



16 Democracy

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter addressed four main issues. (1) Democracy is a central issue globally but its meaning is contested. Some argue for a universal definition that centres on a collection of liberal electoral procedures. For others, democracy is more complex because it is embedded in the specific culture(s) of each society; it also includes other components such as socio-economic rights. (2) Countries move from one type of regime to another for various equally contested reasons. One debate is about the role of domestic (or national) factors and international factors: are the prime causes of democratization located within the country or are they located at the international level, outside the country? Second, both actors (politicians, activists, social movements) and large structural forces (i.e., a country's rising level of socio-economic development) are variously seen as the main engines of change. (3) Once democratic institutions and practices are established, various factors can consolidate and strengthen them, or, conversely, can cause their downfall. The importance of popular support, the acceptance of defeat on the part of incumbent elected officials, as well as ethnic violence and persistent economic inequalities, can determine the consolidation or unravelling of nascent democratization. (4) Some believe that only an iron-fisted authoritarian regime is capable of imposing difficult (but necessary) decisions to foster development. Others point out that too many predatory dictators have plundered national resources and that democracy is thus the best form of regime to improve social and economic welfare. Both sides of each of these four debates have some merit and a full understanding of democracy and its relation to development can be gained only by examining specific cases.

VIDEO RESOURCES

Africa: Elections Aren't Enough

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEF5hGDgu0k>

Time 1:29:16

Paul Collier, award-winning author of books such as *The Bottom Billion* and *War, Guns, and Votes*, is joined on a panel by David Carroll, director of the Carter Center's Democracy Program; Tom Crick, associate director of the Center's Conflict Resolution Program; and Jennifer McCoy, director of the Center's Americas Program, for a closer look at the impact of elections in Africa and what is needed to make democracy hold in developing countries. Carter Center Vice President for Peace Programs John Stremmler moderates.

Conversing on the Commons: Interview with Gustavo Esteva

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLZGhyNWD70>

Time 1:12:22

Órla O'Donovan, Community Development Journal, in conversation with Gustavo Esteva, Mexican commoner, activist and post-development theorist.

Noam Chomsky: History of US Rule in Latin America

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKwJI9axblQ>

Time 1:14:52

History of US Rule in Latin America; Elections and Resistance to the Coup in Honduras—Professor Noam Chomsky.

Commons against and beyond capitalism? Interview with Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REliNI4z_wI

Time 2:02:25

Órla O'Donovan interviews Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis about their work on the commons.

Protecting South Africa's fragile democracy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=053YwBupDLQ>

Time 1:38:52

The institutions of South Africa's democracy are under strain, making the miracle of South Africa's democracy more vulnerable and fragile than perhaps any time since its inception in 1994. The Leader of the Opposition in South Africa will discuss the challenges faced in trying to root democracy in a divided, unequal and economically unstable society.

Bernie Sanders Explains How The CIA Destroyed Democracy In Latin America

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvSLIK5QmDc>

Time 1:11

Bernie Sanders Explains How The CIA Destroyed Democracy In Latin America

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How does the “boomerang pattern” affect political change?
2. Compare the “international structure” and “national structure” approaches to democratic transition.
3. Contrast the procedural and substantive definitions of democracy.
4. What is an authoritarian political regime?
5. Contrast the phases of democratic transition and democratic consolidation.
6. What is the agency-based explanation of democracy?
7. What group of scholars argue that structuralist vision is “teleological,” and what do they mean by this contention?

ANSWER KEY: REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. The “boomerang effect,” a term coined by Keck and Sikkink (1999), refers to democracy activists reaching out to international actors, like NGOs or existing democracies, who are better placed to put pressure on the authoritarian regime. This dynamic is an example of the “international actor” approach to democratic transition. (p. 310)
2. The “international structure” approach holds that the biggest waves of democratization (in the late 1940s and late 1980s) happened because of the major transformations of the international system that occurred at those time periods. For instance, the end of the bipolar Cold War yielded a unipolar system with a single (democratic) superpower. This “victory for democracy” put pressure on authoritarian regimes to democratize. In other words, the strategic necessities of the Cold War, the conflict between the two superpowers, often let authoritarian regimes persist. The end of the Cold War was a *structural* change that created pressures for democratization (p. 304). In contrast, the “national structure” approach, which has been influenced by modernization theory, explains democratic transition by reference to political, economic, and/or social structural changes *within* a country. As the economy develops under an authoritarian regime, social structures change, such as the growth of the middle and working classes. These classes, concentrated in urban areas, begin to pressure the regime for change and greater inclusion in the political process. Some argue, however, that there is no empirical evidence to support the idea that the level of economic development is linked to the likelihood of democratization. For instance, the *authoritarian* states of China, Singapore, and Vietnam have experienced both high growth and major transformations of their social structures (pp. 309–310)
3. The procedural definition of democracy is a “minimalist” one that views democracy as existing as long as specific political procedures are enforced. These include the following: regular free and fair elections to choose political representatives; any citizen may run for office and vote, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, class, etc.; and that citizens’ basic rights must be guaranteed by the state, especially the rights of assembly, expression, and information. This view has a *universal* character, that is, it holds that democracies can actually be observed and classified across time and space. A common criticism is that the view is too reductionist and minimalist, that it deals with important but not sufficient criteria for establishing the existence of a democracy. In contrast, substantive definitions of democracy focus on the cultural, socio-economic, and citizenship factors related to democratic governance. Such views stress, for instance, the need to recognize local cultural variations of democracy, the impact of inequality on formal political rights, and the universality of rights for all citizens. (pp. 306–316)
4. In an authoritarian regime, state officials prevent civil society from participating in the decision-making process. Violent repression, the unequal distribution of economic resources, and a lack of accountability are hallmarks of such regimes. (p. 303)
5. During a democratic transition, authoritarian institutions and practices are reformed and replaced by more democratic institutions and practices. This phase is characterized by high levels of uncertainty, as pro-democracy forces clash with defenders of the authoritarian regime. Democratic consolidation follows the transition phase. In this phase, efforts are made to solidify the newly created democratic foundations. Rather than debate whether democratization is the preferred course, this phase is marked instead by debate on *how* the democratic system should be re-enforced. (p. 303)
6. In this framework, we explain democratization based on the preferences, interests, strategies, and identities of political actors, the information at their disposal and what they choose to do with it, their representations of the world, and, of course, the relationships these actors develop with each other (including negotiations, conflicts, tricks, and pacts). In this view, the decisions

and actions of political actors, and not structural forces over which these actors have no control, explain important political change such as democratization. (p. 309)

7. The advocates of the national actor approach argue that the structuralist vision is “teleological” in the sense that it gives an impression—a false and misleading one, according to these critics—that we can know in advance whether a country will democratize (the end point of that process) and how it will go about the transition. According to supporters of the agency-based approach, transitions are full of uncertainties and contingencies. They really depend on the choices made by a number of actors. Thus, the factors that really count must be found elsewhere. This “elsewhere”—what makes the difference in democratization—is the role of political actors. (pp. 311–313)