

Book Review: Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 448 pages.

After the Second Wave of Democratization

Edward Friedman

Larry Diamond, a leading analyst and promoter of democracy, asks in *The Spirit of Democracy* what will be the fate of democracy in the first part of the twenty-first century. He brings to this study a synthesis of skills and traits that few possess. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of the topic, resulting from global travel, political involvement, and deep reading. He joins this breath of knowledge with a passionate commitment to the virtues of freedom, combined with a hard-headed political realism. This is a book of profound reflection and wise insights. The sections on Nigeria (pp. 238-244) and on Iran (pp. 278-281) and on the need to improve the quality of democracy are particularly magnificent (chapters 13-15).

Diamond is concerned about the future of democracy. He asks, “Why are many third wave democracies weak and troubled?” (p. 296). He finds that Americans are right to be worried about the increasingly low quality of their democracy (p. 346). And many of the problems that plague America actually are “much worse in the European Union” (p. 349). Diamond’s proposed solutions—mandatory voting, making election day a holiday, a national service program, deliberative forums, making legislative seats competitive, ending gerrymandering, getting money out of politics, proportional representation, alternative voting—seem unlikely to be adopted or to achieve the desired goal. There therefore is no vibrant democracy in the offing to attract people living in authoritarian countries to struggle for political freedom.

If the wise Diamond is worried, we should all be concerned. He finds that democracy no longer seems very attractive to the international community. Instead, political leaders seek to learn from the rise of an authoritarian China. “Singapore...could foreshadow a resilient form of capitalist-authoritarianism in China, Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia” (p. 211) in an age where “Asia will determine the global fate of democracy” (p. 212), as Asian authoritarian-

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capitalism delivers “booming development, political stability, low levels of corruption, affordable housing, and a secure pension system” (p. 215). In addition, the rise of petroleum power enhances the weight and stability of authoritarian regimes that fund themselves by exporting high-priced energy. Authoritarian regimes seem to be doing better than democratic ones.

Some might hope instead that the rise of democratic India, Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia might be globally attractive. In contrast to most analysts of democracy, Diamond accords India the space and respect it merits (chapter 7). But these democratic countries are not about to join together to construct multilateral bodies to highlight how their constitutional liberties make their politics humanely superior to China’s Communist Party or the Saudi monarchy. The new age is not like the bipolar Cold War. With the economic issue privileged (p. 90), international politics does not pit democracies against authoritarians. Regimes scramble amorally to grapple with extraordinary economic challenges.

Some might hope that an economic crash might bring down China and oil power. But wishful thinking about why making things worse would actually make them better never has made things better. There therefore is no alternative but to come to grips with Diamond’s pessimistic (realistic?) assessment and prognosis.

Diamond sees anti-democratic forces dynamizing the world in the wake of the democratizations of East Europe and the former Soviet Union. The political cascade that turned the democratizations that had begun in the 1970s into a veritable tsunami, the third wave of democratic transitions (p. 291) is over. But what if the notion of a third wave, popularized by Sam Huntington, misleads?

What if the 1970s is better seen as also unleashing an anti-democratic tide? In order to reach numbers that can be characterized as a third wave, Huntington treated India as if it democratized only in 1977, at the end of Indira Gandhi’s short period of emergency rule, rather than as democratizing, as it actually did, in 1947, when India won its independence from the British Empire. What if World War II unleashed the most powerful democratic wave?

Why isn’t it obvious that Huntington coded India in a way he does not code “the West”? He does not treat France as democratizing from the end of an era of emergency rule, running from the late 1950s crisis of the Fourth Republic to the beginning of the Fifth Republic, as with India in 1975 to 1977, an emergency hiatus in constitutional governance that in France brought de Gaulle to the presidency under a new constitution. Despite a commitment to general theory rather than to cultural particularism, too often Diamond idealizes the histories of industrialized democracies so that developing country democracies seem less democratic than they are.

A more even-handed approach might make prospects for democracy seem more hopeful than Diamond allows. When discussing the good and bad of the Indian court system (p. 166), the reader should be able to measure it against, say, how big corporations buy state supreme courts in the United States to

protect themselves from liability from law suits for their recklessness in creating defective products which kill people. After all, Diamond wisely notes “that democracy means...accountability and responsiveness” (p. 167), which is what the weight of money in American politics often can cancel. Perhaps what is needed to get a more accurate fix on prospects for a new wave of democracy is a more critical approach to the prior waves.

Too much is hidden and misdescribed by the notion of a third wave of democracy. It may be more useful to see the democratization that happened starting around 1974 as the culmination of the great wave of democratization that came with the World War II victory over fascist Japan, Germany, Italy, and Austria. That democratizing thrust was interrupted by the Cold War, in which America would back dictatorships opposed to Stalin’s Soviet Union’s gaining greater global influence. In the Cold War era, Washington supported numerous authoritarian regimes, from fascist Spain to apartheid South Africa to single-party police states such as Chiang Kai-shek’s regime on Taiwan. America backed friendly authoritarian governments in order to check Soviet power. Russia could even ally with democratic India against America, which was allied to India’s adversary, the military dictatorship in Pakistan. During the Cold War, “the United States” supported “the overthrow of democratically elected governments in Iran in 1953, in Guatemala in 1954 and in Chile in 1973” (p. 1). Also, in Laos.

From this perspective of an interrupted second wave of post-World War II democratization, the waning of the Cold War opened up space for a reigniting of an anti-racist, inclusionary, freedom agenda that World War II had unleashed. Diamond notes that the end of the Cold War facilitated civilian control of the military (p. 182). Mark Thompson’s study of *Democratic Revolutions* (London: Routledge, 2004) finds that “it is only since the end of the Cold War that the democratizations have clearly outpaced breakdowns of democracy” (p. 130). I think that it is more useful to focus on the winding down of the Cold War in the Nixon years.

In Eastern Europe and the Soviet bloc, in an era of Moscow-Washington détente, the Helsinki Accords of 1977 helped legitimate an agenda of human rights and constitutional liberties as Nixon’s entente with Mao in 1972 helped delegitimize national security states in Asia, from Pakistan to Korea and, eventually, in Latin America’s so-called “free world” dictatorships. These authoritarian regimes began to lose their anti-communist reason for existing. A democratic alternative to KMT authoritarianism could be legitimated in Taiwan. The promise of victory over fascism in World War II—the Four Freedoms, decolonialization, anti-racism, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—which had been institutionalized in the democratization of Japan, Germany, Italy and Austria, could then be globalized, as détente allowed the Cold War to wind down.

Diamond’s data show that the new forces unleashed in the 1970s actually worked in an authoritarian direction. “Democracy had given way to the military

in Turkey and to civil war in Lebanon, and...[democratic] Bangladesh, Ghana and Nigeria ‘broke down’” (pp. 43, 57). Military coups toppled democracy in Fiji in 1987, Sudan in 1988, Thailand in 1991, and The Gambia and Lesotho in 1994, while Fujimori carried out a coup “in Peru in 1992” (p. 59). During the 1970s, the Leninists won in Vietnam, China abandoned Mao’s mobilizational autarky for openness to world market competition in order to stabilize the Chinese Communist Party’s authoritarian regime, and OPEC oil price spikes weakened democratic Europe and North America and empowered authoritarian petro-regimes. Perhaps the most important political event of the so-called third wave era, actually a rising anti-democratic tide, was the crushing, on June 4, 1989, of China’s nation-wide democracy movement. As a result, China’s “authoritarian rule can endure for a very long time” (p. 229).

Actually, Diamond’s data argue against thinking in terms of global waves. His focus is on “regions” (p. 52). Gorbachev’s undermining of the Soviet empire, both internally and externally, was essentially a regional event. So were southern European democratizations of the mid-1970s and subsequent Latin American democratizations. Diamond offers shrewd and separate analyses of Latin America (chapter 8), Asia (chapter 10), Africa (chapter 11), and the Middle East (chapter 12).

My main complaint about Diamond’s work is that too often he ignores his own persuasive data and insightful analysis to bow to Huntington and Lipset, whose hypotheses Diamond’s excellent study totally discredits. Against Lipset’s contention that increased wealth facilitates democratic breakthroughs, a proposition undermined also by Przeworski’s data, Diamond finds that “economist Jeffrey Sachs...has it upside down when he argues, ‘African governance is poor because Africa is poor’. Africa is poor because its governance is rotten” (p. 323). Ignoring this anti-Lipset finding, Diamond predicts, based on Lipset’s claim about wealth causing democracy, that authoritarian China will have “a different political system by 2025” (p. 237), which contradicts Diamond’s persuasive analysis of China’s stable and resilient authoritarianism.

For Diamond, everything rests on China. It is the rising economic superpower. “And if China can democratize, why not the world?” (p. 13). Diamond’s data, however, show that economically dynamic authoritarian China is moving in a Singapore direction in which an authoritarian dominant party commands wealth-making state institutions such as Sovereign Investment Funds, which then give the regime the patronage power to satisfy its loyal networks of supporters.

Our age, after the World War II second wave of democratization reached its peak, beginning in the 1970s with the implosion of the Keynesian Bretton Woods system which had permitted macro-economic management on behalf of growth with equity, has been replaced by an international economic era, infused by huge amounts of unregulated international finance that tend toward income polarization that weakens democratic possibilities. Given a certain

degree of popular anger over the injustices of polarization, vested economic interests will not risk the destiny of their wealth to decisions made by numbers of people. Diamond knows that it is elites, and not masses, that usually betray democracy. Democracy is now in trouble, but not for the reasons given by analysts of democratic preconditions such as Lipset.

As with his undermining of Lipset's claim about wealth producing democracy, Diamond does a brilliant job of skewering notions of cultural preconditions of democracy made popular by Huntington (chapter 1). He persuasively critiques Eurocentric parochialism. In fact, authority in the family was ranked more highly by Americans than by East Asians (p. 37). Diamond concludes that, "The obstacle to democracy in the Middle East is not the culture or the religion of Islam.... When asked in 2006 if democracy is a Western form of government, incompatible with Islam, two-thirds of those surveyed in Jordan and in Palestine disagreed" (p. 277). But then Diamond bows to Huntington, allowing that East European democratization "reflects deep historical and cultural legacies" (p. 192). "Most of these countries had long been socially and culturally ready for democracy" (p. 47), forgetting that the Serbs are not part of Huntington's "West."

As with his important arguments which counter the conventional wisdom on democracy, wealth, and culture, Diamond should pay more heed to his own excellent data on the anti-democratic forces unleashed in the 1970s. No third wave of democratization was perceived until the so-called wave had waned (p. 10). In fact, Huntington, Linz, Sartori, and other conservative analysts of democracy feared that democracy in Europe and America was in danger because of the popular participation of the 1960s. The conservative theorists focused on the mass mobilizations of French May and the American Civil Rights movement and on the violence of the German Baader-Meinhof gang, the Italian Red Brigades, and the Japanese Red Army. They worried about a breakdown of democracies as had occurred in the post-World War I era. Diamond is excellent in showing how analysts with little faith in the popular forces seeking freedom have time and again gotten democratic potential all wrong. Perhaps we again are too pessimistic today about prospects for future democratizations.

Diamond sees a reverse tide against democratization beginning only with "the 1999 military coup in Pakistan" (p. 12). He portrays Pakistan as trapped by anti-democratic forces which "viciously reinforced one another" (p. 59). While the future actually is still up for grabs, democratic prospects for Pakistan looked a mite less bleak in 2008, whatever happens subsequently. But for Diamond, "Around the world, a backlash has gathered against international democracy promotion efforts, led by Russia and China, and such regional petro-powers as Iran and Venezuela" (p. 12). These forces are real and weighty and Diamond's analysis of them is persuasive. Yet, I wonder if future trends are as obvious as Diamond suggests.

Do analysts really know whether populism, petroleum, and pro-Chavez

feelings will undermine democracy in Bolivia and Ecuador? Diamond offers compelling data on how the empowerment of indigenous peoples in Ecuador, Bolivia, and elsewhere is a great victory for democracy (chapter 8). Might it yet be possible that successful democracies such as Brazil will become the region's standard-bearer?

Diamond argues powerfully for the importance of understanding the humane superiority of even flawed and shallow democracies over authoritarian regimes. But I wish that when Diamond accurately depicted the inhumanities of democracy in Bihar, India (p. 24), he would have compared the fate of African-Americans in Southern Mississippi before 1968 or of Catholic Irish under English Protestant rule. Yet, more has to be done than is done by even the magnificently anti-Eurocentric Diamond to not idealize Europe and America, producing in such romanticization a false standard by which to measure democratic achievements or flaws in the rest of the world. For example, Diamond sees Malaysia as authoritarian (p. 26). I, in comparing Malaysia to America in the era of Jim Crow, see Malaysia as a shallow and flawed democracy.

There is a danger in treating Europe and America as different from the rest, a point Diamond establishes over and over. In looking at religion and politics in nineteenth-century Europe, Diamond finds that more attention should be paid to both the anti-democratic papacy and the rise of Christian Democratic parties, if one is going to understand the prospects for Muslim democratic parties (p. 286). It is worth remembering a Europe where people could be drawn, quartered, and burned at the stake for owning or reading a vernacular edition of the Bible. Europeans were not born tolerant. Indeed, democracy came to flourish in some nations of Europe in no small part because of an eventual backlash against monumental intolerance. It is darkest before the dawn.

His encyclopedic knowledge and critical arguments make Diamond uniquely realistic. He argues that only certain states are weighty enough to have a large regional impact on democracy's destiny. He sees most of these states—China, Russia, Egypt, Belarus, Ukraine, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Venezuela, Nigeria—as going the wrong way (chapter 3), especially those whose oil resources preclude a need to court tax-payers. With Russia and China using the Shanghai Cooperation Organization “to thwart efforts to promote democracy,” Diamond finds “an emerging global alliance for supporting authoritarian backlash” (p. 86).

I am persuaded by Diamond's pessimistic prognosis. The great second wave of democratization brought by the World War II mobilization against fascism has run its course. Large anti-democratic forces have been unleashed from the 1970s onward.

Diamond's work is an excellent introduction to this anti-democratic tide. But I also think we should remind ourselves of how frequently even the wisest of analysts has misunderstood both his own era and the age that was dawning, as with Huntington et al. in the 1970s and 1980s wrongly predicting no further

democratization. From Fiji to Venezuela, from Thailand to Kenya, I doubt that anyone knows for sure what will be the fate of the democratic project in the coming generation. Diamond, in his up-beat, Lipset-inspired moments, is open to believing that continued global economic growth will facilitate democratization (chapter 4). So will the new information technologies. Civil society growth will help, he finds. Perhaps.

But authoritarian China “can insulate a dictatorship” from democratic forces (p. 113). China’s wealth offers alternatives to good governance conditionality in Africa and elsewhere (p. 117). In addition, the lesson of Clinton’s Haiti policy revealed “the limits of democracy by force” (p. 134), even before Bush’s misadventure in Iraq. Given a conclusion drawn by many in the democracies, that there is little the democracies can do to promote democracy, it seems that, if there is a global contest between authoritarian China and a democratic United States or European Union, then the democratic side has surrendered even before the contest has begun.

Diamond finds that the Organization of American States is an effective promoter and defender of democracy, as are the Commonwealth of Nations and the EU (chapter 6). Still, as shown by how China, India, and ASEAN privilege access to Burmese oil and other resources over sanctioning the military tyranny for its systemic abuses of human rights, the economic factor is trump in this post-second wave era. This suggests that, despite a discussion of federalism (p. 162) and electoral and political systems (pp. 240-241), Diamond does not agree with those who find that the secret of successful democratization is good crafting. Far more powerful objective and structural dynamics are working in an anti-democratic direction.

It is surprising, however, that Diamond has nothing to say about Juan Linz or the numerous others who have focused on the vulnerabilities of democracies to breakdown and who then analyze how to avoid democratic breakdowns, surely a key topic for an age such as ours, an era in which, as with the post-World War I period, democracy is in danger and its authoritarian alternatives are attractive to many. Diamond’s serious and solid work should be the beginning of an important discussion about how to defend democracy in a difficult time.

The second wave of democratization has run its course. How then do we avoid a repetition of the horrors that attended the breakdowns of democracy after World War I? Diamond’s insightful work should be treated by democrats as a warning and a call for help in thinking about and acting for the preservation, deepening, and spreading of freedom in a most unpropitious age. In short, I fully embrace Diamond’s analysis and agenda.

