

The Role of the Working Class and the Impact of Resource Allocation and Economic Incentives on the Evolution of Democracy

1. The Approach of Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens

The main argument of the authors is that capitalist development is associated with the rise of democracy mainly because of two reasons. One is that democracy strengthens the working class and the other argues that it weakens large landowners and their influence. They contend that capitalism without democracy is possible, as in the cases of South Korea and Taiwan after WWII, Nazi Germany and a number of fascist regimes between the two world wars, and Brazil and Chile recently; yet, democracies are all associated with capitalist political economies.

According to the authors, the key ingredients of democratization are universal suffrage and an indiscriminate inclusiveness of citizens whereas their theory qualifies democracy as a matter of power. Secondly, they depict the role of the state as a critical element and define another major power configuration as being the structure, strength, and autonomy of the state and its interrelations with the society. They assert that the conventional wisdom that state autonomy is an opposition force to democracy is incomplete because some autonomy of the state from the dominant classes, such as bourgeoisie and landlord class, is a necessary condition for democracy.

Third, the authors suggest the impact of transnational power relations in forming and consolidating a democracy. Whereas it is hard to deny the muscular impact of global proximity of even the farthest states because of the liberalization of markets and trade, there has always been a transnational power structure regardless of democracy. Thus, this argument does not hold an explanatory power in understanding the conundrum of capitalism-democracy relationship.

2. The Approach of Acemoğlu and Robinson

In their search of the determinants of democracy, Acemoğlu and Robinson first find the existence of civil society as a critical component to form and consolidate democracy. Second, they argue that shocks as well as crises provide an impetus for democratization. Third, because of taxation on land, higher damages of social and political turbulence for physical and human capital owners, and the changing impacts of economic institutions such as slavery, democracy is more likely to exist and consolidate where the elites are industrialists rather than landowners.

Fourth, the formation of political institutions has significant influence on democracy in that they can be structured to limit the power of majority. In so doing, institutions that place limits on pro-majoritarian policies in democracy are more likely to help its consolidation. Fifth, great inequality is associated with a greater likelihood of democratization as an effective threat of revolution can initiate a democratization process by forcing the elite. Yet, this association offers an inverted U-shape relationship between inter-group inequality and the probability for a transition to democracy. For the consolidation of democracy, the reverse of such relationship holds as in the case of Latin American countries with relatively higher inequalities.

Sixth, while the authors initially mention the existence of elites and citizens in a society, they go on to reveal that in many times a third group, middle class, emerges which acts as the driver of democratization process. The elites prefer to co-opt the middle class, which has a greater tendency to align with them, rather than undertaking a full democratic stance. Last but not least, globalization contributes to democratization and its consolidation by making it easy for capital owners to take their capital out of a market, providing freer trade which facilitates redistribution by affecting factor prices, making the failure of economic activities more costly, and raising global community's eyebrows for antidemocratic attitudes of countries.

3. Reflections on Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens

Despite the fact the authors characterize bourgeoisie and working class as the challengers of land-owner aristocracy, they attribute more to the working class in the evolution of democracy. Paradoxically, they, too, contend that if bourgeoisie is not large enough and independent, it has a tendency to make coalition with landed aristocracy which creates resistance to democracy. Therefore, one hesitates in figuring out the role of middle class because of the ambiguity with regards to its preferences. According to the authors, bourgeoisie became supportive of repressive authoritarianism when they felt threatened by democratic regime. From the stand point of economic incentives, this method resembles the approach of Acemoğlu and Robinson because the landed upper class, being dependent on large cheap labor, was the most consistent anti-democratic force.

When Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens give the main credit to the role of the working class, they agree with Therborn (1977) that the working class -represented by the socialist parties and the unions- is the engine of universal mal suffrage and responsible government. Nevertheless, such claim contradicts with the modernization view, which owes much to Lipset (1960) and which contends that economic development and democracy are connected primarily through the expansion of education and the growth of middle class.

4. Reflections on Acemoğlu and Robinson

The determination of Acemoğlu and Robinson -as also clarified by themselves- is purely game theoretic. Not only do they assume that individuals and groups behave strategically based on individual motivations, their study also gives virtually all credit to resource allocation and economic incentives. The authors take human behaviors solely on economic rationales and go

further to contend that, for instance, an elite is a hardliner only because hardline behavior is optimal for him based on his preferences, endowments, and opportunities. The authors see each actor as an economically driven one. In so doing, they exclude the role of social classes, state, and human nature -honor, self-respect, will for higher societal role, and status-.

The study endeavors to bring a positivist holistic explanation to social science such that it just looks at income distribution and economic inequalities while attempting to theorize the evolution of democracy; it virtually pays no attention to historical context, traditions, cultural norms and class structure of societies, which critically matter in the interpretation of democratic developments. I argue that the way they conduct their search in figuring out a behavioral attitude for societies fall short because of the misleading belief that each society's economic rationales necessarily resemble one another. Indeed, western type of rationalistic behavior may well differ from that of other communities even in the fundamental definition of what really "rational" is.

The authors argue that Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens fail to provide a mechanism for how capitalist development causes democracy. None the less, democratization is an outcome of many factors; despite the fact that one of which is undoubtedly economic rationales, each country is a unique case in its own set of historical, social and political peculiarities. One hastens to suggest that a social study which attempts to reach the underlying factors of democratization should be careful while arguing to constitute a standard mechanism between an economic outcome and a social evolution.

Finally, the authors come up with a sharp distinction of groups of people in a society, namely elites and citizens, by overlooking the role of middle class while they later - paradoxically- go on to acknowledge the role of the latter in many cases. The fact that they merely characterize the middle class as a buffer zone between the elites and citizens and see its

existence only as a means of a catalyst ignore the significance of middle class in formation, continuation and consolidation of various former and recent democracies, as Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens lay out with a factual competence.

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