

# How and why has multiparty democracy spread over the past 100 years, and what difference has it made to the lives of the poor?

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*Since the 1990s, democratisation has become a central goal and tool of many development agencies. As well as having intrinsic capacities relating to civil and political rights, democracy is argued to promote economic growth and pro-poor development. This paper reviews the growth of democratisation in developing countries, and discusses the agencies, institutions, and structural factors driving this phenomenon. It considers the evidence for pro-poor impacts of democratisation. Democracy tends to promote individual civil and political rights more than other political systems. However, where formal democratic institutions are created without support for political voice and freedoms, pro-poor impacts are limited. There is little evidence supporting claims that democratisation promotes economic development. Indeed, tensions can arise between democratisation and economic development in some contexts. Rather than adopting a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to democratisation, the paper concludes that it is important for states to develop tailored solutions to collectively defined problems of political and economic development.*

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## Overview

Since the 1990s, democracy has been a central goal and tool of many development agencies, and has been considered to possess intrinsic values related to civil and political rights and the instrumental capability to promote economic growth, poverty reduction and social stability (see for example Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2002; World Bank, 1997; DFID, 2006). The aim of this paper is to examine the spread of multiparty democracy throughout the world over the past 100 years, paying particular attention to the acceleration of democratisation in developing countries over the past 40 years. After considering the shape and dynamics of global democratisation processes, it discusses the main factors that have been driving them. It argues that analysis of the forces driving democratisation and the nature of the democracies they produce must be country-specific, taking into account both individual and group agency<sup>1</sup> and considering how people's actions are affected by underlying structures and political dynamics.

The final section of the paper discusses what the implications of the global spread of democracy have been for the poor, concluding that it has brought benefits in many cases through providing a framework for the realisation of individual political rights and avenues for the strengthening of their political voices. However, there is little conclusive evidence to suggest that democracy has the direct capability to promote economic development, as is often assumed. Moreover, the construction of democratic institutions does not in itself guarantee strengthened civil rights and political voice, and any attempts to build or strengthen democracy must be specifically tailored to local structural and political dynamics.

## 1 The nature of democracy

Deriving from the classical Greek for 'rule by the people', the term democracy is usually used to refer to Western-style liberal democracy in which leaders are elected by citizens to act on their behalf (Luckham *et al.*, 2003). Luckham *et al.* (2003:18) distinguish between 'democratic institutions' and 'democratic politics', with the former making up the rules and structures within which the latter can take place. Protected by a national constitution, formal liberal democratic institutions usually include elected representatives; free, fair and regular elections; freedom of expression; access to alternative, independent sources of information; freedom of autonomous association; and inclusive citizenship (Dahl, quoted in Crick, 2002 pp107-108). Politics can be defined as processes of negotiation, conflict and cooperation for power and resources (Leftwich, 2000), and democratic politics refers to such struggles underlain by democratic moral and political principles such as the accountability of political representatives to their electorate and political equality amongst all citizens (Luckham *et al.*, 2003). Liberal democracy has in most places taken the form of multiparty democracy, in which groups exercise their right to freedom of association to form political parties and contest for power<sup>2</sup>.

## 2 Trends and dynamics: how has multiparty democracy spread over the past 100 years?

In 1991, Samuel Huntington identified three major 'waves' of democratisation that have swept through the modern world. The first began in the 1820s with the widening of suffrage in the United States, continuing for nearly a century and leaving 29 democracies in its wake. After a 'reverse wave' reduced the number of democracies back down to 12 with the rise of fascism in the 1920s, a second wave began after the Second World War, bringing the number of democratic states in the world back

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<sup>1</sup> 'Agency' is used here to refer to the idea that people can instigate and drive change in the political economy. Theories of political economic change can broadly be divided into those that believe agency is the main driver of change, and those that believe the role of underlying economic structures is more important. This is discussed in section 3.

<sup>2</sup> Space does not allow for discussion of other forms of democracy here, but it should be noted that Western-style liberal democracy is not necessarily the best form of democracy or the most appropriate for all countries. Other forms of democracy include more participatory and deliberative models (see for example Huber *et al.*, 1997), and some countries have attempted to experiment with different forms of democracy, for example Uganda's no-party democracy from 1987-2006. Liberal multiparty democracy is, however, the globally dominant form and commentators are often sceptical about other models.

up to 36 by 1962. Huntington's 'third wave' began in Portugal in 1974, spreading first to Greece and Spain and subsequently to Latin America where elected civilian governments replaced military rulers in nine countries between 1979 and 1985. The mid-1980s and early 1990s saw democratisation in the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 prompted competitive elections in most of Eastern Europe, whilst Benin and South Africa opened the floodgates to the wave in Africa in 1990. By 1997, most African states had legalised opposition parties whilst only three could have been classed as democracies at the beginning of the decade (Diamond, 2003).

Huntington's third wave of democracy has been the longest and most powerful yet, with 121 countries classed as electoral democracies by Freedom House in 2005 compared to only 76 in 1990. This is an increase from 41 to 61 percent of the world's nation states (Freedom House, 2006). Fukuyama (1992) has suggested that this global democratisation represents the 'End of History', with liberal democracy being universally accepted as the only viable and sustainable political system. However, some commentators have identified a current backlash against democracy, with countries such as Russia, Belarus, Venezuela and Ethiopia placing restrictions on foreign agencies involved in the promotion of democracy and condemning democracy aid programmes as aggressive foreign policy interventions by the West, aimed at regime change in the interests of donors (Carothers, 2006). There is thus a danger of a third 'reverse wave' of democracy undoing achievements made over the last thirty years, with semi-authoritarian leaders making policy that encroaches on democratic freedoms in the name of maintaining domestic stability and resisting imperialism (ibid).

### **3 What can be done to make change happen: why has multiparty democracy spread over the past 100 years?**

This section aims to identify the main factors that have driven transitions to multiparty democracy over the past 100 years. Democratisation processes are highly contextual, with changes in each country being caused by a unique combination of factors that produce democracies with different characteristics. There are therefore no clear-cut answers to the question of what drives democratisation and each country should be considered individually. However, theories of democratisation are useful in providing a framework for analysis, and will therefore be discussed briefly. They can be divided into two main camps, those that focus on the role of agency, and those that focus on the role of structure.

#### **3.1 Agency-driven institution building**

Theories that stress the role of agency tend to work within what Carothers (2002) refers to as the 'transition paradigm', making the assumption that any country moving away from authoritarianism is moving towards democracy, and that this process occurs in a set sequence of stages. First, cracks appear in the legitimacy of ruling authoritarian regimes, caused for example by human rights abuses or failure to achieve economic development. Proponents of democratic transition make use of these fractures, eventually breaking through to install new democratic regimes based on institutions of liberal democracy. The final stage in this process is democratic consolidation in which new democratic norms and culture are institutionalised and accepted by all of society. According to the definition of liberal democracy outlined in section 1, it is at this stage that democratic institutions are combined with democratic politics to produce a well-functioning, established democracy. The main actors in democratisation according to this approach are civil society groups and elite actors, with the former placing pressure on the latter to design new political systems based around democratic institutions. Pacts between elite groups in society are often important, with democratisation the outcome of negotiations between groups of elites who may have different interests, but who are willing to compromise as chaos and anarchy are the worst outcome for all parties (Adeney and Wyatt, 2004). For example, Bardhan (1993) suggests that democracy has been successful as a political system in India because elite groups have found it to be a useful device for keeping bargaining between them within moderate bounds.

The promotion of democracy by donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) through both direct political conditionality and the creation of international norms have undoubtedly been a major factor driving the third wave of democratisation. For example, conditionality effected regime change in Kenya and Malawi (Hauser, 1999) and gave rise to 'snowballing' effects of regional democratisation following the establishment of democracy in a number of key countries (Huntington, 1993). The rationale behind this international push for democracy is rooted in economic and political theories associated with the post-Washington consensus<sup>3</sup> as discussed in Section 4.2. It is an agency-driven transition view of democratisation that dominates international approaches to democratisation. If elites can consciously engage in political negotiation and build democratic institutions to suit their needs, it follows that development agencies can intervene and assist in this process, thereby helping to foster democratic politics (Luckham et al., 2003). Donors also attempt to prompt democratisation and consolidation through working with civil society organisations, building their capacity to campaign for democracy and engage in productive dialogue with the state (World Bank, 1997). This institution-building approach to democratisation is simplistic and a-historic, and fails to recognise that political systems are embedded in a constellation of social, political and economic power relations. The case of Haiti discussed in Box One illustrates how democratic institution-building can lead to the upwards accountability of states to donors and western liberal democratic norms rather than to their people, and to the building of shallow democratic institutions that fail to substantially increase the political voice of the poor.

**Box One: Building democratic institutions whilst undermining democratic politics: the case of Haiti**

After the collapse of decades of authoritarian rule in Haiti, the country held its first democratic elections in over thirty years in 1991. The President was ousted by a military coup only 7 months after these elections, but was re-instated with international assistance in 1994. It was at this point that international aid agencies embarked on a democratisation programme in Haiti, devoting vast amounts of resources to bring political stability to the country. However, the approaches taken were focussed on the building of formal democratic institutions and did not directly aim to build the political voice of the poor or entrench democratic politics in the country.

This is illustrated by the donor-driven process of judicial reform, which centred on the provision of training for judges, the reformulation of laws and engagement in conflict resolution. However, throughout Haitian history, the judicial system has evolved to act in the interests of powerful elite groups rather than to promote social justice for all. Reform therefore acted as a mere face-lift, leaving the historical pattern of the systematic exclusion of the majority of the population from the legal system undisturbed. What was really needed was a reorientation of the system towards the interests of the majority through measures such as the development of legal aid services, translation of proceedings into Creole and promotion of literacy and education. The faith of the poor in the judicial system was further undermined by the failure of the international community to support the National Commission for Truth and Justice, insisting instead that full amnesties were given to the armed forces involved in the 1991 coup. The result was the creation of a cycle of impunity and the effective legitimisation of violence which, rather than helping to entrench democratic politics, prevented citizens from believing in the principle and rule of law, social inclusion and democracy.

International approaches to democratisation in Haiti were thus not primarily aimed at building the political voice of the poor and entrenching democratic politics and culture. Instead, evidence suggests that donors were more concerned with the government's accountability to neoliberal reform programmes rather than to the poor. In 1995, the President went back on pledges to privatise nine state-owned enterprises, as popular opposition feared this would put resources into the hands of elites that had supported the military coup. The donor response was to freeze financial assistance,

<sup>3</sup> The term 'Washington Consensus' refers to the broad international agreement from the 1980s that markets are the most effective drivers of growth and development. State intervention in the market should therefore be as limited as possible. The term 'post-Washington Consensus' was coined in the late 1990s to refer to a new body of thought and analysis that was emerging. This highlighted market imperfections and argued that more, rather than less, state intervention and institution building is required in order to overcome market failures. According to this new 'consensus', states have more responsibility within the development process, and it is therefore essential that they are made accountable through democracy and good governance measures. See Saad-Filho (2005) for further discussion.

failing to see how this contradicted its advocacy of democratisation. Further irony came in 2000 when, having directly countered the development of democratic politics in Haiti, donors withheld aid from the country after it deemed the 2000 elections to have been unfair. This exacerbated economic and political instability, culminating in a military coup in 2004. Ten years of democratic institution building in Haiti thus left the country in a deeper state of turmoil than it had been upon the collapse of military rule in 1990.

Source: Shamsie (2004)

### 3.2 The importance of structural scaffolding

In contrast to agency-driven theories of democratisation, structuralist approaches assert that it is changes in the economic sphere, or the mode of production, that prompts changes in the political sphere. Capitalist development results in changes in the balances of power between social classes, empowering certain actors to promote political change if it is in their material interests (Huber *et al.*, 1993; 1997). Both structure and agency have played important roles in democratisation processes throughout history. The individual and collective agency of international, state and civil society actors have clearly been important in many democratic transitions, but this agency must also be considered in the context of underlying structural conditions that neither may or may not be favourable to democracy. Moreover, these structural conditions are not limited to the balances of power between economic classes, but also between different groups within a 'structural scaffolding' of ethnicity, religion, gender, geographical location, politics and other social groupings (Bratton and van de Walle, quoted in Adeney and Wyatt, 2004).

In contrast to classical Marxist views of democracy as a creation of the bourgeoisie, Huber *et al.* (1993) show that the democratisation of most West European countries in Huntington's first wave were driven by the working and middle classes. Structural changes associated with the development of capitalism such as industrialisation, urbanisation and improvements in communications allowed the lower classes to organise and form alliances in unions and political parties, pressing for a political system in which they could participate and that would fulfil their needs. In only three of the first wave countries studied by Huber *et al.* (1993) in Western Europe - France, Switzerland and Britain - did the bourgeoisie play a significant role in pushing for full democratisation, and in all of these the lower classes were not sufficiently organised to pose a threat to their interests. Even if some elite groups and state actors try to push for democratisation, 'transition failure' can occur if other actors in society are powerful enough to resist change, inflicting economic or political costs on the state that it is unable to withstand (Khan, 2002). Box Two illustrates how a combined analysis of agency and structural scaffolding provides insight into the factors that drove democratisation in India at independence and why, in contrast, transition failure occurred in Pakistan.

#### **Box Two - The influence of both agency and structural scaffolding on democratisation: a comparison of India and Pakistan**

##### *Democratisation in India*

In the pre and post-independence periods, democratisation in India was largely driven by political elites. However, their motivations and successes were linked to the structural scaffolding underlying politics in the country.

The Indian National Congress led India's independence movement from the late nineteenth century, mobilising millions of people with its discourse of personal resistance against colonial rule, poverty and social hierarchies. This involvement in independence politics and social mobilisation gave it roots penetrating deep into society, providing it with popular support and, in 1947, legitimacy as the governing body of independent India. Individual agency was also important in determining India's democratic path, for example with Gandhi as the main agent of popular mobilisation in the pre-independence era, and Nehru's deliberate steering of political development along democratic rather than authoritarian lines.

The Congress had initially been led by a class of urban educated elite, but elections in the decade before independence saw an influx of other powerful elements of society into the party, namely landowning elites and capitalists, and democracy effectively took the form of a pact between these elite groups. This political inclusiveness lent stability to both the Congress and the Indian political system, reducing the threat of challenges for power, or resistance to policies, from elites excluded from political decision-making.

Upon independence, the Congress retained popular support amongst the lower classes, partly through successfully presenting itself as the only agent capable of bringing modernisation and development to the country. However, elements within the structural scaffolding of India were also conducive to the development of a stable democracy with support of the masses. Indian society is heterogeneous with a large numbers of crosscutting identities along linguistic, religious, regional and caste lines. These crosscutting social cleavages prevented any single identity group from having too much influence over the state, allowing it to act autonomously rather than having to answer solely to dominant groups. The Indian state and its leaders thus had sufficient strength, unity and legitimacy to establish democratic institutions and develop democratic politics.

#### *Transition failure in Pakistan*

In 1947, both India and Pakistan had a similar class structure, with society dominated by landowning elites and a group of political elites devoted to democratisation. However, the leaders of Pakistan failed to build an established democracy and the country has been under authoritarian rule for much of its post-independence history.

Calls for the creation of a separate territory for Muslims upon Indian independence originated with the Muslim League, which was founded in the United Provinces of India rather than in the area that was to become Pakistan. Upon partition in 1947, the leaders of the League migrated from India to Pakistan. Despite winning 82 percent of constituent seats in the Pakistani territories in the 1946 elections, the Muslim League lacked the deep social and political roots in Pakistan that the Congress had developed in India during the independence struggle. This left them more dependent on the political support of elite landowners and less capable of the political negotiation and compromise that had allowed the formation of a democratic pact between elite groups in India. The Pakistani state therefore came to be answerable to the interests of the elite classes and prone to manipulation by them.

Hampered by their lack of autonomy from other elite groups, the Muslim League failed to build an inclusive government. This was exacerbated by Pakistan's structural scaffolding which has fewer cross-cutting identity groups than in India, making individual groups more cohesive and thereby increasing their power relative to the state. Politics in the region ran along linguistic divisions in the pre-independence period and, due to the lack of an inclusive and politically strong leadership, continued to do so after 1947. Whilst Bengali speakers formed the numerically-dominant group in the Pakistani population, Punjabi speakers dominated public life and the army. The group with the most political power therefore had the most to lose from democratisation, which demands a degree of compromise and power-sharing between groups. Combined with constant external threat from India and the need to build new national political institutions from scratch, these factors contributed to Pakistan's failure to entrench democracy within the country.

The different political experiences of India and Pakistan after independence illustrate the importance of taking both agency and structural elements into consideration when analysing democratisation processes and the nature of the political systems they create.

*Source: Adeney and Wyatt (2004) and Chatterjee (1997)*

## **4 The core argument: What difference has multiparty democracy made to the lives of the poor?**

### **4.1 Does democracy strengthen the political voice of the poor?**

Whilst it is true that the nature of multiparty democracies and their impact on the poor vary between countries, a political system cannot be labelled as a democracy if it does not allow for at least some

degree of popular participation in government, at the very least the holding of free and fair elections. Thus, at the very least, democracy improves the lives of the poor through providing a framework for political participation and expression. Sen (1999) argues that this political participation has intrinsic value for human well-being, making it a fundamental human right in itself. This is reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which grants all people 'the right to take part in the government of his (sic) country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.... The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures' (Article 21). Substantial evidence exists to suggest that people in rich and poor countries alike value democracy as a political system, with an international survey recently finding that eight out of ten global citizens agree that democracy is the best system of government (Gallup, 2005). This is supported by other regional surveys, for example with 69 per cent of Africans believing that democracy is 'always preferable' to other political systems and an increasing proportion of Latin Americans favouring democracy over other systems (Afrobarometer, 2006; Latinbarometro, quoted in Graham and Sukhtankar, 2004).

More than any other political system, democracy has a track record of promoting and protecting other individual political rights and civil liberties such as freedom of speech and association (Leftwich, 2000), and these in turn help to entrench democratic values and foster democratic politics. Indeed, it is most common for people throughout the world to define democracy in terms of these individual freedoms and civil liberties (Afrobarometer, 2002; Marcus et al., 2001). This can have important repercussions for the realisation of other human rights such as that to a secure livelihood, as illustrated by Dreze and Sen's (1989) argument that no substantial famine has ever occurred in an independent and democratic country with a free press. However, the presence of a multiparty democracy in a country does not necessarily guarantee political rights and civil freedoms, or the presence of democratic norms and politics such as the accountability of the government to all citizens on an equal basis. Countries can be labelled as democracies and have multiparty political systems, but this does not automatically mean that all of the formal institutions of democracy are in place, or that these are considered to be legitimate by all of the population. For example, many mature democracies suffer from the under-representation of women and minorities and unaccountable non-transparent bureaucracies (Luckham et al., 2003). Only around 20 of the 100 third wave countries that have recently been considered as 'transitional' and on their way to democratic consolidation have actually developed into well-functioning democracies with firm links between democratic institutions and politics (Carothers, 2002). The remainder have been referred to variously as 'low-intensity' or 'partial' democracies, suffering from 'democracy deficits' (Gills et al., 1993; Dahl, 1989; Luckham et al., 2003). Mahabani describes how, in many countries, democracy exists as a 'thin veneer of Western concepts', a set of formal institutions that do not translate into real democratic practice and culture on the ground (quoted in Evans, 2001:630).

In countries with persistent democracy deficits, democracy may have a less positive impact on the lives of the poor, even acting to effectively exclude them from political participation outside of formal elections and undermine their political voice. If popular participation in government is limited to formal voting, once elected, politicians are able to act as they choose, legitimated by the fact that they were voted into power. Indeed, liberal democracy was from the very beginning designed to regulate popular participation in government, with Kant going so far as to equate Athenian-style direct democracy with despotism (Luckham et al., 2003). If democratic culture or politics is weak or absent, and elected representatives are not accountable to citizens, democracy will not automatically result in the realisation of civil liberties or increased political voice of citizens. The poor may be able to participate in elections, but in most cases face insurmountable economic and social obstacles that prevent them from running themselves, leaving them without the option of choosing leaders that are willing or able to represent them and act in their interests. This is even more likely to be the case in democracies run by what Carothers (2002) refers to as 'dominant power politics' such as Tanzania and Uganda, where single parties dominates and, whilst others can contest in theory, they lack the resources and political power to do so effectively.

It should thus be recognised that the presence of liberal democracy does not necessarily translate into increased political voice for the poor. However, through allowing at least a degree of popular participation in government and providing a framework for the realisation of civil rights, democracy is more likely to give voice to the poor than authoritarian political systems. Moreover, in some liberal democratic countries that long suffered the persistence of democratic deficits and the *de facto* political and economic exclusion of sections of the poor, liberal democratic elections eventually provided the mechanisms whereby more accountable leaders came into power in a peaceful manner. One such case is Bolivia, as is discussed in Box Three. The task is therefore to identify the obstacles to change within countries where democratic deficits persist, and potential spaces in these countries where democratic politics can be fostered, taking into account power dynamics in the underlying structural scaffolding (Luckham et al., 2003). Cornwall (2004) distinguishes between ‘invited spaces’ for democratic participation created by the government; ‘popular spaces’ where people organise independently, for example to protest against government policies or to provide mutual aid; and ‘conquered spaces’ which are provided or taken over by the public as a result of successful political action. People wishing to follow the lead of countries such as Brazil in experimenting with the expansion of democratic spaces through bottom-up participatory mechanisms should recognise that conquered and popular spaces are more likely to be successful than invited spaces which are prone to being co-opted by dominant groups resulting in the reproduction of social hierarchies and relationships of domination and exclusion (Cornwall, 2004). The case studies in Box Four illustrate this point, and also highlight the importance of building the capacity of excluded groups to effectively engage in political systems that may be alien to them and that embody deeply entrenched social hierarchies.

**Box Three - Democratisation in Bolivia: dynamics, obstacles and drivers of change**

*From military rule to liberal democracy: social movements and elite pacts in the context of the structural scaffolding*

From 1964 until 1982, Bolivia experienced a series of coups and counter-coups led by authoritarian regimes. Widespread social unrest prompted by economic deterioration and human rights abuses led to the initiation of a return to constitutional rule by the outgoing dictator in 1978, yet political and economic instability continued until 1985 when the two dominant political parties in Bolivia successfully formed a majority coalition government. The initial driver of change in this democratisation process was thus civil society, in particular the working classes whose collective voice was articulated by the umbrella organisation Central Obrera Boliviana (COB). The roots of the political voice of the working classes lay in the structure of Bolivia’s economy, particularly in the strength of the tin mining industry which, providing the largest source of employment and foreign exchange, harboured a politicised labour movement. However, once the wheels of democratisation had been set in motion by civil society movements, the process was taken over by the political elite, particularly from 1985 when the historic Pact for Democracy signed by the two dominant parties made a break with Bolivia’s tradition of politics based on conflict, laying the foundations for politics based on compromise. This brought political stability and entrenched constitutional democracy in Bolivia.

*Political stability with democracy deficits*

However, political stability in Bolivia was accompanied by the consolidation of power in the hands of the political elite. Between 1985 and 1986 the global tin market collapsed, leading to the retrenchment of 21,000 miners, and in turn undermining the strength of the labour movement. This, coupled with the informalisation of workers associated with newly-adopted Washington Consensus economic policy, eroded the political voice of the lower classes whose political participation was limited to formal elections. Moreover, the spectrum of political alternatives available during elections was extremely limited, exacerbated by the new culture of compromise amongst the political elite. The government did make a number of policies designed to meet the needs of the poor, for example an innovative privatisation scheme that would provide funds for a national pension scheme and a sweeping decentralisation programme to bring the government closer to the people (Whitehead, 2001). However, these invited spaces largely served to co-opt dissenting voices rather than increase their power over the government, failing to address the deeply rooted structural problems that left the majority of the Bolivian population entrenched in poverty.

### *Towards the eradication of democracy deficits*

Having suffered from decades of political and economic turmoil, most Bolivians placed expectation in the new economic and political order, willing to make sacrifices in the hope of stability and social betterment (Garcia Linera, 2006). However, by the turn of the millennium it was clear that the new era was failing to deliver substantial benefits for much of the population and Bolivia remained the poorest country in Latin America. Social movements arose in the agrarian zones that had long been politically and economically marginalised and, due to overlapping economic and identity-based exclusion; many of these took the form of indigenous movements against the historically mestizo-dominated state. These movements sparked a shift in the balance of power between the lower classes and the political elite and had their roots in the indigenous traditional systems of accountability and authority that have coexisted with formal systems since the period of colonial rule in Bolivia (Garcia Linera, 2006). As the new liberal economic and political order increasingly alienated the lower classes from the 1980s, indigenous peasants and workers increasingly turned to these traditional systems, reinforcing and politicising indigenous identity.

Tension surfaced in April 2000 when around 100,000 people held a mass protest in the city of Cochabamba over a longstanding dispute concerning rate hikes and poor water quality provided by the newly privatised water supply. The same month saw peasant upsurge in the altiplano against US-supported government efforts to eradicate coca farming, to which many former tin miners had turned following the collapse of their industry. In October 2000, indigenous people's organisations played a lead role in the month-long road blockades that threatened the food supplies of La Paz. Popular protest came to a head again in 2003, this time over the popular perception of government mismanagement of Bolivia's natural gas resources, the profits of which were disproportionately going to international business rather than benefiting the Bolivian population. Social unrest eventually forced the president to resign. It was largely on a promise to divert benefits accruing from Bolivia's natural resources, combined with increased protection for coca farmers, that the *Movimiento al Socialismo* was voted into power in December 2005, led by Bolivia's first indigenous president Evo Morales. However, it was the institutionalisation of democratic norms from the mid-1980s that, despite excluding the poor from politics, provided the mechanisms through which popular protest could be translated into a formal political coalition that successfully contested for power in the 2005 elections.

The new leadership faces the gargantuan challenge of delivering on its promises of poverty eradication and economic development whilst mediating between the demands of groups in a highly fractured society. However, it is hoped that the institutionalisation of democratic politics in Bolivia has been sufficient to ensure that political debate remains largely peaceful and that the political system can withstand this historic shift in balances of power towards formerly excluded groups.

*Source: Garcia Linera (2006), Mayorga (1997) and Whitehead (2001)*

### **Box Four – Lessons from attempts to build participatory democratic spaces**

#### *Community Groups in Bangladesh: Reinforcing social and political exclusion through invited democratic spaces*

Participatory community groups (CGs) were set up in Bangladesh in 1998 as part of a donor-driven health sector reform process. The aim was to increase citizen participation in the delivery of state health services to facilitate the co-management of institutions by citizens and the government. CGs brought together people from different sections of society, providing a space for them to deliberate the planning and delivery of health services.

As 'invited spaces' the CGs did not substantially deepen democracy at the local level, failing to provide an arena for the poor to effectively participate in health policy formation or to act as mechanisms of political empowerment. A major reason behind this was the failure to recognise both that poverty poses an obstacle to effective participation. Not only do the poor not have the time to participate in the CGs, but a lack of understanding about the participatory process, a lack of self-esteem among certain groups (in particular women) and the strong perception that the state is both caring and authoritative undermined the effective participation of the poor. Moreover, power relationships and hierarchies that permeate Bangladeshi society were replicated in the running of,

and participation in, the CGs. Rather than providing a democratic space in which democratic values and participation could be fostered, the CGs in many instances acted to maintain the effective political exclusion of the poor.

*The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa: expanding invited and popular spaces for democratic participation.*

TAC is a South African-based campaign for equal, accessible and affordable HIV and AIDS treatment and education. The campaign has been successful in mobilising vast numbers of people from disparate sections of society, binding them together through their common experiences and beliefs. The campaign has taken advantage of the negotiation skills developed by activists during the apartheid era, and of the opportunities for mobilisation offered by new communications such as the internet and mobile phones. Through using a wide range of strategies, from campaigning in the streets to campaigning in the courts, TAC has overcome traditional boundaries between the state and public space, at times working with the state, and at other times working in direct opposition to it.

In contrast to the CGs of Bangladesh, TAC represents a bottom-up process of political empowerment. Rather than entrenching social hierarchies it has succeeded in overcoming them, mobilising diverse groups around a universally relevant health issue. It has done this through making use of official and invited democratic spaces, as well as forging new popular spaces, thereby politically empowering diverse sections of South African society and providing a means for them to develop a new form of politics that is relevant, inclusive and participatory.

*Source: Cornwall (2004); Mahmud (2004) and Robins and Von Lieres (2004)*

## 4.2 Does democracy promote economic development<sup>4</sup>?

As already noted, liberal democracy has come to be seen by the mainstream development community as central for economic, political and social development over the past decade. Whilst more recently fuelled by the 'War on Terror', a major reason for this focus on democracy has been the commonly-held belief in its ability to promote economic growth and good governance in line with the theories of the post-Washington consensus (Evans, 2001). Whilst the rolling back of state intervention in the economy was encouraged in the era of structural adjustment, the state was 'brought back in' to development towards the end of the 1990s. As the World Development Report 1997 states, 'we now see that markets and governments are complementary: the state is essential for putting in place the appropriate institutional foundations for markets' (p4). These institutions include systems of law and order that not only promote justice and political stability, but also provide businesses with the confidence to operate in a country, for example through guaranteeing property rights. However, because the state still has a 'unique weakness' towards corruption and the ability to distort economic markets through misguided intervention, its actions must be kept in check (*Ibid*). Liberal democracy provides a political complement to the neoliberal economic policies of the post-Washington consensus, with regular elections ensuring that governments do not engage in corrupt behaviour or interfere with the workings of the market, but instead provide the institutions for it to be able to function smoothly as demanded by economically rational individuals within society (Saad-Filho, 2005).

This belief that democracy promotes economic development is largely ideologically driven, and is not supported by empirical evidence. A number of studies have performed regression analyses on the relationship between indicators of economic growth and inequality and indicators of democracy such as the presence of elections for public figures.<sup>5</sup> The results of these studies vary dramatically, for example, with a review of 21 studies by Prezeworski and Limongi finding that eight identified a positive relationship between democracy and economic development, eight concluding that authoritarianism is more conducive than democracy to economic development, and six finding no relationship at all between the economy and indicators of democracy (quoted in Leblang, 1997). The evidence is no more conclusive for the relationship between democracy and inequality (Lopez, 2004),

<sup>4</sup> 'Economic development' is used here to refer to economic growth, poverty reduction and reduced economic inequality.

<sup>5</sup> Freedom House's Freedom Index and Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index are two prominent examples.

or for that between other 'good governance' indicators and economic growth (Treisman, 2000; Khan, 2002a).

The inconsistencies in the results of econometric studies are likely to be related to the subjective nature of democracy and governance indicators, and to the dependence of the relationship between democracy and economic development on the immeasurable and country-specific configuration of the structural scaffolding underlying political and economic systems. Moreover, it is difficult to establish directions of causality in econometric analysis, and, where studies have identified significant relationships between variables, it is not clear whether good governance and/or democracy prompt economic growth or vice versa. Historically, there has been no example of a country that first improved governance to the levels of high income countries today without first achieving sustained economic growth, and countries that have achieved high growth rates in the last 50 years, such as the Asian 'tigers', have only moderately better or the same governance indicators compared to low-growth countries (Khan, 2002a). This becomes apparent when this group of countries are grouped together on graphs that identify a positive relationship between governance indicators and economic growth, suggesting that 'good governance' or democracy did not play a significant role in their economic success. However, the fact that these countries are small in number means that they have little influence on overall regression lines, leading analysts to identify a positive linear relationship rather than the more plausible hypothesis that economic growth eventually prompts 'good governance' as opposed to vice versa. This is illustrated in Figure One. Structural analysis suggests that successful democratisation and the development of democratic politics are one result of capitalist economic development that prompts the formation of new class divisions and shifts in the balances of power between different social groups. For example, in South Korea, economic growth gave rise to a new class of business elite who resented the heavy and restrictive involvement of the state in their affairs (Box Five).

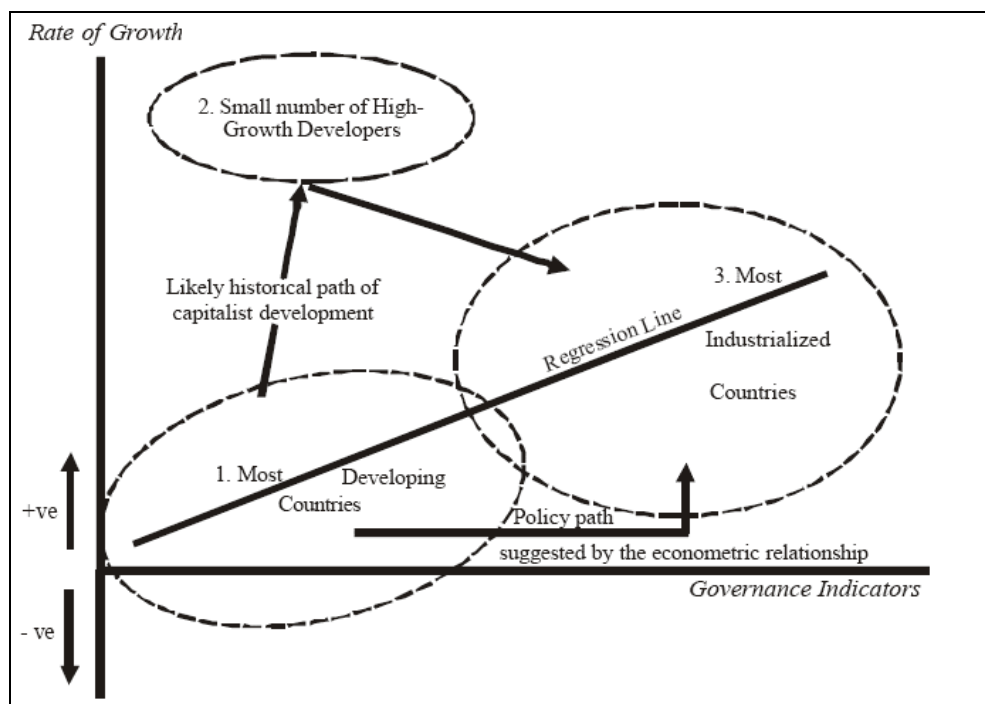


Figure 1: Theories of the relationship between economic growth and good governance (Source: Khan, 2002a)

Whilst economic development may be a driver of democratisation rather than vice versa, the question remains as to what the implications are for economic development if democratisation precedes the development of a capitalist market economy. One early attempt to theorise the relationship between democracy and development came from Huntington in 1968 who claimed that democratisation in poor countries where people are eager to benefit from improvements in welfare results in excessive

political pressures on the state to meet the demands of diverse sections of society, leading to a crisis of governability (White, 1995). However, Section 3.2 showed that the heterogeneity of Indian society was one factor behind its successful development of democratic politics after independence. More nuanced analysis of the nature of the relationship between states and groups in society are required. In any political system, groups are likely to push for the protection of their property rights, and, as already discussed, at the ideological level liberal democracy is the ideological counterpart to liberal economics, allowing capitalists to influence the state to ensure that it maintains rather than encroaches upon their property rights. However, where market economies have not yet fully matured, the protection of property rights may not be beneficial for economic development. Leftwich (2002) maintains that poverty reduction and economic growth in poor countries requires a radical redistribution of resources, such as the land reform programme in South Korea after 1948 (Box Five). However, such redistribution is unlikely to occur under democratic political systems, as they are necessarily conservative in nature. Democracy depends on wealthy sections of society for funding and democratic governments are unlikely to risk losing their political and economic support through threats of resource redistribution. Moreover, democracy as a system depends on compromise, and losers of democratic competition will only accept defeat if their losses are not too great (*Ibid*).

Trade-offs are thus likely to exist between economic and political freedoms in most developing countries. However, pitching authoritarian states against democratic states and assessing, which have better development records, oversimplifies the debate. Whilst many authoritarian governments have achieved significant economic development, most notably those in East Asia, others have achieved economic growth without adequately addressing poverty and inequality, such as China and many Latin American countries under dictatorial rule. Others, including many in Africa, have failed to achieve much economic development at all. Rather than the nature of the political system per se, it is the ability of the state to maintain control over resources or property rights and allocate them to the most productive sections of society that is important for economic development (Khan, 2002a). As the case of South Korea illustrates, in order for successful economic development to occur, states need to be able to both allocate resources in society and, where beneficiaries do not use these resources productively to contribute to economic growth, to retain the ability to reallocate capital where necessary (Box Five). If unproductive elites dominate economic and political society, and if democracy legitimises competition between these groups and increases their strength in relation to the state, democratisation is unlikely to be compatible with economic growth and the reduction of inequalities, and may even exacerbate them (Khan, 2002b).

#### **Box Five - South Korea: from authoritarianism to economic development to democratisation**

South Korea gained independence from Japan in 1948. In an attempt to neutralise communist influence and ensure political stability in rural areas, the South Korean state implemented radical land reform, which swept the land owning classes from power. Before the reform process, about half of the farmland in South Korea was owned by less than five percent of farm households. The land reform increased farm ownership to almost 70 per cent of farm households. Whilst the South Korean state was initially democratic, the communist threat from North Korea, coupled with international support, largely from the USA, helped to eliminate landlord resistance to the reform. The absence of a landowning class gave the state direct control over the peasantry through the maintenance of a monopoly on agricultural inputs and control of prices, trade policy and taxation. Agricultural efficiency and productivity increased as the state used this control to coerce farmers into adopting new technologies. However, the benefits of this were creamed off by the state rather than going directly to the peasantry, as it was able to buy large quantities of agricultural produce at artificially low prices. This gave the state a source of income to channel into industrial development, as well as a source of cheap food for an expanding industrial workforce.

Agricultural policy thus laid the foundations for industrial and economic growth in South Korea. Interventionist industrial policy also played a large role in the success of the country's export-oriented production of consumer goods, which contributed to an average annual growth rate of 7.1 per cent between 1965 and 1990. The state deliberately created a number of *chaebols*, or large private conglomerates, handpicking companies and providing them with subsidies and privileges in return for

developing technology and capital intensive activities geared to export markets. A close relationship was maintained between the *chaebols* and the state, with monthly meetings and the setting of targets that were coupled with strict punitive measures for the *chaebols* if they were missed. Coupled with state support, the large size of the *chaebols* allowed for the vertical integration of functions and enabled them to withstand the risks associated with innovation and the adoption of new technologies.

Korea's successful growth through export-oriented industrialisation was facilitated by the ability of the state to retain control over resource allocation through mechanisms that would be unlikely to have been possible under democratic rule. However, the economic success of the *chaebols* created a new class of business elite who, by the 1980s, were increasingly dissatisfied with the heavy restrictions and intervention imposed by the state and began to push for increased autonomy. Economic development also saw increased labour activism, spurred on by increased literacy and a militant women's labour movement. Social activism was channelled through Christian organisations, which subverted state control through avoiding classification as political organisations and which received extensive support from the USA. Student movements also received widespread journalistic and popular support. These social struggles culminated in intensive popular protests in 1986 and 1987, eventually forcing the government to announce democratic reform in 1987.

Source: Kay (2002), Lall (2005) and White (1995).

The promotion of liberal democracy and good governance as a panacea for development poses the danger of creating high expectations of material benefits in countries undergoing democratisation. Whilst polls show that democracy is emerging as a universal value amongst rich and poor alike, evidence also suggests that citizens often blame political systems when they fail to deliver material improvements. For example, the promise of democratic participation in the running of Caracas in Venezuela led to the surprise election of the La Causa R party in 1992, but when the new system failed to deliver substantial economic benefits, most of the poorer residents reverted back to patronage politics and the party was not re-elected (Goldfrank, 2004). Similarly, news reports from Iran have suggested that rural people are less concerned about whether they live under an authoritarian regime than whether measures are taken to ameliorate their poverty (Channel 4 News 7<sup>th</sup> May 2006). On a slightly different note, Garrard (2004) suggests that one of the factors behind successful democratisation in the UK over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was that the enfranchisement of new sections of society coincided with 'benign economic cycles', for example with rising real wages or declines in food prices, ensuring that democratisation was never associated with economic failure. However, reference should be made here to the discussion of the differences between 'invited' and 'popular' democratic spaces in section 4.1. A study by Carlos Cortez Ruiz in Chiapas, Mexico found that there is a longer-term vision of participation as part of the struggle to achieve political and economic rights in municipalities controlled by the Zapatista movement, compared to a shorter-term vision of participation as a means to achieve material benefit in government-controlled arenas (quoted in Cornwall, 2004:7). This suggests that the poor do value political participation in itself, but that the expectations and outcomes of participation will vary according to the political, economic and social dynamics of the participatory space.

The discussion so far has established that democracy has intrinsic value related to fundamental human freedoms and that, rather than a mutually reinforcing relationship existing between economic development and democracy in poor countries, tensions often exist between them depending on underlying political and economic power configurations. However, this does not mean that democracy and economic development are necessarily incompatible, and democracy is likely to assist directly in poverty reduction and the avoidance of humanitarian crises such as famine through providing mechanisms for increased political voice of the poor as discussed in section 4.1. The challenge for governments is therefore to identify where tensions may exist between economic development and the instigation and continuation of democratisation, and to develop smart and imaginative solutions to address them, taking into consideration the underlying structural scaffolding and assessing the advantages and disadvantages of possible political and economic outcomes.

This is likely to involve thinking outside of the box of Western-style liberal democracy, which may serve to effectively exclude the poor from political decision-making and exacerbate material and political inequalities. For example, lessons can be drawn from the successes and failures of Brazilian experiments in local participatory budgeting and deliberative policy councils. Despite producing new patterns of inclusion and exclusion, these have resulted in the range of services provided by municipalities widening and the fixed allocation of budgets along patronage lines being replaced by annually varying budgets according to community-defined priorities (Coelho, 2004; Heller, 2001; Acharya, et al., 2004). Contrary to Huntington's thesis on democracy producing crises of governability, the role of political participation in enhancing the legitimacy of states and therefore their ability to function effectively should not be overlooked. Participation can also foster cultures of political patience and understanding amongst citizens in the face of inadequate resources (Heller, 2001). However, it should be remembered that citizens may vote to spend money on service provision or job creation rather than expensive participatory decision-making mechanisms as illustrated by the case of La Causa R in Caracas. The dangers of treating participation as a panacea for democracy as discussed in section 4.1 should also be borne in mind when attempting to forge local and national democratic spaces. Many political economists are calling for the development of 'smart industrial policy' to circumvent restrictive neoliberal economics (see for example Evans, 2005), and this needs to be accompanied by a call for 'smart democracy' to allow for the fostering of innovative and contextually specific solutions to collectively defined development problems. Whilst the challenges are many and complex, they must be addressed if democracy is to be at least compatible with, if not conducive to, political and economic development in the interests of the poor.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, multiparty democratisation has brought important improvements to the lives of the poor in many third wave countries, providing a framework for the realisation of individual political freedoms, civil rights and a strengthening of the voices of the poor. However, it must be remembered that the building of liberal democratic institutions does not always translate into the democratic culture and politics that are necessary for these benefits to be realised. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that the establishment of multiparty democracy will automatically contribute to the achievement of other development goals such as economic development. This assumption, along with the assumption that institutions foster democratic politics, have led to the creation and persistence of gaping democracy deficits in many third wave countries. Anyone who is intervening in democratisation processes, including donors, governments and civil society actors, must from the very beginning aim specifically to build political voice and freedoms through democracy, rather than assuming that building democratic institutions will automatically lead to political and economic development. If the realisation of democracy's ability to promote political freedoms is taken as the starting point, institutions can be developed in democratic spaces to specifically achieve this goal. Otherwise, there is a danger that time, resources and lives will be lost through the building of empty democratic institutions that at best maintain, and at worst exacerbate, the lack of political voice of the poor.

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