



Why Democracy?

NextGen Democracy Council
Session 2

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Why do we need democracy?

- What is it good for?
- Is democracy worth fighting for? Why/why not?

How important is democracy?

Person A:

- Low-income earner, the sole breadwinner of the family
- Cannot send his three children to school
- Can barely scrape by
- Lives in an unsafe neighbourhood



Who would you support?

Government A:

- Will ensure your children receive a decent high school education
- Will provide you with a small 1 bedroom house – free of cost
- Has authoritarian tendencies, will arrest journalists & throw opposition politicians in jail

Government B:

- Strictly democratic, respects opposition
- Corrupt, inefficient, bureaucratic
- Campaign agenda centered around issues of religion, race, immigration, etc.

Can you fault person A for supporting Government A over B?



Discuss: Is democracy only for the privileged*? And, by extension, is democracy itself a privilege?

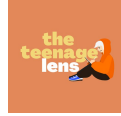
* is democracy secondary in importance?





Case study: Cuba, 1959

- Until 1959, it was closely allied to the United States under the leadership of the right-wing dictator, General Batista.
- Batista was an unpopular leader among the Cubans, who were growing increasingly discontent with American influence over Cuba and Batista's corrupt and oppressive regime.
- In 1959, Batista was overthrown in a revolution led by Fidel Castro. Castro promised to restore power in Cuba to its people and to end the American corruption in the country.



Case study: Cuba, 1959

Many Cubans saw Castro as a symbol of hope for social justice, economic improvement, and political reform.

- Ended segregation
- Made free education available to all
- Introduced free healthcare

Supported by 90% of the population. However, Castro failed to keep his promise of holding free elections. In 1965, all opposition political parties were dissolved and banned.

Discuss: If the people decide that 'democracy' is not what they want, can that make an autocracy democratic?

For a government to be considered democratic, does consent have to be explicit, e.g in the form of votes?

Can governments be considered legitimate/democratic if they have implicit consent?

(e.g no elections, but high approval ratings/ backed by the people – Castro)





What does this mean for the democracy promotion doctrine?

Context: The democracy promotion doctrine suggests that promoting democracy in other nations is a moral imperative

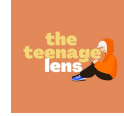
Do states have the right to intervene in other states with the goal of promoting democracy?

Example: Bay of Pigs invasion, April 1961

The CIA landed 1,400 Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs on the southern coast of Cuba with the aim of provoking an anti-communist uprising.

The invasion was primarily framed as an effort to overthrow Fidel Castro's communist regime in Cuba and to *restore democracy* to the island.

Types of democracy



Electoral democracy: achieved through electoral competition for the electorate's approval under circumstances when political and civil society organizations can operate freely; elections are clean and not marred by fraud or systematic irregularities.

Egalitarian democracy: The egalitarian principle of democracy holds that material and immaterial inequalities inhibit the exercise of formal rights and liberties, and diminish the ability of citizens from all social groups to participate. Egalitarian democracy is achieved when 1 rights and freedoms of individuals are protected equally across all social groups; and 2 resources are distributed equally across all social groups; 3 groups and individuals enjoy equal access to power.

Liberal democracy: The liberal principle of democracy emphasizes the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power.



What is democracy
good for?

(1) Democracy benefits everyone (materially)

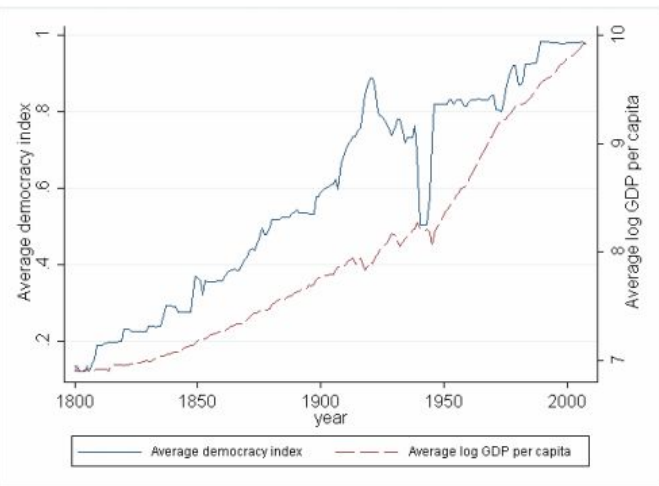


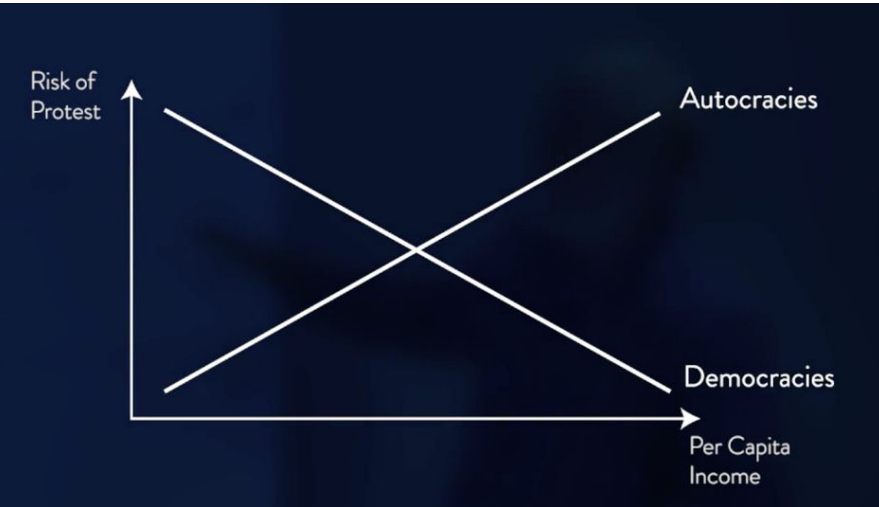
Figure 1 - The Democratic and Economic Transitions

note: the balanced sample is composed of Austria, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, France, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States over the 1800-2000 period. Log GDP per capita is taken from Maddison (2006) and democracy is the Polity index. Missing observations are interpolated.

More democracy = more development

Rationale: common-interest state, i.e. the incentives of the ruling class align with those of the masses

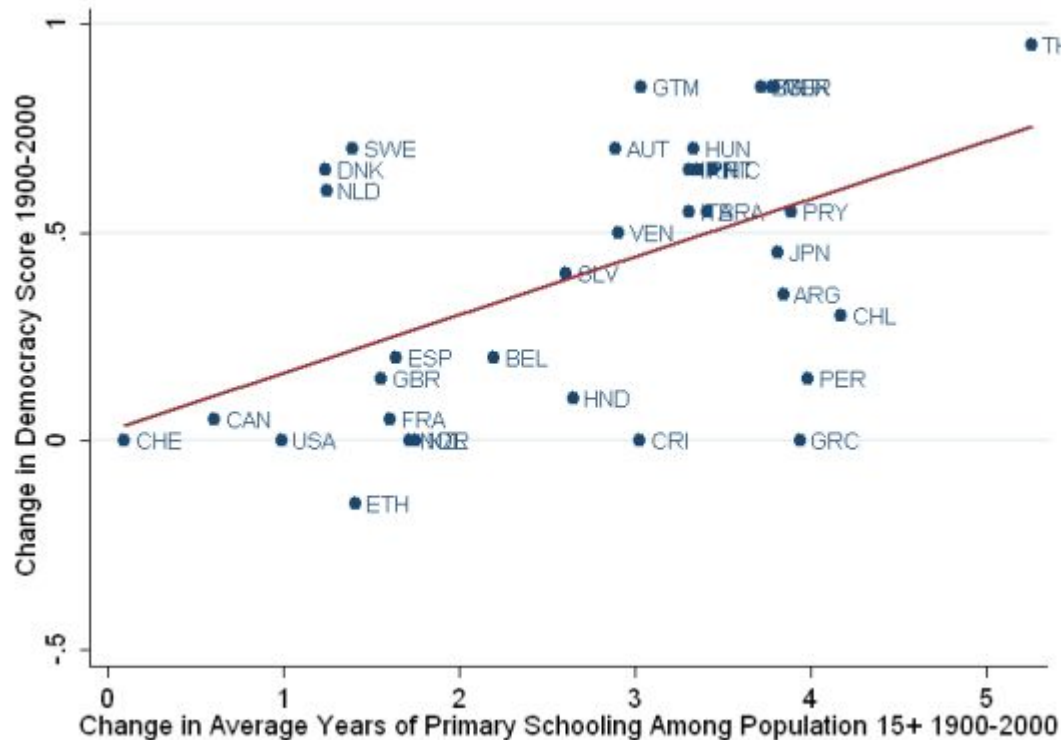
The chicken & egg problem



Does democratisation lead to development *or* does development lead to democratisation?

Rationale: the more wealthy & educated a population is, the more likely revolution leading to democratisation is.

(Murtin & Wacziarg)



Education (particularly increases in primary schooling) and, to a lesser extent, per capita income levels, are strong determinants of the quality of political institutions – not the other way around.

Implication: Education as a means of promoting democracy

Task: Think about how you can educate (i) yourself and (ii) your local community about democracy



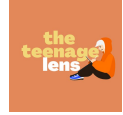


(2) Democracy as a human right

Democracy serves to protect rights & freedoms

Recall: egalitarian democracy & liberal democracy

Can democracy itself be understood as a human right?



The *indivisibility* of human rights

Indivisible: different elements are of equal importance and cannot be separated or divided from one another. Governments are not permitted to pick and choose some rights over others

Therefore, advancing some human rights does not give governments the right to dismiss upholding others

E.g consider how the chinese government has responded to criticisms of its human rights record



The *interdependence* of human rights

Human rights are **interdependent**, as successful protection of one human right helps with the protection of others. Similarly, the denial of one human right will act as a barrier to the effective protection of other human rights.

As a result, democracy cannot be viewed as a commodity that can be traded off for material gain.

Why is democracy worth fighting for?

