

Relationship between development and democracy

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



The rapid political transformation that exemplified the last decade of the past century in various countries of the world encouraged a renewed interest in the relationship between development and democracy (Doorenspleet, 2002, p. 55). The argument in the 1960s had been that democracy was positively interrelated to the level of modernization, and then viewed as the equivalence of development. The two succeeding decades were much more cautious about any such relationship. It was only the turbulent years following the fall of communism and the attempts to move away from dictatorial modes of rule that encouraged comparative politics students to revisit the development - democracy nexus (Chan, 2002, p. 89).

The students of Latin American politics had already started to respond to reform efforts embarked on in their region in the early 1980s. It was in the 1990s that issues of democratization reentered the mainstream of comparative politics. The re-orientation in the field of comparative politics has already resulted in a wide range of publications.

Mapping the Major Approaches

Development and democracy are both very complicated concepts as they tend to mean different things to different people. For example, conceptions of development have varied over time in the last five decades from being the equivalence of modernization to being concerned with overcoming social inequities and on to providing opportunities for individuals in the marketplace and institutional improvements in the name of good governance. The definition of democracy has been the subject of much

debate as to whether it should be a minimalist concept useful for analytical functions (Doorenspleet, 2002, p. 57).

I suggest that it may be helpful to follow a distinction along 2 axes. The first is methodological and epistemological where the two endpoints are agency and structure. The second is substantive in nature which differentiates between a focus on elite or mass level. The structuralist approaches typically adopt a historical standpoint in explaining the success or failure of democratization.

The development and democracy also varies in terms of its focus on elites or the mass of the population. Those who are concerned with providing prescriptive advice tend to be focusing on the privileged because they are the ones directly concerned with making policy. Political scientists have amassed enough knowledge about democratization process that we can tell the political elite what traps to keep away from and what opportunities to take hold of. This remains the ultimate goal of political science as most people in the discipline are likely to adopt a more humble position, realizing that our knowledge of democratization is still very general and fragmented (Chan, 2002, p. 144).

The University of Michigan administered a survey which has contributed to an understanding of how human values and preferences shift in response to changes in material circumstances. Associations also count in this type of political studies. The long term positive outcome comes from people working together in small scale groups.

Structuralist studies

Structuralist studies have evolved over the past 40 years and it has been proved that this is a fruitful area of research. Three issues have crystallized as being of special interest:

- (1) Does location in the global economic order matter?
- (2) Does class or social structure matter? and
- (3) Do value changes caused by structural factors matter?

I shall discuss these issues in turn before focusing on some of the methodological challenges associated with this approach.

Location in the global economic order

Studies in this area have a long pedigree with many other well-known political sociologists and political economists having made contributions. The original finding was that the more prosperous a nation, the greater the chances that it will maintain democracy (Doorenspleet, 2002, p. 68). It was not the location in the global economic order that was important, but the ability of a country to adopt the structural and cultural features associated with modern society, i. e. an urbanized and educated population as well as an industrialized economy.

Using the regression type of statistical analysis, scholars have demonstrated that level of economic development consistently appears as a statistically and substantively significant influence on democracy (Haggard, 2003). The level of economic development alone accounts for more variance in democracy than all other independent variables taken altogether. Therefore,

some students of development and democracy are ready to treat it as such a strong correlation that it must not to be in question.

Even if it is a vigorous relationship, it raises questions about what in that association really matters, and what kind of conclusions to draw there from. The thing which matters is at least in part determined by how the dependent and independent variables are specified. It has been found that while being well-to-do matters at the level of cross national comparison; it is not necessarily the economic but the social factors, such as education literacy that are the more powerful explanatory variables (Chan, 2002, p. 123).

Few scholars have questioned whether it is the rate of economic growth or the level of economic development that is more important. The prospects to become democratic countries are rather dim, not because most Third World nations have low average per capita incomes, but because the economic development is not fast enough or the rate of growth is slow. The potential importance of location in the global economic order is also a very significant variable. Economic development has a differential impact and it matters most in the industrialized countries, only half as much in the semi peripheral countries, and even less so for countries in the periphery (Haggard, 2003).

Studies have also established a positive correlation between key variables but they do not necessarily rein in everything that matters in the development - democracy equation. One may assume that the economic development matters the most in the core or the industrialized countries because it has been present there for a longer time period. It is not only the domestic environment of the countries in the periphery that counts but also their exterior environment. One of the gaps that need to be filled in the <https://assignbuster.com/relationship-between-development-and-democracy/>

research on development and democracy is clearly what difference globalization makes. The relationship between globalization, socio-economic development and democracy is of prime importance (Doorenspleet, 2002, p. 52).

Economic crises and other performance problems in the non democratic regimes help promote a democratic transition. Using data for approximately 100 Third World nations with populations of at least one-million, it was proved that inflationary crises tended to inhibit democratization in 1950s and 1960s but seem to have facilitated the same process in the late 1980s. Another proposition is that there is no relationship between per capita income level and the probability of democratic transition contrary to what was indicated earlier. One such reason may be growing international pressure to democratize (Johansson, 2002, p. 23).

The Role of Class Structure

This type of study is useful for focusing on wide systematic causal processes that hold across space and time, but needs to be complemented by those that include more characteristic explanations that hold at certain times or in certain regions only (Chan, 2002, p. 24). The analysis of specific historical events or processes is often an unavoidable complement to statistical techniques, especially if the objective of the research is to concentrate on the occurrence of discrete events within their historical context.

The capitalist economic development creates growing pressure for democratization by fostering the emergence of a middle-class has been very broadly accepted: 'without a bourgeoisie, no democracy'. This sets the

broader parameters for the development of democracy by liberalizing economic market forces and thereby, also individualizing both behaviors and choices. Comparing Germany and Japan, which adopted a fascist approach to rule, with the UK and USA, which chose a democratic path, the class is an extremely vital factor. The middle class or the bourgeoisie enjoys a degree of self-sufficiency by being able to shape the course of political development in any direction. It is not expected that the middle-class will choose a democratic path over a non democratic one. It all depends on how they manage the challenges that structural factors present in the economy (Doorenspleet, 2002, p. 53).

With economic liberalization being pushed around the world, one can hypothesize that class may grow in significance. Deeper social inequalities are reported from all regions of the world and Livelihoods are being threatened, quality of life is going down for a bulk of people, more specifically in the Third World countries. The most immediate issue is how to make the concept of class operational. There is no universal accord about how that should be done. It is not easy at this point to arrive at any solid conclusions about the relationship between the class and the prospect of transition to democracy. In a first attempt to do so, it was found that class structure does not have an impact on the likelihood that a nation makes a transition to democracy (Chan, 2002, p. 67).

It is a path breaking study that points to the need for many more studies in this area and the surveys that try to measure people's subjective perception of class. Survey data are available for industrialized nations but are yet to be collected in developing countries. Such data would significantly improve our

ability to say something about the relationship between class and the probability of transition to democracy.

Value Changes

Changes in the economy do not only create new forms of social stratification as they also influence our cultural values. Modernization and value change is the subject of several important studies in the field of comparative politics. Subjective aspirations reflect the nature of objective conditions, a point that is associated traditionally with Marxism but is also reflected in psychological theories (Doorenspleet, 2002, p. 58). The strengthening of human striving for self expression that follows from enlarging people's cognitive and physical resources (modernization) reduces constraints on the level of formal rules by generating negative and positive freedom rights (democratization). Using data from 63 societies, it was found that:

- (1) Democratization originates in aspiration adjustments on individual level,
- (2) Democracy does not flow directly from economic changes but through shifts in ethical values,
- (3) This sequence has cross cultural validity, and,
- (4) The sequence holds against rival influences, the transnational infusion of changes in traditionally connected societies.

More research is needed to ascertain whether these findings hold if other data sets are used, the notion that democratization in a given society is the result of both ethical and material changes is important. It is suggested that the dynamics of social change is driven more by internal than external

factors. We do not specifically address this issue here, but it is one that should be considered in the light of amplified global communications (Haggard, 2003).

Methodological Issues

One of the problems with research on democracy and development is that scholars using quantitative methods tend to ignore those using qualitative methods, and vice versa. The latter tend to use thick concepts which are applied to a very small number of cases, whereas the former tend to rely on thin concepts that are applied to a large number of cases. Due to the lack of dialogue between these two researcher groups, the task of knowing more about causal relations has been stifled.

The assumption being that qualitative researchers play a key role in opening up novel areas of inquiry, while the quantitatively oriented can determine the extent to which findings can be generalized. In short, the study of development and democracy requires both approaches since both of them are complementary to each other (Johansson, 2002, p. 23).

There are many troubles with the existing state of knowledge in this field that stem from methodological inadequacies. The first concern is the quality of the data available. There has been a heavy reliance on the Freedom House Index (FHI) of Civil Liberties and Political Rights. With few other data sets available, it is quite understandable that many researchers have found the FHI handy.

There are at least two problems with that Index. The first is that it relies on the evaluative input of a panel of experts rather than primary data collected

in survey form. The scores in the Index, while not entirely invalid, nonetheless suffer from lack of representativeness of opinions in individual nations (Johansson, 2002, p. 213). The second problem is that the cumulative scores provided for each indicator and country tends to be rather rough. This lack of differentiation is also obvious in many studies that use other data.

Most researchers have to settle for a sub-optimal choice, because it is extremely difficult to identify a singular manifestation. Reliability refers to the prospect that the same data collection process would produce the same data. Duplication prevails whenever other scholars are able to reproduce the process through which data were generated.

Structured contingency

If the structuralist concern with the pre-requisites of democracy constitutes the first generation of studies on democratization, a distinct second generation has emerged in the past two decades that is more process oriented and focused on contingent choice. This innovative approach incorporates institutional factors as explanatory variables (Haggard, 2003). Democratization is understood as a historical process with analytically distinct, if empirically overlapping, stages of consolidation and transition. A variety of actors with different followings, calculations, preferences, resources and time horizons come to the fore during these successive stages.

These stages vary in terms of degree of uncertainty prevailing at each point. During regime transitions, interactions, and political calculations are highly

uncertain, actors find it hard to know what their interests are, who their supporters are, and which groups will be their allies or opponents. The absence of predictable rules of the game during a regime transition expands the boundaries of contingent choice (Johansson, 2002, p. 88). A government is being consolidated whenever contending groups come to accept some set of rules, formal or informal, about who gets what, when and how from politics.

Power-sharing arrangements

Democratization often runs into grave difficulties because societies are divided vertically rather than horizontally. Resource conflicts are not interpreted in straight-forward social class terms but take on meaning only in the context of identity politics. Whether ethnicity, race or religion constitutes the line along which cleavages are defined, they pose a special problem for democratizing countries specifically because the issue of inclusion in regime is conflated with inclusion in the community. Strategic choices are socially or culturally embedded to such an amount that it becomes difficult to produce governance agreements that satisfy all parties to the conflict (Johansson, 2002, p. 56).

The problems of exclusion and inclusion do not fade away when new institutions are being adopted and put into operation. Democratization itself may aggravate such problems precisely because it brings elements of openness and competition into the political progression. Conceptions of the scope of the political community become more prominent as people interact with each other in the public realm and have to make choices about who is an insider and who is an outsider. One of the ironies of democratization is

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that, as the future is being planned, the past intrudes with escalating severity. There is no such thing as a fresh start in culturally plural societies; differences in historical depth are likely to matter.

For example, where the notion of first-comers is deeply rooted, claims of political priority by virtue of indigenouness are typically made to confront those deemed to be immigrants (Haggard, 2003). Europe and Asia are particularly full of such claims. Sri Lankan Tamils really belong to South India. Chinese in Indonesia and Malaysia are immigrants and Bengalis are illegally in Assam. The Balkans, the Baltic and the Caucasus regions of the former USSR are other examples of places where such claims are being made. They are particularly hard to resolve because they are frequently embedded in religious differences that reinforce the ethnic dimension and have a long history.

Electoral modalities

In the 1990s, larger attention was paid to how different electoral rules may help promote inclusiveness. Such rules are the most specific manipulative instrument of politics. Africans realized this point at independence and many leaders proceeded to promote inclusiveness within a democratically designed single party system. Although the principle of competitive elections within a single party system was an interesting innovation, practical experience soon showed that sustaining the democratic element in such system became very hard (Chan, 2002, p. 345).

Most of the conversation on what difference electoral systems or modalities make has focused on the comparative advantages of proportional

representation and majority systems. The combination of parliamentary system with a proportional system of representation as the constitutional arrangement most likely to serve racially divided societies well. It is only in industrialist societies with a more dispersed population that proportional representation (PR) has the intended effects of enhancing the distribution of power among elites. Another study of electoral systems in southern Africa maintains that a mixed member proportional system (MMP), as used in Germany and New Zealand, may prove to be particularly relevant in countries such as South Africa where forms of power sharing have been considered vital to a successful democratic transition (Haggard, 2003).

Legal Systems

One of the more dominant arguments for the link between liberal democracy and capitalism rests on the premise that with the rise of a private property regime, the estate of the landlord is fully severed from the state, thus consolidating the separation between public and private spheres of power. Capitalist economic rule is no longer legitimated politically by reference to the performance of communal functions. Private power is stabilized to the extent that democratic principles of rule are successfully insulated within a public domain (Johansson, 2002, p. 98). This emphasis on human rights has also brought a renewed importance to concepts such as rule of law and by implication to the role of legal systems in democratization.

Civil Society

Civil society is a bothersome concept. It refers to all voluntary associations that have been created to mediate relations between the state and

the family household. This excludes productive enterprises since their purpose is not to associate individuals to the state. Most students of civil society take a functional view of the society counting in all associations regardless of their normative stand on the democracy issue. Many nations that are attempting to consolidate democracy suffer from what is sometimes referred to as a civic deficit. This entails that society is short of the values that really help build democracy.

This deficit often stems from disenchantment with the political leadership. The new democratic regime proves ineffective in various ways, such as not being able to curb corruption or to deliver tangible policy results. Once the transition from dictatorial rule has been made, it is more difficult to mobilize popular support for the measures that are necessary to keep the democratic process on the track. The civil society is most effective in the initial phase of the transition. It tends to lose its implication in the political process as it moves from transition to consolidation (Chan, 2002, p. 266).

Social movements clearly energize civil society. They often lead major political transitions, but they also contribute to keeping civil society healthy at other times. Without such movements, the impact of civil society on democracy would be much less significant. Without implying that social movements always work for a civic or democratic cause (Johansson, 2002, p. 143). It seems a feasible proposition to state that a democratic change without the backing of a social movement is less likely to achieve something than one with such backing.

Conclusion

To conclude, it may be worth making a few general observations on the studies of development and democracy. The first is that the difference between qualitative and quantitative studies is often exaggerated. There are substantive differences between the two, but they lie not in the criteria used to create and rationalize a particular research design but in the manner in which the former is executed (Haggard, 2003). It is primarily in the execution of research that quantitative statistical analyzes come to differ from qualitative forms of study. When it comes to designing research, considerable qualitative reasoning goes into designing quantitative studies.

When choosing the unit of analysis, indicators for measurement and set of cases, qualitative criteria are being used to justify the design. The qualitative reasoning enters into the design in at least two ways: first, by differentiating between Europe and Latin America and the second, by bringing in the concept of stability, which does not even feature in the conceptual definition of democracy (Chan, 2002, p. 67). We should be alert to the fact that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative forms of reasoning is more blurred than many scholars would have us believe.

The second observation is that the relationships between variables are not always linear in a causal sense. The study of the development - democracy nexus provides ample of evidence that the relations are often interactive; development, or dimensions thereof, influences democracy but scope of democracy may also affect development. Modernists and Marxists tend to assume that political democracy is the outcome of underlying changes in the socio-economic or cultural spheres.

Those who essentially believe in human agency would argue that institutions and choices can be made to shape developmental outcomes. Much of the current debate in the international development community focuses on the independent effects that good governance is expected to have on various aspects of development (Haggard, 2003).

The third and final observation concerns the propensity to treat findings as universal or to generalize without taking into consideration the potential influence of contextual variables. Much knowledge that is acquired on the issues relating to development and democracy are both time and context specific. Changing either temporal or spatial dimensions may have significant influence on the results.

Generalizations that hold across national and regional boundaries are typically at a high level of aggregation. The challenge that we often face in our research is not only to disaggregate or deconstruct these concepts and variables but also to continue testing how far these general findings still hold at lower levels of aggregation.

In sum, whichever way we turn in the research exercise, there are challenges just around the corner (Haggard, 2003). The contributors to this essay are highlighting many of these challenges, thereby providing a sense of what comparative politics have achieved so far and also what remains to be done.