

Introduction

Democratization around the world has been a persistent trend in the last century. The causes of so many states choosing to transition to a democracy are difficult to pin down to a single component, however. While there is and will likely never be any clear cause for a state's shift to democracy, there are some factors that help tremendously. A state that is able to largely maintain its institutions through the regime change is more likely to embrace democratization. This is because, in part, elite support comes when they are able to maintain a level of power which helps them accept the idea of a regime change. In fact, democratic institutions would in most cases enhance the established elite level of influence as they can have a larger role in choosing leaders. From there, a state can build on the institutions it repurposed better than if it had started from scratch to create a stable economy quicker which enhances the political goods citizens can receive. When the people are happier and the classes are more equal, democracy is more structurally sound. This paper will define democracy as a means to measure it in various countries, explain how authoritarians maintain control, explore both internal and external causes for democratic transitions and show the benefit of maintaining previous institutions.

Before one can understand what causes states to transition to a democratic regime, a definition of democracy must be agreed upon. Unfortunately, the social sciences have yet to settle on a universal definition but several collaborative key components have emerged over decades of study. Lindberg, Coppedge, Gerring and Teorell, (2014) concluded that democracy can be broken down into five principles that must be present to qualify. The *electoral component* gives citizens the power to choose their rulers and hold them accountable, which is a fundamental element. Protection of the civil liberties of individuals and minorities against the majority is embodied in *the liberal component* and is secured within the constitution. Active

participation by citizens in civil society and direct democracy mechanisms is called the *participatory component* and makes any democracy stronger. The *deliberative component* brings the act of political decision making to the forefront by ensuring it is done with informed reason rather than coercion or emotion. Finally, equality among all citizens in political participation and distribution of resources across all socioeconomic groups is encompassed in the *egalitarian component*. These individual principles together make up the attributes of a liberal democracy (Lindberg et al., 2014).

David Beetham (1999) narrows these elements down even further to just two core principles, but all five previous components can live inside them. The first crucial democratic principle is *political control* which means that the organization is controlled by its members. This does not have to refer to a state's regime but can apply to any group's decision-making process. One may immediately think of elections and the selection of leadership within a community but this can also refer to participation in civil society and the deliberative process of policy-making. Beetham's (1999) second core principle is *political equality* which ensures that all members are equal in their influence and access to the process of making decisions. This element includes the representation of equal rights and civil liberties for all members. Refining democracy in this way brings the academic community a little bit closer to an acceptable definition which is essential to the job of measuring it.

Democracies are measured by a number of indices that rank states by their ability to perform some or all of these various principles, but the reasoning is more specific. Western democratic governments have had a particular interest in spreading democracy in states that fall under a non-democratic regime category. The amount of money spent on programs to support transitioning democracies would be less useful if there were no way of measuring based on the

democratic principles they are meant to embody. Beyond these interests lie those in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scholars, educators, journalists, etc. all of which benefit from understanding the level of democracy being practiced around the world (Lindberg et al., 2014). The Freedom House and Polity indices are two of the most utilized and are always expanding their level of analysis to better understand the trajectory various states are heading. These indices are available online for anyone to examine and are easy to understand. Lindberg et al. (2014) are developing another measuring mechanism called V-Dem that utilizes all five of their principles to offer a more detailed analysis than they believe has been available. No matter which system is used, the concept of democratic regime measurement is crucial to the transition process because it shows where more work and support is needed for prodemocratic agents.

Common Debates over Democratic Transitions

Transitioning democracies have been the cause for much academic debate over the years. What inspires democracy in states where the people have not experienced those principles described above is a giant genre of research. Beyond the initial push towards a regime change, the effectiveness of new democracies is another primary area of interest. Before any of these topics can be examined however, there must be an vision of what the goal of a transition looks like. In short, consolidation into a strong, self-sustaining democratic state is a crucial measurement of success in this field and has proven more elusive in the third wave than initially anticipated by democracy advocates (Haggart & Kaufman, 2016). The test of time seems to be one of the best indicators of consolidatory democratic transition and allows an opportunity to explore the evolution of the transition from causal influences to effectiveness.

Haggart and Kaufman, (2016) point to a renewed debate on the value of structural evaluation from a qualitative stand point. There are a few structural factors that have proven most influential in the consolidation process. First, the modernization theory which includes development in terms of a state's annual gross domestic product (GDP) and other elements of economic growth have proven helpful in transitioning away from non-democratic regimes. Poor countries struggle to maintain democratic principles over time but it is not an impossibility. Another structural consideration worth mentioning is the level of income equality a state produces. While it has been suggested that concentrated land ownership, for example, is helpful for democracy, vast disparity between the classes can cause instability and clientelism. Additionally, "resource curse" can be a relatable factor to GDP but it is unique in that it can cause instability for different reasons than just a lack of resources for citizens (Haggart & Kaufman., 2016). States deal with resource curse when they have limited avenues to bring in revenue, such as making money predominantly from oil or precious minerals. These become points of conflict at risk for seizure by militant groups that may then use the resource to overthrow the transitioning democratic regime. Finally, ethnic or cultural conflicts over citizenship or identity can cause a lack of egalitarian measures and diminish transitional success. All of these structural impacts can be influential, or less so, depending on the individual characteristics of each state.

Institutions within a developing democracy can also greatly impact the likelihood of consolidation and are another subject of scholastic debate. That means how strong is the constitutional development in terms of its protections of civil liberties as well as vertical and horizontal accountability (Haggart & Kaufman, 2016). Engineering a constitution to make certain the incumbent executive must concede to the rules over pursuing personal power, for

example, is an essential inclusion for a functional democracy. Ensuring there is a bureaucracy capable of handling unexpected crises on every level whether it be economic or environmental leads to effective consolidation as well. International influencers can also help or hinder democratic development when there is an upheaval on the world stage between super powers. A powerful democracy, which would otherwise want to promote the spread of democratic regimes, might tolerate an authoritarian state that is also opposed to their rival. The amount of debatable impacts on democratic transitions is immense and far more than this paper can convey but they are a key aspect of establishing a more in-depth political understanding.

Authoritarian Regime Survival

Many citizens of consolidated liberal democracies cannot understand how authoritarian regimes survive, especially when they stay in power for decades or even centuries. To begin to comprehend this, there must be a basic understanding of the importance of state legitimacy which is the citizen's recognition that their government has the right to rule over them. Without the acceptance of the people, there can be no regime whether it is a dictatorship or a democracy.

Authoritarians convince citizens of their right to rule by making proclamations about their ability or right to rule, which is broken down into six separate legitimacy claims by Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvoge (2017). They are:

1. *Foundational Myth* – An identity-based claim that touts the dictator's part either directly or indirectly in the origins of a state's sovereignty. This generally applies to incumbents and a previously established ruling class who links themselves with historical attributes of the country.

2. *Ideology* – This is used in ideological strong states to link a leader to the commonly held belief systems within certain borders. It can relate to religion but it is not limited to theocratic beliefs and is also an identity-based concept.
3. *Personalism* – These are the last of the identity-based claims and they are primarily related to a leader's charismatic personality. Sometimes the dictator leads people to believe they are somehow ordained on high or they may profess to being personally responsible for things generally construed as positive for the country.
4. *Procedures* – The systems in place to choose leadership or run government may be referred to in a legitimizing fashion even if they are merely the guise of fairness. These rules supposedly followed may only arbitrarily exist.
5. *Performance* – This claim relates to a leader's ability to run a well-functioning government and is often either embellished or untrue. Often the performance is related to the distribution of goods can be inflated to put the current government in the best light possible.
6. *International Engagement* – Autocrats can try to claim legitimacy by referencing support or relationships on the international front. The idea is if a regime is validated externally, it will reflect well on the citizenry.

How a regime uses these legitimacy claims can be very individualized based on the leadership and citizen's priorities. One authoritarian may rely heavily on his own charisma and not much else while another may strategically mix all six claims into a formula that works well for him. Some authoritarians remain in power because they impose harsh consequences for speaking out against them as is true in Syria under the Bashar al-Assad regime. He still uses the foundational legitimacy claim in conjunction with his brutality so that he maintains the support

of soft-liners helping him in his ruthless behavior. Without help, no dictator can stay in power. His level of aggression mixed with use of an identity-based legitimacy claim is how al-Assad was able to withstand the uprisings of the Arab Spring that left Tunisia and Egypt on the road to democracy (Masud, 2018). What is clear is authoritarians will do anything and everything they can to stay in power, whether that means manipulating the constitution, lying or bullying their people.

Internal and External Causes for Democratization

Democratic transitions are never a single-issue decision for a state. There are always forces working in multiple layers for a state to start down that path. Naturally, internal causes come from within a country in the domestic realm while external causes are driven from international players. Often, transitions to democracy are sparked by a combination of factors which influence how successful the new regime will be. Barbara Geddes (2009) wrote, “Assuming there is one explanation for democratization may be the reason scholars continue to disagree about its causes.” No two countries are the same and so it is only logical that there can be no single formula for democracy. That said, it is important to decipher prominent influences.

Seymour Martin Lipset (1959) surmised that modernization is the key to democratic transitions. As mentioned in the earlier section regarding structural conditions for democratic consolidation, industrialization has been repeatedly referenced to in academia as a common internal cause. Many scholars have tried to disprove the link between economic prosperity and democracy since Lipset (1959) made his pre-third wave assertions. More data, however has only shown more details of why this connection, in fact, exists. When a country has a stable economy, there are more political goods to offer their citizens in terms of health care, education and other socioeconomic benefits. Primary education especially has been well demonstrated to drive

democracy (Geddes, 2009). Lipset (1959) theorized that people who had more foundational education would understand what they were missing without democracy and demand it over time but it is likely more complex than that. Some data shows that while many underdeveloped countries have lost their democracies to authoritarianism, rich countries never have and that may be because they can offer more equality among the classes (Geddes, 2009). Oppressive dictators who keep a majority of a country's wealth for himself will likely inspire his poverty-stricken people to revolt eventually. O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986) argue that elites who have supported hard-liner authoritarians are less fearful of transitioning to democracy when there are fewer calls for vast wealth redistribution. They are often more willing to concede some power rather than risk the expense of a revolution and can become soft-liner proponents of a new democratic regime (O'Donnell et al., 1986; Geddes, 2009). Internal factors for democratization are powerful causes because they lie at the heart of the people's quality of life.

International causes for democratic transitions, according to Geddes (2009), have been largely absent from democratization models even though they have become a greater factor since the 1980s. This influence has, in part, come from a disbursement of democratic ideas and growing pressure from international NGOs like banks and corporations. Bruce Gilley (2013) conceded that internal factors seem to play a larger role in causing democratic transitions but external factors generally create more initial openings for change. Globalization creates relationships between NGOs, state governments, and their citizens like the world has never known before modern technology opened windows into each other's lives. These can be significant influences on democratic transitions especially on soft-liner elites who prosper from doing business internationally. War also has made a powerful impact on the spread of democracy but not always in consistent ways. The United States made a mission of freeing Iraq after the

September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks with President George W. Bush's "Freedom Agenda" (Gilley, 2013). This was essentially the intentional exportation of democratic principles to primarily the Middle East. While many factors of this international plan proved controversial in the long term, democracy did increase throughout the region over the last two decades. The seeds of democracy were planted and grew over time and much foreign and technological influence. The impact that comes from external sources is no doubt a causal factor in democratization even though it is most often working in conjunction with internal ones.

Examining Japan

Japan is a perfect example of the impact of external forces and the importance of maintaining institutions in order to facilitate a lasting democratic transition. Many have wondered why Japan succeeded in its democratization so much better than Iraq has, considering much of the actions in Iraq were based on the U.S. occupation of Japan after WWII (Monten, 2014). There were some important distinctions that assisted the Japanese regime change. The United States occupied Japan from 1945-1952. In that time, they carefully expelled the governmental influences that led Japan to seek world domination but maintained the bureaucratic and supporting institutions that remained intact. This move made the Japanese partners in their transition rather than forcing everyone out and starting over. The U.S. and its western allies also formed the Supreme Command of the Allied Powers (SCAP) to help establish the new democracy (Monten, 2014). SCAP assisted Japan by drafting an initial constitution which the country has since made their own with several alterations, all of which maintain and may even deepen their democratic institutions (Vogel, 2000). The alliance also facilitated several social and economic reforms that created long-term attachments for the people to further embrace democracy. This helped the Japanese government expand economically so it could provide more

political goods to the people via a strong national bureaucracy. Japan continues to develop its democratic principles with large constitutional reforms in the 1990s when it ceased to be a one-party system and the people become more invested in protecting their democracy as the decades pass (Vogel, 2000).

Conclusion

Democracy is a cherished ideal to those who have reaped its rewards and live in free society. It is not easy to maintain however as James Madison predicted in his Federalist Papers #51. Even though there are countless internal and external causal factors that impact democratic transitions, there are clear choices that help bring it to fruition. The idea of democracy is only as good as the institutions that support it which is why building upon those which are retainable from the previous non-democratic regimes helps to support a lasting transition. As this paper has examined, authoritarians can only hold on to power when they have the support of influential elites or soft-liners. When those enablers see that they can maintain some of their power through a transition to democracy, they become important allies in the effort. As prodemocratic forces continue their mission to spread democracy around the globe, it would serve them well to remember to build on what is already working rather than throw the baby out with the bathwater.

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