major need is to develop the sense of community and enhance the forms of cooperation among liberal democracies. One way of doing this is by the creation in more countries of publicly funded foundations or other institutions committed to the expansion of democracy. The Third Wave has already seen the formation of the National Endowment for Democracy in the United States and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in the United Kingdom. Other Western democracies are moving toward the establishment of comparable institutions. It is also highly desirable that these institutions join together in an international association to coordinate their efforts and to become an effective lobbying group with national governments and international organizations on behalf of democratic development. Many years ago, when I was working at the White House in the Carter administration, we discussed the possibility of convening a meeting of the leaders of democratic governments and democratic movements from throughout the [End Page 11] world in order to discuss how to promote democracy on a global scale. But somehow the time then did not seem ripe, and we did not pursue this project. It is difficult for governments, which have many other interests at stake, to take the lead in such an endeavor. Now, after 20 years of the Third Wave, conditions are much more favorable, and private groups should move to create an international association of organizations and movements dedicated to expanding democracy on a global basis and to enhancing the performance of democracy within countries. The Comintern is dead. The time for a Demintern has arrived. The creation of such an association will be a major step toward ensuring the consolidation and the continuation of the momentous expansion of human freedom that began under the leadership of Mário Soares 23 years ago.

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Notes

¹. Quoted in Tad Szulc, "Lisbon and Washington: Behind the Portuguese Revolution," *Foreign Policy* 21 (Winter 1975-76): 3.

². Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), ch. 2, "Economic Development and Democracy."

³. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 59-69.

- [4.](#) Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 127.
- [5.](#) Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976; orig. publ. 1942), esp. chs. 22-23.
- [6.](#) Larry Diamond, "Is the Third Wave Over?" *Journal of Democracy* 7 (July 1996): 20-37.
- [7.](#) Adrian Karatnycky, "Freedom on the March," *Freedom Review* 28 (January-February 1997): 4ff. See also, list of "Electoral Democracies as of 31 December 1996," supplied by Freedom House.
- [8.](#) John Mueller, "Democracy and Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery: Elections, Equality, and the Minimal Human Being," *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (November 1992): 984-90.
- [9.](#) Leslie H. Gelb, "The Free Elections Trap," *New York Times*, 29 May 1991, A23.
- [10.](#) Fouad Ajami, "The Impossible Life of Muslim Liberalism," *New Republic*, 2 June 1986, 27.
- [11.](#) See Daniel Bell, David Brown, Kashka Jayasuriya, and David Martin Jones, *Towards Illiberal Democracy in Pacific Asia* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995).
- [12.](#) Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (January 1994): 55-69; Brian Loveman, "Protected Democracies and Military Guardianship: Political Transitions in Latin America, 1978-1993," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 36 (Summer 1994): 108-11; Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989), xvi-xviii; Terry Lynn Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics* 23 (October 1990): 1-21. For a sophisticated analysis of the conceptual complexity and confusion with respect to types of democracies and semidemocracies, see David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49 (April 1997): 430-51.