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DEMOCRACY IN ITS ONE AND MANY FORMS

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Source: Howard J. Wiarda (ed.), *Comparative Democracy and Democratization*, Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 2000 (2nd edn), pp. 162–173.

Democracy is both universal—in the senses both that all people (*almost* all) want it *and* that it has certain core requirements that give it global applicability—and particular—in the sense that all countries and cultural areas practice democracy in their own way.

Of the fact that most people, if they are able to choose, want democracy, there can be no doubt. Democracy and the political freedoms and basic human rights that it implies are well-nigh a universal aspiration. Public opinion surveys tell us that in country after country, 80, 85, or 90 percent of the population prefer democracy. Particularly with the decline, overthrow, and discrediting of authoritarianism on the one hand and Marxism-Leninism on the other—the two major alternatives to democracy in the twentieth century—democracy seems to have the global playing field all to itself. In the modern world, no other system of government enjoys the legitimacy that democracy has; indeed, one can go further and say that democracy is now the *only* form of government that has global legitimacy. Today, democracy has triumphed in the world; Winston Churchill's backhanded complaint that "democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others" seems to have been borne out.

Furthermore, there is substantial agreement on the core requirements of democracy: (1) regular, fair, competitive elections; (2) basic civil and political rights and liberties; and (3) a considerable degree of political pluralism. In Western Europe, as Eric Einhorn's chapter emphasizes, the definition of modern democracy has been expanded to encompass social and economic democracy, the welfare state, but in other countries that may not necessarily be the case: either as in a poor country that cannot afford all the elaborate and costly provisions of full economic democracy or as in the United States

where such provisions are seen more as a matter of voter choice rather than integral to democracy.

Note that the definition and "core requirements" of democracy listed above apply largely to Western, developed democracies; they tend to assume and take for granted the culture, history, and overall high socioeconomic development of the West. They assume that a country has experienced the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and the movement toward limited government, in fact, the *whole panoply* of Western experiences, history, culture, and high socioeconomic development. But in many poor and non-Western countries, this history, experience, and foundation for democracy have been lacking. That is why we suggest the need for a broader definition of democracy, one that encompasses some level of literacy and socioeconomic development, some degree of tolerance and civility, some degree of egalitarianism, military subordination to civilian authority, a functioning and independent legislature and judiciary, and a considerable degree of probity in the management of public funds. We use the terms "some level of" or "a considerable degree of" because no democracy is ever perfect, and we need to be realistic about the level of democracy we can expect—even in the United States!

Here we have at least a working definition of democracy. But then we also have all those distinct political, philosophical, religious, and cultural traditions surveyed in this book. Many of these are not only different from but at variance with the Western conception of democracy. And even *within* the West, as we have seen, both the practice and the philosophical basis of democracy may be quite different. The question is: Can these two every meet? That is: Can we find some concordance between our general definition of democracy (largely Western-based) on the one hand, and all those myriad and diverse cultural, regional, philosophical, and historical differences and distinct countries and regions, on the other?

Let us take the easiest case first. U.S. democracy is highly individualistic, grounded at least historically on Anglo-Dutch-Protestant conceptions, organized on the basis of separation of powers, and highly pluralistic. But can that be the basis for a universal model? European democracy tends to be based on solidarity and communitarianism more than individualism, does not have, in its parliamentary systems, the same conception of separation of powers as in the United States, is less oriented toward interest group lobbying, and has a broader sense of socioeconomic democracy. Even in the contrasts between the United States and its close allies and culturally related democracies in Western Europe, therefore, there are some major differences that require at least a certain degree of cultural relativism.

Russia, or at least those areas west of the Ural Mountains, is European in geography, but in its history, religion, sociology, politics, and culture it is only partly European. Since the collapse and overthrow of Communism in

the period 1989–91, Russia has embarked on a democratic, more capitalistic or mixed-economy course, and it wishes to be incorporated into the prosperity, affluence, and consumerist culture of the West. But, as Steve Boilard's chapter makes clear, Russia is divided over its commitment to democracy and a Western-style economy. Particularly when the political and economic going gets tough, Russia ends to repudiate that, including democracy, which comes from the West. Instead, it emphasizes its "Slavic traditions," which is a code phrase for nationalism, authoritarianism, to-down decision-making, concentrated power, and even anti-Americanism. But because it is desperately poor and needs Western capital, Russia accepts Western influence even while resenting it at the same time. Russia now has institutions and public opinion supportive of democracy, and even its Slavophiles have no alternative system to offer, only carping at the existing system. So Russia is a mixed bag: a country that is formally democratic but with weak democratic institutions and a political culture that is still only partly democratic.

Much the same, interestingly, could be said of Latin America. Latin America is *partly* Western, a fragment of feudal, medieval Spain and Portugal circa 1500 that is still struggling to modernize and democratize. Beginning in the 1970s Latin America commenced an impressive transition to democracy that resulted in nineteen of the twenty countries (all except Cuba) now being counted in the democratic camp (defined in most cases as formal or electoral democracy). However, Margaret MacLeish Mott's chapter shows how Latin America is still, like Russia, only partially democratic; that its democracy, grounded in ancient and medieval Christianity, is quite different from U.S. democracy; and that Latin American democracy demonstrates a curious, often confusing, sometimes chaotic, blend of U.S., European, indigenous, and Hispanic traditions. Democracy in Latin America is also development-related: as socioeconomic modernization has gone forward, the foundations of Latin American democracy have also been strengthened. Latin America is, again like Russia, currently in transition, and its political institutions, therefore, often exhibit curious blends and hybrids of democracy and authoritarianism.

The discussion then moved to East Asia, the first of our non-Western areas, and the Confucian tradition. Here the political trajectories, traditions, and current situations are complex and varied, so complex that it may be difficult to generalize across countries. First comes Japan, which was defeated, occupied, and strongly influenced in its political institutions by the post-World War II U.S. occupation forces. It is formally a democracy, but with its culture, work habits, family system, and all-powerful bureaucracy still dominated by not-very-democratic Confucian traditions of order, hierarchy, and obligation. Second are Taiwan and South Korea, which may be treated together for our purpose. Both had long and strong Confucian traditions; both had authoritarianism for long periods, but then both

democratized in the 1980s and 1990s. The reasons for democratization are significant: outside (United States and others) pressures, internal demands for greater freedom, the end of the Cold War, which made security issues less important, and developmental transformations. With regard to the latter, whereas in the early stages of their development (1950–70) Taiwan and South Korea felt they had to keep the authoritarian lid on to prevent social upheaval and disintegration, in the last two decades they had become affluent, secure, and self-confident enough that they felt they could loosen up—democratization.

The Philippines had four centuries of Spanish colonialism followed by a half-century of U.S. occupation on top of a long but fragmented indigenous tradition; its democracy is a mix of all three of these influences. China is, of course, the paradigm case: *the* center of Confucianism, a powerful, autocratic, and authoritarian tradition, then a communist revolution, and now a gradual loosening up. China, at least in the coastal trading areas, is becoming more capitalistic, but its political system is still Marxist-Leninist totalitarian, and it shows few signs of gravitating in a democratic direction. But the possibility exists that China, as well as other Southeast Asian nations, will follow the South Korea/Taiwan model: economic development first, followed by a gradual liberalization that leads to democracy. Meanwhile, we also need to wrestle with our chapter author Peter Moody's injunction that *all* of Asia is becoming *post*-Confucian: more affluent, more pragmatic, globalist, and less shaped by its ancient traditions and more by interdependence.

Our analysis then shifted to South Asia, specifically India. India is a big and important country (one billion people) and an emerging world power, with (like its neighbor and rival China) a long history and rich cultural heritage (mainly Buddhist), but also great diversity of its own. It was colonial master Great Britain that brought democratic institutions to India and, unlike other former colonies, once independent, India did not feel compelled to repudiate everything from its colonial past. Rather, its democracy has proved to be healthy and vigorous, although (rather like Japan) practicing democracy in its own special fashion. However, India's economic system for a long time remained autarkic; only in recent years has it begun to liberalize. So here we have a case that is the opposite of the East Asian examples: in India it is political democracy that has come before economic liberalization and growth rather than the other way around. The result is the paradox emphasized in author A. H. Somjee's chapter: the absorption of Western democratic theories but a non-Western democratic experience.

We next moved on to the Middle East. Of all the areas surveyed here, the Middle East has been among the least hospitable to democracy, with only five or six governments out of forty that could be termed even partially

democratic. Recall also Professor Samuel P. Huntington's conclusion from his study of "the clash of civilizations"[1] that it was Islamic civilization with whom the United States was most likely to clash in the twenty-first century. It *is* true that there is much in Islam, a in Confucianism, that can be used to justify autocratic, authoritarian, despotic government and that has certainly been the predominant practice so far. On the other hand, one can also find in Islam justification for democratic consultation between ruler and ruled, for pluralism, and for a government limited by social norms and popular values. Additionally, we must take seriously author Anwar Syed's statement that there is nothing in Islam, neither in the *Koran* nor in the *Shariah*, that expressly prohibits democracy. So is it something inherent in Islamic culture and religion that has proved inhospitable to democracy, or is it instead frustration, a feeling of powerlessness in the face of Western (United States, European, and Israeli) power or perhaps—as in China or, earlier, as in Taiwan and South Korea—underdevelopment? The answer: It is probably some combination of all of these.

Finally, the analysis moved to Africa. Despite the optimistic official rhetoric coming out of Washington recently, Africa seems to be on the edge of a precipice. War, pestilence, diseases such as acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), colonial legacies, starvation, underdevelopment, corruption, bloodshed, natural disasters, dictatorship, thuggery, ethnic conflict, bad government, donor fatigue, Western indifference—all these and other ills plague Africa. In almost every country the situation seems well-nigh hopeless. And yet in a handful of countries there are some rays of hope: democratic elections, a reduction of the corrupt state sector, greater transparency in the management of public affairs and funds, a nascent civil society, and decentralization of public services and their administration through local or indigenous agencies. Africa is also the poorest area surveyed, so again the question arises: if Africa were more economically and socially developed, would its chances for democracy by improved? Our author, Yohannes Woldemariam, thinks so; on the other hand, he also advocates a distinctly African model of democracy and governance. Africa's problems are presently so overwhelming and the conditions so bad that no amount of economic pump-priming is going to do the trick anytime soon, nor can we hold out much hope for an indigenous African model of democracy if war, revolution, disease, and the myriad other problems listed above constantly wipe out or threaten to eliminate the gains made.

This brief survey supports several conclusions. The first is that the desire or aspiration for democracy is well-nigh universal, particularly since the other main alternatives, authoritarianism and Marxism-Leninism, have declined, collapsed, or lost legitimacy. The second is that this universal drive for democracy runs up against an incredible diversity of countries and societies that have very different histories and cultures, mean different

things by democracy, or accord it different priorities. Matching people's aspirations for democracy, therefore, with these distinct cultural traditions is a real problem if our goal is the advancement of democracy.

But we have also seen that the frequent mismatch between democratic aspirations and the realities of political culture can change over time. East Asia is a prime example: a Confucian tradition that in the past often supported authoritarian or autocratic rule has now been transformed in several key countries into support for stable democratic government. What accounts for such changes" We identify five factors: (l) war and military occupation, (2) the changing balance of international forces and power, (3) social and economic development, (4) globalization, and (5) changing political culture. We take up each of these factors below, but first we need to examine more closely the argument over whether democracy is universal or not.

There is a growing consensus, at least in the West, that democracy and human rights are universal.[2] Those universal goals are incorporated in the United Nations charter, to which all member states are signatories, and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. No one wants to live under dictatorship or suffer torture or abuse under tyrants, either from the left or right. Instead, if given a choice, all peoples everywhere would opt for democracy. And, if one looks at the world over the last three decades, there is strong support for this position: quite remarkable transitions to democracy in many parts of the world, the collapse of both authoritarianism and communism paving the way for democracy, a sharp increase in the number of democracies globally, and overwhelming public support for democracy across cultures as *the* best form of government.

The contrary argument is also strong. It asserts that few things are universal and that all rights, values, and political institutions are defined and limited by cultural perceptions. If there is no universal culture, there can be no universally accepted criteria of democracy. For example, the United States has a strongly individualistic culture, but how can one talk about individual rights or one-person, one-vote in societies that are communitarian and emphasize group rights, not those of individuals? Similarly, in the Confucian and Indian traditions, the emphasis is on duties more than on rights; how can *that* be reconciled with an American or universal conception of democracy and human rights? Hence, the argument runs, it is both ethnocratic and self-defeating for the West to try to impose its definition and criteria of democracy on the rest of the world. Indeed, many in the Third World suggest that the concept of "universal" human rights or democracy is a smoke screen for the West to impose its values on them and to continue dominating them. Additional arguments are that democracy is too divisive and polarizing for poor and weak countries to afford and that authoritarianism is more efficient in establishing stability and achieving economic growth, particularly in its early stages.

The viewpoint and conclusion of this book are that there are certain *core principles* that all countries, regardless of culture, need to have to qualify as democracies: honest and competitive elections, basic political and human rights, some degree of pluralism and egalitarianism, military subordination to civilian authority, and honesty and transparency in the administration of public funds and programs. But beyond that our authors argue that there is a great deal of variety, depending on culture, history, tradition, and level of development, in the form, institutions, and practice of democracy. As long as a country has the core principles listed here, we are prepared to call that country democratic. The result is that not only are the *istitutions* of democracy often different as between the United States and Europe, for example, but the actual *practice* and *functioning of* democracy in diverse countries such as Japan, India, South Africa, and Argentina may be quite different as well. So long as we agree on the democratic basics, we are prepared to accept considerable variation on the particulars.

Moreover, we argue here for the acceptance of degrees, gradations, and "halfway houses" of democracy. Authoritarianism and democracy need not be seen as polar opposites but as involving a spectrum, a continuum; in this sense all countries including the United States are incomplete democracies on democracies in-process, with some countries further along on the journey than others. That also means we may have to settle on the fact that some countries are incomplete democracies or partial democracies, that they lack the foundations and infrastructure of democracy and, therefore, often blend some degree of democracy with some degree of authoritarianism. These are often the hardest countries to deal with in a policy sense, giving rise to the dilemma of whether you reward them for their democratic accomplishments or punish them for their democratic failures. For example, some African tyrants have held elections that are just democratic enough to avoid international sanction but not democratic enough to allow the opposition to win. Peru's Alberto Fujimori was democratically elected, but the election was tainted; he is an autocrat, but in terms of combating drugs, achieving economic growth, and eliminating a terrorist guerrilla threat, a particularly effective and popular one. For policy makers, these are the tough cases.

But even if we accept gradations, degrees, and varieties of democracy, we need not say that is the end of the story. For, in fact, countries change, evolve, and are transformed. We now take up the question raised and briefly outlined earlier of how countries do in fact evolve and how democracy may be established or enhanced in the process.

1. *War and military occupation.* In the mid-1940s the United States defeated and militarily occupied both Germany and Japan. During the occupation, the United States eliminated or abolished numerous older and authoritarian institutions, *forced* these countries to write new and more democratic constitutions, and oversaw the transition to democracy in both. More recently the United States and its NATO allies have militarily occupied

parts of the former Yugoslavia and sought to instill democracy here. Haiti is another example of a country whose democracy was restored at the point of U.S. bayonets. Obviously one does not want to recommend this solution for very many countries of the world, but one must also admit that key countries such as Germany and Japan are democracies today in significant part because of wartime defeat and subsequently military occupation.

2. *The changing balance of international forces and power: diplomacy and pressure.* U.S. and international influence can often be decisive in pressuring countries toward democracy or in preventing a coup or backsliding in an already existing democracy. President Jimmy Carter initiated a foreign policy heavily influenced by human rights considerations; under President Ronald Reagan the emphasis was on democracy, both as a way of influencing wobbly authoritarian regimes and of undermining communism. And now, particularly since the end of the Cold War, the United States stands as a democratic beacon for many nations with unprecedented influence in world affairs. Obviously the United States has to be careful when, where, and how is promotes democracy (sanctions versus quiet diplomacy or overt pressure versus simple persuasion), but of the fact the United States can use its international force, power, and pressure to advance democracy there is no doubt. Some analysts want the United States to go so far as to use force to impose democracy on the rest of the world; others are skeptical of that tactic. Nevertheless U.S. diplomacy and pressure can be and is often used to advance democracy abroad.[3]

3. *Social and economic development.* A large body of literature suggests that there is a rather close correlation between levels of socioeconomic development and democracy. As literacy, education, urbanization, levels of economic development, and overall modernization go up, so do the odds for democracy. This is not to imply direct causation (economic growth does not *cause* democracy), nor is it to suggest that democracy requires rigid prerequisites (e.g., a fixed rate of literacy before democracy becomes possible). But it is to say that as countries become more affluent, middle class, and educated, the chances of their having and sustaining democracy increase. Other things being equal, if you want democracy it is better to be wealthy than poor. By the same token, while no country needs to be dismissed as hopeless, we must recognize, if we wish to be successful, that the odds of the United States successfully bringing democracy to poor, illiterate, underdeveloped Cambodia, Haiti, or Somalia are pretty low. And from a foreign policy point of view where you need to point to accomplishments for the policy to succeed, be funded, and have popular support, it is better to notch successes on your belt than a string of failures. Hence, while we may *wish* for democracy to be successful everywhere, we also need to be realistic in deciding where and when the policy can be successful.

4. *Globalization.* Globalization is a hotly debated topic these days: it has its effect on democracy in the following ways. First, with author-itarianism

discredited and Marxism-Leninism having collapsed in most countries, democracy enjoys unprecedented, near-universal legitimacy and is "the only game in town." Second, the spread of the mass media—the Worldwide Web, music, and television—and the freedom and choices they convey all enhance the possibilities for democracy. Third, large numbers of businessmen and governments, even if they are not necessarily enamored of democracy, recognize that, if they want capital, investment, and economic growth, they must put in place regular and honest elections, transparency in the handling of public funds and programs, pluralism, responsibility, and accountability—that is, democracy. Globalization is, therefore, not just an economic or Internet phenomenon; instead, it has profound and generally positive implications for the spread of democracy as well.

5. *Changing political culture.* We have learned in this book that some political cultures (Russian, Confucian, Islamic, and Latin American) have not historically been very supportive of democracy. But political culture is not fixed forever and unchanging; there can be divisions over political culture, the evolution of political culture, and changing interpretations of the political culture's basic precepts. For example, Confucianism, which was once thought to stand in the way of democracy, is now thought to be an ally of democracy; similarly, both Russia and Latin America have long had powerful authoritarian political cultures, but these are now changing in favor of democracy or at least mixed forms of limited or partial democracy. The political culture of the Islamic countries has been less favorable to democracy, but recall that there are no express provisions against democracy in Islam; at the same time, African political culture(s) may prove to be malleable with the main problem being lack of economic development to support democracy. And, of course, in all countries political culture is often altered as a result of economic development, rising literacy, and changing social structures, as well as the global forces noted above. So while some countries and some regions have not *in the pat* had a political culture supportive of democracy, over time new interpretations and new forces may cause such attitudes to change as well.

Although democracy, therefore, is not necessarily universal, it is becoming increasingly more so. Moreover, the dynamic factors analyzed above—changing political culture, globalization, social and economic development, foreign policy influence and pressure, and sometimes even war and military occupation—are all pointing in a direction that makes democracy more likely. The organization Freedom House that charts democracy's progress on a daily basis reports that 118 countries are now democracies, a record high number. Democracy is the only system of government that presently enjoys global legitimacy.

Although democracy as a system of government now has near-universal legitimacy, it is also mediated, as A. H. Somjee's chapter stresses, through local, national, and grassroots organizations that make its form distinctive

from country to country and region to region. Moreover, the meaning(s), the emphasis, the priorities, and the institutions, to say nothing of the practices of democracy, vary significantly around the globe. In addition, we must recognize the fusions, the halfway houses, and the crazy-quilt patterns that may exist. For instance, Japanese democracy with its emphasis on consensus and harmony is quite different from the partisan and adversarial democracy of the United States. Indian democracy, which is rooted in ethnicity, caste, and identity, is very different from West European continental democracy. And Latin America, with its centralized, organic, and corporatist traditions seems at present to be finding a set of new equilibria, with most countries strung out at various points between autocracy and authoritarianism on one side and democracy on the other. East Asia, Russia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe all seem to exhibit various of these mixed forms.

Yet over time these mixed forms are also undergoing transformation; meanwhile, local ways of doing things are themselves being changed. The mixed forms that exist in Russia, East Asia, Latin America, or Eastern Europe, for example, are by no means static; rather, they continue to change under the ongoing impact of internal and external pressures: the same pressures that pushed them in a democratic direction in the first place continue to pressure them toward *greater* democracy. Similarly with the argument concerning local institutions: although Indian caste associations, African ethnic groups, and Islamic tribal leaders are all performing political functions and delivering public programs that can be described as pre- or proto-democratic, the very local institutions that are often lauded as providing homegrown forms of democracy are themselves also undergoing modernization. Indian caste associations often operate as actual or would-be political parties, African ethnic groups deliver rudimentary public policy, and Islamic tribal leaders are performing consultative and representational functions. In short, while we laud these local and grassroots forms of democracy, they themselves are also changing in the process of overall modernization. Few things are static anymore and the direction of the evolution is mainly toward democracy or democratic openings.

We find both this variety and this dynamism of democracy to be healthy. After all, different cultures and different societies at different levels of development do practice democracy in their own ways, and we should celebrate this diversity. Few countries practice democracy in the same exact way as in the United States: first, because their histories and cultures are different; second, because their level of development only permits democracy at a certain level; and third, because they may actually prefer their own form of democracy and their own ways of doing things. Just as many cultures, societies, and economies are different, so we can also expect different forms and practices of democracy. As long as the *core ingredients*—elections, rights, pluralism, and the like—are present, democracy can encompass many different varieties.

All countries will continue to filter the concept, institutions, and practices of democracy through the lenses of their own social, cultural, historical, and political values, priorities, and understandings. At the same time, all countries will increasingly be influenced by U.S. and Western culture, which is rapidly becoming a global culture and, therefore, by U.S. and Western concepts of democracy. But some countries have stronger cultures and societies than others. Japan, China, India, Iran, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico are all examples of countries with strong political cultures of their own. Their political systems, while clearly influenced from the outside and by the pressures of globalization, will continue to try to shape the outside currents, including those of democratization, to their own realities. Japan is perhaps the best example of a highly successful and developed country that has absorbed *some aspects* of Western-style democracy even while continuing to follow its own path. In other words, big and strong countries, with their own powerful cultures, are able to selectively absorb what is useful from the West and its form of democracy even while retaining their own distinctive ways of doing things and of practicing democracy.

Other smaller, weaker countries and cultures—for example, those of Central America and the Caribbean—are less able to resist the outside pressures. They may simply be overwhelmed by the pressures emanating from the outside, from the global culture, and from the United States. Their own cultures and institutions are often too weak to assert their independence and to perform the winnowing or filtering functions that the Japanese culture does. Some of these countries may be submerged under or destabilized by the pressures of globalization and by the insistence that they conform to U.S. and Western standards of economic and political practice. American-style democracy, or capitalism for that matter, may be "too rich" for these countries to absorb, certainly quickly and all at once; attempts to push them too rapidly toward democracy could result not in democracy but in destabilization, which would set back democracy still further. And yet, even small countries often have an amazing capacity for flexibility to absorb outside pressures (including democracy) while at the same time continuing to practice politics in their own ways, which may involve compromises with full or complete democracy.

That is why we need to recognize mixes, gradations, and distinct varieties of democracy and to acknowledge that democracy in many countries is not an either-or proposition but a continuum, a journey, an ongoing process. We need a set of categories—limited democracy, partial democracy, incomplete democracy, and the like—that enable us to comprehend and come to grips not only with the many gradations of democracy but also with the unique, culturally conditioned forms that democracy may take. Not only will that give us a useful and realistic way of measuring the condition and status of global democracy, but it also provides us with a base to encourage further evolution toward democracy in the future.

Notes

1 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).
2 The analysis here follows Shashi Tharoor, "Are Human Rights Universal?" *World Policy Journal* (Winter 1999–2000): 1–6.
3 Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).