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Causes of democratic instability

# Introduction

“Democracy presupposes equality before the law, due process and political pluralism” (Kurlantzick). There are a number of empirical and comparative studies regarding democratic stability. These studies have focused on either the institutional political traditions or the socioeconomic factors. It is notable to mention that many studies focused on the transition and consolidation of democracy, but none of them addresses its long term stability. It is notable to mention that four groups of relevant independent variables determine the causes of democratic instability. These groups include institutional variables, societal variables, mediating variables, and foreign involvement. Rising strength of authoritarian power results in democratization. Here, the focus is to combine the two approaches (socioeconomic and political institutional traditions) in order to determine various factors that cause democratic instability.

**Variables**

Institutional Variables

There are four institutional variables that are associated with democratic instability. Among them, the first variable is federalism which distinguishes between the federal government (Germany) and unitary governments (Great Britain). It is observed that democratic collapse is vulnerable for federal states rather than unitary ones. It is evident in the case of the American Civil War that inclusion of federalism could undermine democracy as it leads to center-periphery struggles. Federalism is one of the majorities of restraining facets that can destabilize democracy. Therefore, federalism is beneficial to democratic stability (Groshek 1166). A stable democracy in pluralistic societies is achievable through federalism as it is conducive in alleviating ethnic and other social conflicts. Presidentialism is another variable which extricates presidential or semi-presidential systems (The United States and France) and parliamentary systems (Italy). Various studies have been made on this paradigm to find the connection between democratic stability and presidentialism. It is found that presidential regimes are more susceptible to democratic instability than parliamentary ones. It is notable to mention that the chances of conflict between the legislative and executive branch are the main reason behind this instability. Consolidation of democracy can be impeded by presidentialism (Llanos & Marsteintredet). Regardless of presidentialism, dual legitimatizes, rigidity, and zero-sum elections can emasculate the capability to make concessions, lead towards democratic instability.

Another important institutional variable is proportionality. Countries having less proportional electoral systems (Canada) are less prone to democratic instability as compared to countries with high electoral system proportionality (Netherlands). Various studies also examine the vulnerability of high electoral system proportionality to democratic collapse. High proportionality can increase the fragility of the party system as it has the ability to expand fragmentation. Constitutional weakness is an important factor that can determine the democratic stability of a country. Existing literature concludes that political systems with low constitutional constancy are more vulnerable to democratic instability as compared to high constitutional stability (Norris). It is evident in the case of Israel (lack of any stable constitution) and Thailand (major constitutional changes), which results in democratic collapse (Merom). On the other hand, democracy in the United is more stable as it has stable constitutions. The reason behind this is the normative framework of a constitution in which a democratic country function. Clashes that undermine democracy can be minimized with clear rules of the game in critical situations.

Societal Variables

Social cleavages are also associated with democratic collapse. Countries having parallel or deep social cleavages are vulnerable to democratic instability. It is evident in the case of Lebanon having deep social cleavages, which results in democratic collapse. Moreover, countries with low social cleavages such as Sweden are less prone to democratic collapse. The malfunctioning economy is another significant facet that evaluates its linkage with democratic stability. Economic stability is an important paradigm that elaborates the performance of democratic states. Countries having a stable economy are more likely to have democratic stability than those who have weak or unstable economies (Acemoglu, Daron, & Robinson). Weimar Germany is facing major economic problems, so its democracy is not stable, while Norway is democratic stable due to minor economic problems (Pérez-Liñán). High inflation rates are more susceptible to democratic stability. Positive economy performance contributes to democratic stability. Existing literature validates that economic development is more likely to endure a democratic system.

Unfavorable history is another significant variable for democratic stability as it deals with political culture, historical experience, and the extent of progress of the social society of a country. It is noteworthy to mention that a strong political culture and historical background are essential regimes to stabilize democracy in a country. Switzerland has democratic stability due to the democratic historical and civil societal background. Whereas, Peru and Turkey have democratic instability due to undemocratic or mixed historical backgrounds. Therefore, it is safe to say that democratic historical and civil societal background have the tendency to adopt democratic stability.

Mediating Variables

Mediating variables include fragmentation, polarization, and government instability. The degree of fragmentation of the party system in a single chamber of the parliament is a critical factor that distinguishes democratic stability and instability. Countries having low party fragmentation are more prone to democratic stability in comparison with countries having a high level of fragmentation. Democratic instability of Weimar Germany is a clear indicator that a high level of fragmentation in party systems (Brysk). On the other hand, the US is democratically stable due to low fragmentation. Therefore, it is evident that the two-party system is beneficial for political stability. Polarization in a party system is another mediating variable which is associated with democratic stability. Highly polarized systems are vulnerable to democratic instability. The sizable anti-systems political system of pre-Franco Spain is responsible for democratic collapse (Epstein et al.). On the other hand, a low degree of polarization in Australia is responsible for its democratic stability. The legitimacy of the regime is undermined due to polarization as it gives rise to extremist or anti-system parties. They hinder the formation of the government, hence resulting in democratic instability. Governmental instability is another mediating variable that is based on the durability of government coalitions (Rotberg 25). Governing coalitions and unstable governments are more vulnerable to democratic instability as seen in the case of the Fourth French Republic. Governmental instability indicates the overall decline in democratic stability.

Extraneous Variable

Foreign involvement is a significant factor as it has a great impact on democratic stability of a country. The illustrative power of foreign involvement makes its annexation authoritative in the examination of democratic collapse. Many cases have been seen in which foreign involvement plays a remarkable role to bring an end to democratic rule. Therefore, it is evident that countries experiencing immense foreign involvement are more vulnerable to democratic instability.

**Discussion**

Protests movements in Thailand and other states confirm that no inherent commitment to democratic ideals is exhibited when democracy secure the votes of the poorer majority due to populist policies (Kurlantzick). These countries damage the progress of strong democratic structures due to protests against elected leaders and calling for military intervention. According to Kurlantzick, War on Terror has the same impact on society as the Cold War. With the help of war on terror, western powers tried to align themselves with non-democratic leaders, which increases the democratic instability in that particular country. Additionally, corruption and mismanagement of the revenue of the country by political leaders are major factors that can cause democratic collapse. There is a high likelihood of democratic instability in countries having major episodes of corruption. If the rights and freedom of the people are trampled upon, then it gives rise to democratic instability (Kurlantzick). It is notable to mention that economic development contributes to democratic transitions. However, it is evident that the average effect of development on maintaining democracy is higher than the average effect for the whole period. The increase in education, urbanization, equality, and the weakening of traditional loyalties to the tribe are all contributing factors to economic development.

If states grew wealthier, they would develop greater middle classes that can lead to greater political, social, and economic freedoms. Dictators ruled a major portion of Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe up till 1900. However, in 2005, for the first time in history, more than half the population of the world was living in democratic states. Many leaders in those countries morph into elected autocrats after gaining control in the government's offices (Belloni). For instance, it is noteworthy mention that Hugo Chavez in Venezuela is elected as a dictator, while president of Ecudar, Rafael Correa recently won legislation which has provided him with excessive new powers. However, people themselves are responsible for sliding away from open and free government rather than just political leaders. A survey has been made by Afrobarometer in the African states to find out the patriotism of democratic states. It is found that the majority of Africans are not living to support democracy which is declining levels of support for democracy in these states. East Asia also shows rising dissatisfaction with democracy along with Colombia, Paraguay, Honduras, Peru, and Nicaragua. The populist leaders who appeared to be sliding into authoritarianism (McFaul). Citizens of these nations ended up supporting military coups against these democratic leaders due to their unethical measures. Such an example is seen in the history of Thailand when Thaksin Shinawatra turned populist and was elected with the largest mandate in the history of Thailand. The reason behind his success was a large mandate for the poor. During his service, he benefited the poor through various schemes and policies including national health insurance that proved to be effective for democracy. However, charismatic prime minister in 2005 gain victory in the free election (Diskin et al. 294). Majority of middle class revolted results in the military invasion to hold the current situation of the country. Democratization is forestalled due to the rising strength of authoritarian powers in Saudi Arabia, Russia, and China, etc. Foreign leaders play a major role in the democratic instability in a country. Foreign leaders often approach the autocratic leaders in the country to support them with money and power to help them forestall new color revolutions (Crane et al.). Such invasion can be seen in Ukraine, where an advisor Putin was running a Russian Press Club. It was found that Russia's involvement in Ukrainian elections is facilitated by that Russian Press Club, which clearly indicates that foreign involvement plays a critical role in the democratic stability of a country. Stopping the global democratic reversal is essential to promote democracy among various nations. The United States has the power to various covert countries into democratic states where it has significant strategic interests such as Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (Wantchekon). It will help to neutralize the idea that democracy is just a concept.

**Conclusion**

In a nutshell, institutional variables, societal variables, mediating variables, and foreign involvement are major facets that are associated with the democratic stability of a country. Federalism is a major restraining aspect of democratic stability. Proportionality of political system and their fragmentation can lead towards democratic stability. Citizens also contribute towards democratic instability if they force the military to take control of their country by diminishing the political parties. Rising strength of authoritarian powers leads towards democratization in countries like Saudi Arabia.

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