

BOOK REVIEW

THE THIRD WAVE: DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY, BY SAMUEL P HUNTINGTON. OKLAHOMA: UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PRESS, 1991, 384 PAGES. ISBN: 9788475099606

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ABSTRACT

The discourse on democratization features prominently in the work of Samuel P. Huntington (1927-2008) entitled 'The Third Wave' which was published in 1991. Huntington was one of the most influential political scientists and previously held the position of university professor at the prestigious Harvard Kennedy School in the US. He authored many academic books on comparative politics and was the founder of the Foreign Policy Journal as well as the former president of the American Political Science Association (IPSA). Written in six interesting chapters, Huntington's Third Wave provides a clear-cut discussion on fundamental questions of when, why and how democratization occurs in different parts of the world. This fascinating book has contributed significantly to the empirical analyses on comparative transition to democracy and autocracy in around thirty global southern states, primarily in Latin America and Asia, and remains relevant for discourses on any future wave of global democratization.

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REVIEW

The text by Samuel Huntington (1991) titled ‘The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century’ discussed fundamental ideas about, and provided an in-depth understanding of, the process of democratization by explaining its waves, factors, conditions, challenges and future prospects. This paper reviews his detailed perspectives on waves of democratization and argues the possibility of future new waves – specifically the prospect of a ‘fourth wave’, based on recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly the post-Arab Uprisings’ phenomenon that can be compared with previous surges in democratization.

The word democratization specifically refers to political changes that move in a democratic direction. In other words, democratization is a process of developing and establishing democracy in a non-democratic state. Huntington gave a clear definition on democratization, as he defines it as a process of transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that same period of time. He also adds that a democratic transition normally involves liberalization or partial democratization in political systems that do not become fully democratic (Huntington 1991, p. 15). Democratization, in other words, is a continuous process which is influenced and determined by many factors and conditions in order for authoritarian states to move successfully towards liberal democracy.

When speaking of the comparative history of democratization, as debated in the book, Huntington claims that empirically three waves of democratization occurred in the modern world, stretching from the Northern Hemisphere to the Global South and each wave affected a number of countries. The first two waves of democratization were followed by a reverse wave in which some, but not all, of the countries that had previously made the transition to democracy reverted to a non-democratic regime. As Huntington pointed out, the first long wave of democratization (1828-1926), can be seen in the American and French revolutions which brought these states to nowadays serve as models for liberal democratic governments. The same circumstances also apply to Switzerland, Great Britain, Italy, Argentina, Ireland, Sweden and several smaller European states which made a transition to fully-fledged democracy from monarchic or autocratic regimes before the turn of the 20th century. The emergence of national democratic institutions, expansion of universal suffrage, introduction of the secret ballot, periodic elections and the establishment of prime ministerial or presidential responsibility and ministerial cabinets were the criteria adopted by the states mentioned above (Huntington, 1991).

Following the end of World War I, the trend towards global democracy was tapering off and reversing which led to the first reverse wave of democratization (1922-1942). During this period, several states returned to the traditional forms of authoritarian regime and military rule and some other states became more brutal with pervasive forms of totalitarianism. As Huntington stresses in the book, the reversals occurred largely in those ‘new democratic states’ which had adopted democratic rule just before or after World War I, where not only democracy was new, but also the nation and political system. Italy, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Yugoslavia, Austria, Japan, Brazil and Argentina were among the states which were involved with the non-democratic transition and reflected the rise of left wing ideologies such as Fascism, Nazism and Communism and also militaristic ideologies. There was also an uprising of strong anti-democratic movement in both France and Britain as a result of the economic depression which erupted in the 1930s. Indirectly, there had been a sign that back then, democracy was established on shaky grounds (Huntington, 1991).

Towards the end of World War II, a second short wave of democratization occurred between 1943 and 1962. The successful allied occupation had promoted the inauguration of democratic governments in West Germany, Austria, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Japan, Korea and several Latin America countries such as Brazil, Costa Rica, Argentina, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela. During this period, Huntington argues that the military dictatorship was much debilitated and all of these countries were practicing or were only starting to implement elections in order to form a legitimate representative government. Apart from that, the formation of the Atlantic Charter in 1941 which urged the Western States to end their colonial rule and promoted decolonization in many parts of Asia and Africa, produced a number of new independent states such as Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Nigeria. Although these new states were not seen as fully democratic states as in Western Europe and the United States, there was at least an effort to promote democratic rule through the formation of constitutions, general elections, referendums and the establishment of several new political parties (Huntington, 1991).

The second short wave of democratization however did not last long as many states especially in Asia, Latin America and Africa shifted and ‘reversed’ the wave moving towards authoritarianism via military coups, emergency rule and the implementation of martial law, as in the case of the Philippines and Indonesia in Southeast Asia, under the leadership of Ferdinand Marcos and Suharto respectively. The second reverse wave of democratization (1958-1975) showed that military intervention was the biggest challenge to be faced, in order to sustain a democratic government. As pointed out by Huntington, the global swing away from

democracy in the 1960s and 1970s was impressive when 13 governments in the world were the product of military coups by 1962 and this number had increased to 38 by 1975. These regime transitions had triggered broader pessimism about the future of democracy in many developing countries and also in a few developed countries. However, in the 15 years following the end of the Portuguese dictatorship in 1974, democratic regimes started to replace autocratic states in approximately thirty countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America (Huntington, 1991).

Between 1973 and 1990, as emphasized by Huntington, the absolute numbers of authoritarian regimes dramatically decreased which led to the advent of a new era of global democracy known as the third wave of democratization. The military regimes that had governed many parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America collapsed and were replaced by civilian governments such as those ruling in Greece (1974), Spain (1975), India (1977) Ecuador and Peru (1979), Bolivia (1982), Turkey (1983), Uruguay and Brazil (1984), the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1987) and Pakistan (1988). As a result, movements toward democracy seemed to have gained strength and support from the majority of the world population. At the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, as claimed by Huntington, the democratic wave engulfed the USSR and the communist world. Countries such as Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania managed to free themselves from Moscow's grip and began the political transition to democracy and a multi-party system. Overall, Huntington's book concludes that the movement towards democracy during this wave was a global one. The 'third wave of democratization' moved across southern Europe, sweeping through Latin America, moving on to large parts of Asia and decimating the dictatorship in the Soviet Empire. The book ends with a question to readers - is the third wave of democratization still continuing or is there any evidence of a third reverse wave or a fourth wave of democratization? To unravel this issue, I specifically refer to studies by Larry Diamond (1999, 2011 & 2012), Muhamad Olimat (2008 & 2011) and Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain (2013) which offer some justifiable explanation about a post third wave democracy after Huntington's legacy of the 'Third Wave'. The work of Larry Diamond (1999) entitled 'Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation' has delved profoundly into the future of Huntington's third wave and impending fourth wave of democratization. By questioning is the third wave of democratization over? Diamond established that from 1990 to 1996, the number and percentage of democracies in the world had increased every year thus producing a democratic breakthrough without precedent in world history. However, issues about freedom levels and human rights in many developing countries especially in Latin America and certain parts of Asia that create the possibility of a 'third reverse' wave, cannot be blindly dismissed (Diamond 1999, p. 24)

As Diamond pointed out, since the democratic transition occurred in the 1980s, Pakistan and India declined from “partly free” states to the edges of political chaos, with massive political corruption and heavy-handed presidential intervention forcing out one elected government after another. Chile, Brazil, the Philippines and Argentina experienced problems with civil liberties that resulted in ‘semi-autocratic’ countries, while Thailand, Turkey, Algeria and several Sub-Saharan African states faced a series of military interventions, both overt and subtle. However, even if these states’ progress towards democratic consolidation was partial and slow, crises were repeated and the quality of democracy deteriorated, in some respects, there were strong signs from civilians which demonstrated that there was no chance for a return to authoritarian rule. The post-1990s has proved that democracy still remains a valued goal as no anti-democratic ideology has emerged to challenge the continued global ideological hegemony of democracy; thus suggesting that there is no real ‘third reverse’ wave of democratization occurring after the third wave (Diamond 1999, p. 29).

If there is no evidence of a real third reverse wave, will there be a fourth wave of democratization? According to Diamond, the possibility of a fourth wave of democratization in the world rests most pivotally on the future of China and several other regions which encompass the Middle East, East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. At the moment, following the events of the Arab Spring that erupted in 2011 and several political transitions in Asia, it seems that only the Middle East and Southeast Asia have shown a promising future for democracy in that region in the coming years (Diamond 2012; Howard & Hussain 2013). The reality is that the time to begin a process of real political liberalization in Middle Eastern countries is long overdue. To this date, most of the authoritarian regimes in the Arab world are highly corrupted and are consistently experiencing challenges and ‘threats’ to their political legitimacy.

The uprisings against autocratic regimes that swept across the Middle East and North Africa particularly in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and several other Arab states appeared as the fourth wave that many scholars and activists had reasonably predicted and when compared to other regions in the past ‘transformative third wave’ (Diamond 2011; Howard & Hussain 2013). In addition, a view from Muhammad Olimat (2008, p. 24-25) is that the fourth wave of democratization actually begun several years ago when the United States launched its ‘global war on terror’ campaign in West Asia, particularly after the 9/11 tragedy. When the former United States president, George W. Bush declared his initiative to democratize the West Asia and the Middle East regions, particularly Iraq, this represented an exclusive fourth wave of democratization. In effect, it sought to transform the Islamic world in general and the Arab-Middle East in particular into a region of democracy (Olimat 2008, p. 25). The US-led attempts

to install democracy in Iraq seemed to fall into the category of externally ‘imposed’ democratization.

The possibilities for the introduction and consolidation of democracy are impacted by many factors as well as grand historical and social forces such as the failure of empires, the diffusion of models, the movement of peoples, the changes of generations and the transformation of values and class structures that come with economic development. These forces have potential to generate new pressures for democratization in the twenty-first century, as evidenced in the past democratic waves (Diamond 1999, p. 277). Although Huntington claims that there were common elements in the previous waves of democratization, there is some uniqueness with the recent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa as the emergence of new social media played a crucial role in promoting democratic transition and regime change - it helped to organize and mobilize the mass protest more effectively, generated political awareness among citizens more widely and frequently inspired people to be more responsible concerning the political, social and economic issues in the country. Inevitably, not only in the Arab region is the role of new social media affecting the process of democratization, but in many parts of Asia and this effect is very much a work in progress. By analyzing the way several countries evolved from Huntington’s ‘Third Wave’ of democratization, I argue that the Arab Uprisings’ phenomenon and the events in its aftermath have somehow started democratization’s fourth wave, as in the case of Tunisia and Morocco and perhaps the fourth reverse wave if we refer to the political developments in Egypt and Turkey.

Relying on years of comprehensive fieldwork, along with critical and detailed observation, Huntington’s legacies on the ‘wave of democratization’ have undoubtedly placed this book at the heart of comparative democracy studies. The causes, challenges and trends of authoritarianism and democratization at the global level illuminate the complexity of a number of democratic and political transitions in many parts of the modern world, especially in Asia and the Middle East. There is a great need to increase public awareness about the history of the long existence, durability and sustainability of democracy and democratic consolidation around the globe and the ‘Third Wave’ is certainly an important contribution to that goal. Although it has been around 30 years since the first publication of this book in 1991, Huntington’s outstanding work definitely stands as a brilliant introductory volume for students, policy makers and researchers to understand the development and genesis of global democracy, democratization and authoritarianism from the 19th century up until the present day. It is therefore considered as an excellent reference that continuously contributes to the discourse on contemporary democracy and democratization.

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