

13 May 1991
WBS

DEMOCRACY AND TRANSITION

1. INTRODUCTION

Most countries in Europe, Latin America and Africa find themselves in a state of transition away from some or other authoritarian rule towards an uncertain hopefully democratic outcome. "Democracy" has become the code word for good governance, international acceptability and favourable consideration to qualify for international finance. Countries as widely divergent as Nicaragua, Russia, Czechoslovakia and South Africa are in a state of transition towards a commonly declared democratic outcome. What is democracy? How likely are these countries to succeed? What modes of transition can be discerned? Is there a formula for successful transition? Is it possible to develop a comparative framework to answer these questions?

II A DEFINITION OF DEMOCRACY

1. Key Concepts Distinguishing Systems of Government

(a) Regime : Rules and Regulations determining :-

- (i) Access to government positions;
- (ii) eligibility for office;

(iii)resources and strategies actors can use to gain
access;

(iv) how to make publicly binding decisions.

(b) Rulers : Those who occupy dominant positions in the
structure of government.

(c) Public Realm : Where norms binding on society as a
whole and backed by the co-ercive force of the State
are made.

(i) a liberal conception of democracy advocates
circumscribing the public realm as narrowly as
possible.

(ii) A socialist/social democratic conception of
democracy would like to extend that realm through
regulations, subsidization and sometimes
collective ownership.

(d) Citizens : Only democracies have citizens.

(e) Competition :

(i) Disagreement over the principles and practices of
competition leads to different sub-types of
democracy.

(ii) In between elections individuals can compete through a wide variety of intermediaries : interest associations, social movements, clientalistic arrangements etc.

(iii) Elections represent the most widely diffused conception of democratic competition. The view that the mere presence of elections is a sufficient condition for the existence of democracy leads to the fallacy of "electoralism".

(iv) Democratic rules or competition often simplistically associated with majority rule. Problem arises when numbers clash with intensities. Tyranny of the majority has to be contained by various constitutional means.

(d) Co-operation : the code word here is "civil society". It rests on the assumption that if diverse units of interest in society can organise themselves independently from the State, their competitive interaction will :

(i) place restraints on the arbitrary action of rulers;

(ii) alter the behaviour of citizens by making them more aware of the preference of others; and

(iii) provide an intermediate layer of governance between the individual and the State.

(e) Representatives : Principal agents of modern political democracy.

Therefore - democratic systems of Government distinguish themselves from other systems in terms of their Regimes, Rulers, Organisation of the Public Realm, Existence of Citizens, Rules of Competition, Patterns of Civil Co-operation and appointment of Representatives.

These characteristics combine in a set of procedures which make democracy possible.

2. Democratic Procedure

- (a) Elected officials control government decisions.
- (b) Such officials chosen free from coercion in fair and frequent elections.
- (c) Adult suffrage
- (d) Adults can run for office
- (e) Freedom of expression
- (f) Freedom of press/information backed by law
- (g) Freedom of association and organisation
- (h) Non-elected officials sub-ordinate to elected officials

(i) No external/foreign domination of domestic polity.

3. Operational Democratic Principles

(a) Contingent Consent :

(i) Those who have electoral support over opponents will not use temporary superiority to impede losers from gaining access to office.

(ii) Those who lose will respect the right of winners to make binding decisions. This "democratic bargain" may vary from society, but is vital for a democracy to operate.

(b) Bounded Uncertainty :

All democracies involve some uncertainty but this is bounded by previously established rules that have to be respected, e.g. : constitutional guarantees of property, privacy, decent treatment, self-expression, personal movement etc. Most effective boundaries are generated by the processes of competition between interests and co-operation in civil society.

4. Conditions which make Democracy likely

(a) Some conventional assumptions that have been challenged by recent research :

(i) A certain level of economic development or accumulation of wealth is necessary to make

possible high levels of literacy, education, urbanisation and mass media exposure.

(ii) A political culture reflecting mutual trust, willingness to tolerate diversity and enter into compromise is necessary.

(iii) Certain historical conditions such as certain stages in modernization, problems of national identity or social and economic power of landed aristocracy had been resolved.

(iv) External factors were crucial : on one hand dependency theorists argue against external factors, others (Huntingdon) argue for super power enablement.

(b) Some Historical Cases challenging Assumptions :

(i) Relationship between Wealth and Democracy could help to understand Spain, Taiwan, South Korea and Brazil, but not Portugal, Peru or Bolivia where transitions were preceded by stagnant growth, rising foreign debt, balance of payment problems and regressive distribution of income.

(ii) The "political culture" of Portugal, Spain, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil reflected state repression and violation of human rights. How did

they suddenly become sufficiently "civic" and "tolerant" to support democratic outcomes.

(iii) There is no definitive relationship between a country's insertion into a world capitalist economy and the prevalence of authoritarian rule, vide Spain, Brazil, Korea, Taiwan and Chile. The general trend towards recession in export earnings, debt crises, diminishing US support for human rights and frequent resort to military intervention through foreign policy (e.g. under Reagan) did not prevent democratic transitions in the 80's.

In short, what previously has been regarded as independent variables influencing the establishment of democratic regimes can more fruitfully be regarded as dependant variables.

5. What Democracy is not About

There is a danger of loading too many expectations on what "Democracy" can deliver -

- (a) Democratic government is not necessarily more economically efficient (especially during transition);
- (b) Democracies are not necessarily more orderly, consensual or stable than the autocratic regimes they replace;
- (c) Democracies may have more open societies and politics than those they replace but not necessarily more open

economies. Protectionism and closing borders have characterized some of today's consolidated democracies.

Therefore ; Democratization will not inevitably bring economic growth, social peace, efficiency, political conformity, free markets etc. "However, alone among regime types, democracies have the generic capacity to modify consensually the rules and institutions in response to challenging circumstances. They may not immediately produce all those desirable public and private goods, but eventually stand a better chance to do so than autocracies." (Schmitter)

6. CONCLUSIONS

- (a) Democracy is neither inevitable for ethical reasons, nor necessary for developmental purposes.
- (b) There are four possible outcomes to the 30 regime changes that have occurred since 1974 :
 - (i) Regression to autocracy - (most likely)
 - (ii) Stabilization short of democracy
 - (iii) Persistence of unconsolidated democracy
 - (iv) Consolidation of some type of democracy

III. MODES OF TRANSITION TO UNCERTAIN DEMOCRATIC OUTCOMES

1. Key Questions and Assumptions

(a) Key Questions

- (i) Can underlying regularities be discovered which propelled authoritarian regimes from a diversity of national and regional situations towards the convocation of free competitive elections of uncertain outcome within the last 2 1/2 decades? For example -

Southern Europe : Portugal/Spain/Greece/Turkey

Eastern Europe : Bulgaria, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia

South America : Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay.

Africa : Nigeria, Benin, Mali, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa.

- (ii) Will emergent and fragile democracies survive?
(iii) Will such transitions help to improve the quality of life of citizens?

(b) Initial Assumptions

- (i) Regime changes away from autocracy can happen for a variety of reasons.
(ii) Can cluster them into a few "modes of transition".
(iii) Modes determine type of democracy which will emerge.

- (iv) Modes determine whether democracies will be consolidated.
- (v) Modes determine consequences of transition for different social groups.
- (vi) No single set of pre-conditions necessary for the emergence of a democratic polity.
- (vii) Attention must shift from structures to strategic choices, shifting alliances, emergent processes and segmental patterns that are involved in moving from one type of regime to another.
- (viii) Democratization is concerned with a complex historical process with analytically distinct and empirically overlapping stages of transition, consolidation, persistence and eventually deconsolidation.
- (ix) Different sets of actors with different followings, preferences, calculations, resources and time horizons come to the forefront during the successive stages.
- (x) The "political space" inherited from the previous regime may limit the range of options available to decisionmakers and even predispose them to a specific option.

2. Modes of Transition

- (a) Once the link between pre-existing structures and contingent choice is understood it is clear that arrangements "crafted" by key political actors during

regime transition establish new rules, roles and behaviour patterns which can represent important ruptures with the past. "Equally nascent democracies can be scarred with accidental but lasting birth defects."

(b) Comparability remains a source of constant intellectual vigil :-

(i) External factors played a more important role in Eastern Europe and Central America than Southern Europe and South America.

(ii) Southern Europe and South America confined transition largely to political reform. Central America and Eastern Europe are undergoing a compound and simultaneous process of social/economic/political reform.

Therefore, despite these parametric differences analyses proceed as if cases are comparable until evidence forces abandonment of the assumption.

(c) Transitions are "produced" by actors who choose strategies that lead to change from one kind of regime to another.

STRATEGY

	MULTI-LATERAL	UNILATERAL
	COMPROMISE	FORCE
Elites	P A C T	I M P O S I T I O N
Masses	R E F O R M	R E V O L U T I O N

- (i) PACT = Elites agree on a multi-lateral compromise among themselves.
- (ii) IMPOSITION = Elites use force uni-laterally to bring about regime change against resistance from incumbents.
- (iii) REFORM = masses mobilize from below and impose compromised outcome without resorting to force.
- (iv) REVOLUTION = masses rise up in arms and defeat incumbent regime militarily.

3. Historical cases :-

- (a) Pacted transitions - Spain, Uruguay.
- (b) Reform Transitions - Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia
- (c) Imposition - Turkey, Brazil, Ecuador, USSR
- (d) Revolution - Mexico, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia
- (e) Mixed cases - (i) Poland Pact-Imposition-Pact-Reform.

- (ii) Portugal, Argentina, Greece,
Peru.

4. Tentative Conclusions :-

- (a) All modes of transition have been tried.
- (b) Where authoritarian incumbents have been removed by force and replaced by a new elite representing mass constituencies, political democracy is unlikely to emerge.
- (c) Reform mode of transition has seldom led to a consolidation of democracy.
- (d) Transitions from "above" have more often resulted in the implantation of some kind of democracy and imposition is the most common.
- (e) Where democracies have endured for a respectable length of time strong elite actors have engaged in strategies of compromise. In such cases "foundational pacts" have been critical. Such "foundational pacts" have certain critical components :-
 - (i) Comprehensive and inclusive of all politically significant actors.
 - (ii) There are a series of inter-locking accords e.g. civil-military; political parties agree on rules of the game; state-capital-labour.
 - (iii) Such "pacts" focus heavily on rule-making, i.e. "bargaining about bargaining". "In essence, they are anti-democratic mechanisms, bargained by

elites, which seek to create a deliberate socio-economic and political contract which demobilizes emerging mass actors while delineating the extent to which all actors can participate or wield power in the future. They restrict the scope of representation in order to reassure traditional dominant classes that their vital interests will be respected."

IV. TYPES OF DEMOCRACIES EMERGING FROM TRANSITION

1. INTRODUCTION

- (a) Welcome convergence of meaning on concept of democracy. Dubious qualifiers such as "popular", "guided", "bourgeois" and "formal" are disappearing from usage.
- (b) Democracy in its most generic sense may persist but not be consolidated.

2. TYPES OF DEMOCRACY

PRINCIPLE OF AGGREGATION

	INTENSITIES		NUMBERS
Centre	Corporatist	Centralised	Populist
	(Austria)		(Brazil)
of	PARLIAMENTARY		PRESIDENTIAL
Power	Consociational	Dispersed	Electoralist
	(Switzerland)		(U S A)

(a) Principle of Aggregation :

- (i) Is democracy organised predominantly according to the principle of counting equally the sheer number of its citizens that support a given candidacy or policy, i.e. populist or electoralist.
- (ii) Is democracy ordered in such a way that it tends to weigh the intensity of its citizens preferences whether aggregated according to class, religion, region, ethnicity or nationality? e.g. Corporatist or Consociational.

(b) Principles of Centre of Power :

Attempts to capture the mix of public authority and private activity. The vertical axis from top-down reflects increasing voluntarism and individual flexibility in participating in democracy, i.e. from

corporatist to consociational as far as intensities are concerned; from populist to electoralist as far as numbers are concerned.

3. MODES OF TRANSITION AND TYPES OF DEMOCRACY

- (a) Most countries who followed a revolutionary mode of transition failed to consolidate any type of democracy within 10 years of transition.
- (b) Pacts tended to end up in corporatist to electoralist types of democracies.
- (c) Transition through imposition tended towards populist democracies.
- (d) Reformist transitions may end up in consociationalist to populist democracies.

V. CONCLUSIONS

- 1. In terms of this analytical framework, South Africa appears to be groping towards a pacted and reformist mode of transition.
- 2. The type of democracy most likely to emerge will be corporatist with strong electoralist tendencies.
- 3. Most important immediate difficulties :
 - (a) Absence of a foundational pact due to unresolved organisational capacity of pacting parties;
 - (b) The intensity of non-pacting elements, e.g. militant outbidders and security interests.

4. Conducive aspects :
- (a) Convergence on democratic ends.
 - (b) Very favourable international/external environment.
 - (c) Growing awareness of the costs of alternative route of transition.

FOOTNOTES

These notes rely heavily on -

- (i) The research of Schmitter, PC and Karl, TL from the Department of POLITICAL Science Stanford University, US A; as well as
- (ii) the four volume research of O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead : Transitions from Authoritarian Rule, John Hopkins University Press, 1986.