

Democracy and Democratization: theories and problems

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I think they've organised the speakers in the following way. Someone begins who's from Taiwan, then you move on to someone who knows something about Taiwan, and then you end up with me, who knows absolutely nothing about Taiwan. John started off by saying we're going to try to triangulate and, if you think of a triangle, each point in the triangle is as close as the other to the centre. But when it comes to Taiwan, I'm literally six or seven thousand miles away. So what would you do if you were like me, and you don't actually know very much about Taiwan? You want to talk about democracy, and you don't know very much about the specifics. Well, the natural thing then is to become very, very general. I'm not sure I'm going to answer the questions that John posed, but I'll talk about democratisation in a very general sense as a kind of global phenomenon historically. And this might involve a kind of reflection on the different experiences of small states. When you've got a process of democratisation going on for two hundred years or something, driven forwards and backwards by the influence of large states, fundamentally affecting smaller entities, often with a potential of dividing them into two. And so, I'll talk very much about democratisation from a very broad perspective. And this perspective might of course allow us to have some perspective on where Taiwan is in terms of global history, and the way democratisation is going forwards and going backwards all the time. This process of going forwards and backwards is felt more sensitively, I think, in states that are dependent on larger powers, or larger neighbours.

So one of the things I thought I'd do was to talk about a book that was written in the late 80s or early 90s by an American political scientist, Samuel Huntington. He had this book published called *The Third Wave of Democratisation*. And it was a very triumphalistic book which is to say that, written when it was, it really appeared as if democratisation had gone global, it was irreversible, and the whole world could share in this wave of democratisation, and become democratic. What I'm going to say is that I think that optimistic perspective is much, much darker now, after two or three decades. But I'll go into detail about what he said.

So he uses this idea that, since the early 19th century when we talk about democracy, democratisation has taken place in terms of three waves. The First Wave began in 1820, and

lasted until the Second World War. It was a slow wave. It affected most of the Americas, Western Europe, but not much else. Then you had a Second Wave beginning at the end of the Second World War, with the democratisation of Japan and West Germany, which lasted to 1972, 73. Then since 1974 with the Portuguese Revolution, you had an explosion of democratisation, what is known as the Third Wave. And there is a legitimate debate about the Third Wave, whether it's still ongoing, has it affected the whole world, does it explain Latin America in the 1980s, does it explain the post-communist countries, does it explain the Arab Spring? But Huntington's book was called *The Third Wave*, and the idea was that really in this period since the mid-1970s, we're looking at something that's global, it's universal, and it's unstoppable.

Now, one way of thinking about this when we talk about smaller states and larger states is that, if this dichotomy or this division of world history is true, it's pretty clear that in these particular waves, major international factors and the larger powers, whether or not they support democracy, are critical factors. So that what distinguishes the First Wave in time to the Second Wave is of course the Second World War, where the United States and the Allies defeated fascist power. Then what's also very important is you have the emergence of the Soviet Union as a world power, supporting decolonisation, then creating of course over a hundred new states which have the potential to become democratic. And then in this period since the Second World War, you have consistently the development of international institutions, like the UN, which are allegedly supposed to be spreading democratisation. So in a way the international factor has more and more important in all of this. And then we go forward to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the impact that had on Eastern Europe. But if we think about smaller states, it's often the case that we can't really see what they're experiencing in this story because the story is about larger powers, big events in which they don't have the decisive influence.

So I want to pose the question. If you consider what this Third Wave perspective, and this global perspective on democratisation, would be like now in 2013, rather than in 1989 when the Soviet Union collapsed or slightly after that when Huntington wrote his book, and the reason I say it's a less optimistic kind of picture is really because of four factors.

The first of those factors is that, when Huntington was making this type of analysis, we didn't have what we have now in Russia, China, potentially Turkey in the next decade – authoritarian states that are delivering economically, the assumption being back then that capitalism and democracy really worked very well together, and no one could match this.

The second thing was that you always see historically if you go back to the 1920s and 30s,

what they call reverse waves, where democratisation makes certain advances in a country, but then things go backward and backward. And this reverse wave is decisively affected by whether or not you have a neighbour which is a large state and authoritarian. So the emergence of fascist Germany in the 1930s had catastrophic impact on most of Europe in the 1930s. But you could say that about Russia today, Crimea being a sensitive case in point. Potentially it's the case of China in the future. So that the ability of democratisation to take a step backward is closely related to whether or not you have an authoritarian and non-democratic power, as a neighbour.

The third thing I really think is important is that, since the current economic crisis, that we have to realise that the sources of going backward, the political turbulence that Paul talks about, they're never really very far away because, as part of this discussion of democratisation and its successes, we develop this idea that democracies were not just stable, they weren't just democratic, but they were consolidated. They were going to remain there for a very long period of time. And then when you think of the countries that were considered consolidated, like Greece and Hungary and Spain and Portugal, all of a sudden you see how flimsy this concept can be. So what is it that's there underneath the surface that make these societies lose the sense of stability and go backward politically?

And the last thing of course is that in this particular area of democratisation, there is a fundamental distinction between democratic change, and transitions to something, and something that is going to be there for the long run. Four years ago everyone thought the Arab Spring was part of the Third Wave, or maybe constituted a Fourth Wave of its own. I was in Egypt two years ago, and almost everyone I met believed there had been a democratic revolution in Egypt. Now they've just sentenced five hundred members of the Muslim Brotherhood to death. So things can go backward very, very quickly.

Now I wanted to say something particularly about small states, and what this whole discussion about democratisation globally, and the relationship between the large states that really play a big role here, and the small states, what it might say about a small country like Taiwan. I am an expert on small states. I grew up in Ireland, I've written three books on the Republic of Ireland. And we've spent most of our history in the last eight hundred years, at least four hundred years, in the shadow of this state (UK). And I've also worked on the state Finland which was created in 1919, population of three million, with a border six hundred miles long with the most dangerous, the most lethal of authoritarian power in the twentieth century, the Soviet Union. But nonetheless, it survived. So what can we say about these small states, big states, and so forth.

Firstly, there's one thing that's ruled out historically. In the past, in this long process called the first wave, it was possible for some societies to develop in isolation democratically. Finland may have been an example, Costa Rica, Ireland, we can think of other ones – in relative isolation. But now because of globalisation and because of economic forces, that option isn't really there for democracies to develop slowly in isolation. You think of New Zealand, for example. New Zealand was one of the first countries ever to introduce the equal suffrage. But what major power was there down in that part of the world in the 19th century when it did that? It had been allowed to develop in isolation. That route is now not open.

The second thing is when we talk about waves of democratisation, and the Second Wave, what has accompanied this is of course, since the Second World War, since the First World War, is decolonisation and the creation of new states. So when we look at success and failure in terms of democracy, state building is going on, state formation at the same time. A hundred and thirty new states created since the Second World War. And it's in those new states that democracy is being tried out. And you think of Taiwan. How long has it had in order to develop as a state? Has it had enough time? Is this why sovereignty, is this way there are different conceptions of democracy, is this why there is polarisation? Because ultimately the question of democracy, the question of statehood, and the question of sovereignty, it really matters everywhere.

The third point of course is that we're talking now about globalisation. And it's quite curious that, if you went back to the 1990s, the international factor let's say with respect to Eastern Europe or Latin America was greatly influenced by the United States. The international factor made people very optimistic about democracy, and people said, 'Oh, democracy will happen when large states have leverage over small states.' So the European Union have leverage over Romania. The Americans have leverage over Mexico. But it will also happen when there are linkages, when there are organisations, services, economic connections, transnational links that are common between the large state and the small state. And people try to explain why democratisation was so successful within the European Union, and in Latin America, south and central America, in terms of these two factors, leverage and linkage. But of course leverage and linkage can be exercised as they have been in the last month in Russia and Crimea, by an authoritarian state. So you get back to that basic point, that realistically, this depends very much on relationships between small states and large states.

In conclusion, I think we're going to get it perfect here, not only have we got a nicely shaped triangle, but we're going to finish exactly on the hour. What would we say about small states. And what would you say about that question that John posed about why you can have in a very small state different conceptions of democracy, different conceptions of legitimacy, with

the potential to polarise. And actually when I was listening to Paul, I was just thinking that I wrote a book back in 2005 about when Ireland became a state, and where actually the opposition to the creation of a state after Britain and Ireland had agreed a treaty which of course had economic dimensions. The opposition also occupied buildings in the centre of Dublin, and the whole thing resulted in a civil war, and they lost the civil war precisely because of the point they didn't have an exit strategy. So when the occupation failed, they were completely marginalised and decimated by the government. So it's quite interesting to think about all these things, and the way in which the same arguments that people said, 'Of course this treaty is rational, of course this agreement will deliver economic benefits.' But it might not deliver economic benefits to everyone. And, in the long run, it might deliver things that are not of benefit in the long run. And it's in that context I think that you have discussions about sovereignty, legitimacy, Parliament, and so forth. So, okay, in terms of conclusion, I think when it comes to democracy in Taiwan and democracy in small states, the point is if you're a small state, Finland or Costa Rica or Ireland or Switzerland or whatever, your development can never be entirely endogenous, it can never be entirely autonomous. The decisive factors in your political history often originate outside your state. So you have what you call dependent development. That means that as a society you have to come to terms with that dependence. And it also means that the political elite in that country, if they want that country to survive, have to find consensual ways of building trust, consensus, and depolarisation in order not to be exploited by larger powers.

The second thing is going back to Finland. I spent a year in Finland, and there is a wonderful phrase about Finland. They have this expression that, in this country with its border with the Soviet Union, the fact that in the twentieth century it experienced three armed conflicts involving the Soviet Union, drawing a line between what is internal and what is external is very much like drawing a line on water. And the problem of this is not just an analytical one for people like ourselves. The problem is politically when you think about the kind of consequences of these conflicts, when the definition of what is internal and what is external enters into the body politic, it's a very dangerous dichotomy because someone starts being defined as being external, and some people start saying, 'We're the internal ones.' And that has been the experience of Finland. It led to a civil war back in 1917 just after it became independent. And then over the next twenty, thirty years, it had to recover from that. But once again the reason it recovered from that, it was this exceptional sensitivity to its own geopolitical isolation and its vulnerability to the Soviet Union. So I think certainly in terms of where small states stand, in terms of democratisation, and the way the steps forward and the steps backward for democracy are almost always determined from outside. I think small states really need an awful lot to counteract that influence.