

An analysis of huntingtons theories of democratisation politics essay



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The course of modern democratization is actually far more difficult than Huntington suggests in his theory, the Third Wave of Democratization. In fact, this theory fails to elucidate very different explanations for democratization. First of all, it is required to make a separation as to the causes of democratization. Secondly, the wave approach takes for granted that there is now a global movement to establish democracy. This argument might be true to an extent, considering what is happening in certain countries all over the world, and especially in the Arab world. But, according to a more precise consideration, the number of stable and liberal democracies is actually growing very slowly.[1]Huntington presumed that more democracies were emerging because more elections were being held. However, holding elections, as mentioned in previous sections, does not necessarily indicate the implementation of democracy and democratization. In other words, if elections were taken as the only, or the main sign of democracy and democratization, then a country like Lebanon would be one of the most democratic countries in the world. Quite simply, “ social conflict” theory has been pointed to in conventional studies as sparking the democratization process.[2]This theory, based on capitalism, is regarded as the classic method of analysing political reform. It states that the class structure was overturned by capitalism, which led to the formation of a middle class and thus an insistence on social and economic reform so that the new system could be maintained. Indeed, Seymour Lipset asserts that capitalism breed bourgeois and middle class professionals, who are essential for political reform and hence democracy.[3]

Some researchers believe that democratization has its roots in the 1776 American Revolution. Dahl, for example, dates the process to the success known by the question of representation which brought about the Revolution and ultimately saw the birth of the United States. Other scholars, such as Huntington, equate democracy with individualism and consequently hold the view that its first wave began in the 1600s. The rapid spread of capitalism in the West and the fierce social conflicts that ensued should equally be considered.

The non-elite or lower classes were increasingly empowered by growth in the economy, creating a situation where they came to recognize those rights that had so far been denied them. The process of democratization, therefore, resulted from social conflicts. Meanwhile, capitalism and its ensuing social conflicts resulted in the development of a modern and fairly independent state able to play a pivotal role in further social reform. In Europe, this new state enabled the advancement of socio-economic reforms which helped pave the way towards democratization.[4] In other words, socio-economic pressure played a key role in leading to democratization, taking into consideration the combination of this pressure with the development of a liberal state that was to some degree autonomous.

We can see various different types of self-declared democracies in modern experiments with democratization. Certain countries have seen the emergence of a liberal democracy, while others have seen a degree of electoral change. But the overall picture is completed by the problems democracy faces in most Third World countries. It is thus imperative that we make a distinction between democracies with problems or part-democracies, <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-huntingtons-theories-of-democratisation-politics-essay/>

and those that are secure and strong. In short, contemporary processes of democratization encompass failures and successes. The question raised here is: why do some democratization experiments succeed where others fail?

The following is Grugel's short answer to this question:

Democracies are political systems comprising institutions that translate citizen's preferences into policy, have effective states that act to protect and deepen democratic rights, and count on a strong participatory and critical civil society. A consolidated democracy is one in which this political order is routinised and accepted. Consolidation, then, implies both the deepening and stabilizing of democracy. In addition, the chances for consolidation are greatest in cases where favourable international circumstances are allied with state capacity and a growing, vocal and effective civil society.

[5]133

Initially, the process of democratization started most powerfully in countries which were economically strong and well developed. In other words, stable democracy seemed to be a luxury only rich nations could afford. But this form of democracy or this concept was not to succeed all the time as it was challenged in some capitalist and economically developed countries such as the former German Democratic Republic in the 1930s, which, although it distributed wealth relatively equitably and was officially dedicated to social justice, could hardly be considered democratic.[6]Also, in some authoritarian regimes democracy was replaced by fragile or semi-democracies. This implies that although capitalism is essential, it still does not ensure the emergence of democracy (e. g. semi-democracy in Malaysia). Meanwhile, democratic types of government continued to exist in some countries for

considerable periods, even though economic development was slow and elitism was still in force. This happened, for example, in the island nations of the English-speaking Caribbean, Venezuela and India.

In summary, we should see the wave theory as a useful way of placing democratization in its global setting. However, it must be noted that it is not capable of including the various factors implicit in the process. It stresses the need to note that democracy has more chance of developing following social conflict at certain times in world history. But, as we have seen above, on a wider scale the application of wave theory is rather limited. Furthermore, it falls short of clarifying how democracy develops on a national level. With this in mind, we must examine theories of social and economic change and political action in order to gain an understanding of the matter.

2. 2. 2. 2 The Process of Democratization

It is not a matter of surprise if we find that the number of succeeded and thriving democratizations is overbalanced by either had undergone failure or stalled experiments. Given that, in some countries around the world, problems like socio-economic imbalance and gender inequality means that democratization will keep on being slow and will remain a painful, and sometimes impossible, task.

Since the Portuguese dictatorship was overthrown in 1974, the number of democratically ruled countries has dramatically increased. Prior to this, there were an estimated forty democracies world-wide; these were joined steadily during the late 1970s and early 1980s as a number of states made the transition from authoritarianism to seemingly democratic government. The

late 1980s and the decline, and ultimate collapse, of the Soviet Union saw a significant boost to the pace of world-wide democratization. Consequently by the end of 1995 there were, as Larry Diamond has noted, between 76 and 117 democracies, depending on the method used to measure them.[7] This post-1974 period is what Samuel Huntington has termed the third wave of global democratic expansion; he demonstrated how important the effects of regional and international democratization were.[8]

Undoubtedly, holding elections or toppling an authoritarian regime and replacing it with another, even if this receives the support of the people, does not permit a country to wear the badge of democracy. Huntington describes supplanting military regimes as the extremely important beginning to third wave democratization. However, he unwillingly skims over the underlying principal behind taking such action. He states that countries came to begin the process of democratization because of a huge growth in democratic discourse. But it was in fact a result of social and economic change at both the national and supra-national levels. Quite simply the old political system became unable to function in the context of accelerated change to socio-economic structures and had to be exposed and taken apart.

It is possible to view democracy today as the culmination of a steady but important development in political thinking. Since the 1800s it has gradually taken root and grown across throughout the world, demonstrating its ability to spread modern values and beliefs. This development, however, was not straight forward and has faced challenges, but the reasons behind and the incentives involved in democracy have been different in space and time. In the nineteenth century, for example, change was spurred on by social class, <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-huntingtons-theories-of-democratisation-politics-essay/>

whereas in the last two decades of the twentieth century it was carried forward by a complicated mixture of social conflict, state building, free global trade and external influences. There has been considerable effort made to provide an explanation for the expansion of democracy; the most convincing of these has been Huntington's wave theory. With its wide ranging ability to include different issues, it argues that the causes of democratization in those countries to which the wave is common are comparable. Huntington's theory also makes note that reverse waves of authoritarianism have followed those of democratization. This viewpoint is backed up by his mention of those societies that have either been unable to secure lasting democracy or have seen its collapse.

Huntington explains a wave of democratization as follows:

A wave of democratisation is a group of transitions from nondemocratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period of time. A wave also involves liberalisation or partial democratisation in political systems that do not become fully democratic. Each of the first two waves of democratisation was followed by a reverse wave in which some but not all of countries that had previously made the transition to democracy reverted to non-democratic rule.[9]

For Huntington, it was from the beginning of the nineteenth century until 1930 when the first wave took place. This was, as he argues, associated with the growth and development of liberal democracy in theory and practice. He continues by saying that the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945 was indicative

of the Second wave. At that time, the coalition led by the Americans lead the process of democratizing the occupied territories of Germany, Japan and Austria.

In his book, Huntington finally comes to the third wave of democratization which, he argues, started in Portugal in 1974, then spread to Greece and Spain, and after that, in the 1980s, reached some Latin American countries. This wave, according to Huntington, ended up in Eastern and Central Europe and the Soviet Union. One can argue that the profound need for economic growth and popular awareness about political developments contributed greatly to the smooth and painless integration of these countries into the democratic union.

To sum up, adding to what Huntington demonstrated in his book, one can extend these three waves some other encouraging developments that have occurred in certain other developing countries which have showed a great desire for democratization. However, one should bear in mind that in many of these countries these objectives have been counterbalanced and outweighed by conditions that have rendered electoral democracy increasingly shallow, illiberal, unaccountable, and afflicted.[10]In other words, establishing some democratic institutions which are believed to be taken or filled by elected members from the public cannot, in itself, be seen as a proof of successful democratization.

2. 2. 2. 2. 3 Democratization and the State

Democracy describes the system; democratization describes the process.

This rule shows us the boundary between democracy and democratization.

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When discussing democratization it might be helpful to demonstrate its purpose. The purpose of democratization is the building of a democratic state. But the question is: How does this happen? The general consensus is that democracy entails more than simply holding elections. However, academics have so far been unable to agree on what exactly is necessary. We are aware that the state is, in the final analysis, a means of dominating society. In a democracy, then, hierarchies which act combining legitimate power, persuasion and bureaucracy tend to hold power. A further characteristic of a democracy is the existence of several bodies that hold authority and make decisions. In an undemocratic state, meanwhile, democratization makes the state apparatus its main target. Therefore, it is rather illogical to believe that an undemocratic state will itself try to carry out democratization.

Overall, a democratic government's legitimacy is reliant on its ability to convincingly demonstrate it is truly representative of the people, acts in their interest, and can be held accountable by them. Therefore, a democratic government should adhere to these principles. Although democratic and capitalist states naturally work to a business- and profit-oriented agenda, it is more likely that they will answer demands for social and economic justice given that they rely on a healthy balance between this and economic prosperity in order to survive. With regard to force, it is widely agreed that the state can coerce and use violence. However, it is argued that in a democracy there is no need to resort to this unless it is to protect against outside threats or against criminals or those causing social disorder.

Grugel has assessed some fundamental characteristics of a democratic state:

I. Territorial integrity, either as a result of the belief that the state represents a nation or through negotiations and legitimate and binding agreements that make a multinational state possible.

II. The rule of law, that is, minimal rights and duties of citizens are legally encoded and the parameters of state activity legally defined.

III. A minimal use of legally sanctioned violence against its own citizens.

IV. A popularly elected and representative government that is formally controlled by constitutional channels of accountability.

V. A complex bureaucracy that can make claims to impartiality.

VI. The existence of multiple centres of power.

VII. The formal existence of channels of access to decision making, even for subordinated social groups, which are operational to some degree.

VIII. Some commitment to social and economic justice.[11]

In short and to end this section, the only way that leads to fully democratizing any state involves applying, to a degree, the following three conditions:

Institutional change.

Representative change.

Functional transformation.

These three steps create the path towards full democratization, regardless the fact of that in contemporary democratizations, most attention focuses on having and implementing institutional change.