

in employing this combination, we may call it the U.S. option. A half-dozen newer democracies have also chosen this arrangement.

The Latin American option: presidential government with PR elections. In their strong preference for presidential government, Latin American countries have followed the same constitutional path as the United States. But in their choice of electoral systems, during the late twentieth century they generally followed European practice. As a result, in the fifteen Latin American countries where democratic institutions were more or less in place in the early 1990s, the basic constitutional pattern was a combination of presidential government and PR.⁴ So we might call this combination the Latin American option.

It is striking that—with one exception, Costa Rica—none of the older democracies has opted for this combination. Although the older democracies are strongly predisposed to PR, as we have seen they have overwhelmingly rejected presidential government. Costa Rica stands out as the exception. Because Costa Rica, unlike every other country in Latin America, has been steadily democratic since about 1950, I count it among the older democracies. Unlike the others, however, it combines presidentialism with PR.

The mixed option: other combinations. Alongside these more or less “pure” types, several older democracies have created constitutional arrangements that depart in important respects from pure types. They have done so in an effort to minimize the undesirable consequences of the pure types while retaining their advantages. France, Germany, and Switzerland provide important illustrations of constitutional ingenuity.

The constitution of the French Fifth Republic provides for both an elected president with considerable power and a prime minister dependent on the parliament. France has also modified the FPTP electoral system. In a constituency where no candidate for the national assembly receives a majority of votes, a second runoff election

is held. In the runoff, any candidate who won more than 12.5 percent of the registered voters in the first election can compete. Small parties thus have a shot at winning a seat here and there in the first round; but in the second round they and their supporters may decide to throw in their lot with one of the two top candidates.

In Germany, half the members of the Reichstag are chosen in FPTP elections and the other half by PR. Versions of the German solution have also been adopted in Italy and New Zealand.

In order to adapt their political system to their diverse population, the Swiss have created a plural executive consisting of seven councillors elected by the parliament for four years. The Swiss plural executive remains unique among the older democracies.⁵

THINKING ABOUT DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTIONS: SOME GUIDELINES

Drawing on the experiences of the older democracies touched on in the last two chapters, I would offer the following conclusions:

- Most of the basic problems of a country cannot be solved by constitutional design. No constitution will preserve democracy in a country where the underlying conditions are highly unfavorable. A country where the underlying conditions are highly favorable can preserve its basic democratic institutions under a great variety of constitutional arrangements. Carefully crafted constitutional design may be helpful, however, in preserving the basic democratic institutions in countries where the underlying conditions are mixed, both favorable and unfavorable. (More about this in the next chapter.)
- Essential as it is, maintaining fundamental democratic stability is not the only relevant criterion for a good constitution. Fairness in representation, transparency,

comprehensibility, responsiveness, and effective government are, among others, also important. Specific constitutional arrangements can and probably will have consequences for values like these.

- All constitutional arrangements have some disadvantages; none satisfy all reasonable criteria. From a democratic point of view, there is no perfect constitution. Moreover, the results of introducing or changing a constitution are bound to be somewhat uncertain. Consequently, constitutional design or reform requires judgments about acceptable trade-offs among goals and the risks and uncertainties of change.
- Over two centuries Americans seem to have developed a political culture, skills, and practices that enable their presidential-congressional system with FPTP, federalism, and strong judicial review to function satisfactorily. But the American system is exceedingly complicated and would probably not work nearly as well in any other country. In any case, it has not been widely copied. Probably it should not be.
- Some scholars contend that the Latin American combination of presidential government with PR has contributed to the breakdowns of democracy that have been so frequent among the republics of Central and South America.⁶ Although it is difficult to sort out the effects of constitutional form from the adverse conditions that were the underlying causes of political polarization and crisis, democratic countries would probably be wise to avoid the Latin American option.

Moved by his optimism about the French and American revolutions, Thomas Jefferson once asserted that a revolution about every generation would be a good thing. That romantic idea was shot down during the twentieth century by the numerous revolutions

that failed tragically or pathetically or, worse, produced despotic regimes. Yet it might not be a bad idea if a democratic country, about once every twenty years or so, assembled a group of constitutional scholars, political leaders, and informed citizens to evaluate its constitution in the light not only of its own experience but also of the rapidly expanding body of knowledge gained from the experiences of other democratic countries.

PART IV *Conditions
Favorable and
Unfavorable*

What Underlying Conditions Favor Democracy?

The twentieth century was a time of frequent democratic failure. On more than seventy occasions democracy collapsed and gave way to an authoritarian regime.¹ Yet it was also a time of extraordinary democratic success. Before it ended, the twentieth century had turned into an age of democratic triumph. The global range and influence of democratic ideas, institutions, and practices had made that century far and away the most flourishing period for democracy in human history.

So we face two questions—or, rather, the same question put two ways. How can we account for the establishment of democratic institutions in so many countries in so many parts of the world? And how can we explain its failure? Although a full answer would be impossible, two interrelated sets of factors are undoubtedly of crucial importance.

FAILURE OF THE ALTERNATIVES

First, in the course of the century the main alternatives pretty much lost out in the competition with democracy. Even by the end of the century's first quarter the nondemocratic forms of government that from time immemorial had dominated beliefs and practices throughout most of the world—monarchy, hereditary aristocracy, and open oligarchy—had fatally declined in legitimacy and ideological strength. Although they were replaced by more widely

popular antidemocratic alternatives in the form of fascism, Nazism, Leninism, and other authoritarian creeds and governments, these flourished only briefly. Fascism and Nazism were mortally wounded by the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II. Later in the century, military dictatorships, notably in Latin America, fell under the weight of their failures economic, diplomatic, and even military (Argentina). As the last decade of the century approached, the remaining and most important totalitarian rival to democracy, Leninism as embodied in Soviet communism, abruptly collapsed, irreparably weakened by internal decay and external pressures.

So was democracy now secure throughout the globe? As the American president Woodrow Wilson optimistically (and, as it turned out, wrongly) proclaimed in 1919 after the end of World War I, had the world at last “been made safe for democracy”?

Unfortunately, no. A final victory for democracy had not been achieved, nor was it close. The most populous country on earth and a major world power, China, had not yet been democratized. During the four thousand years of an illustrious civilization, the Chinese people had never once experienced democracy; and the prospects that China would soon become democratic were highly dubious. Nondemocratic regimes persisted in many other parts of the world as well, in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and some of the remnants of the dissolved USSR. In most of these countries the conditions for democracy were not highly favorable; consequently, it was unclear whether and how they would make the transition to democracy. Finally, in more than a few countries that had made the transition and introduced the basic political institutions of polyarchal democracy, the underlying conditions were not favorable enough to guarantee that democracy would survive indefinitely.

Underlying conditions? I have suggested yet again that certain underlying or background conditions in a country are favorable to the stability of democracy and where these conditions are weakly

FIGURE 8. *What conditions favor democratic institutions?*

Essential conditions for democracy:

1. Control of military and police by elected officials
2. Democratic beliefs and political culture
3. No strong foreign control hostile to democracy

Favorable conditions for democracy:

4. A modern market economy and society
5. Weak subcultural pluralism

present or entirely absent democracy is unlikely to exist, or if it does, its existence is likely to be precarious.

So it is now time to ask: What are these conditions?

To answer, we can draw on a large body of relevant experience provided by the twentieth century: countries that have undergone a transition to democracy, consolidated their democratic institutions, and retained them over many decades; countries where the transition has been followed by collapse; and countries that have never made the transition. These instances of democratic transition, consolidation, and breakdown indicate that five conditions (and there are probably more) significantly affect the chances for democracy in a country (fig. 8).

FOREIGN INTERVENTION

Democratic institutions are less likely to develop in a country subject to intervention by another country hostile to democratic government in that country.

This condition is sometimes sufficient to explain why democratic institutions failed to develop or persist in a country where other conditions were considerably more favorable. For example, were it not for the intervention of the Soviet Union after World War II, Czechoslovakia would probably be counted today among the older

democracies. Soviet intervention also prevented Poland and Hungary from developing democratic institutions.

More surprisingly, until the last decades of the twentieth century the United States had compiled a dismal record of intervention in Latin America, where it had sometimes undermined a popularly elected government by intervening against it to protect American businesses or (in the official view) American national security. Although these Latin American countries where democracy was nipped in the bud were not necessarily fully democratic, had they been free from American intervention—or, better yet, strongly supported in their initial steps toward democratization—democratic institutions might well have evolved in time. A particularly egregious example was the clandestine intervention of U.S. intelligence agencies in Guatemala in 1964 to overthrow the elected government of a populist and left-leaning president, Jacopo Arbenz.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the countries of Central Europe and the Baltic moved speedily to install democratic institutions. In addition, the United States, and the international community generally, began to oppose dictatorships in Latin America and elsewhere and to support the development of democratic institutions throughout much of the world. Never in human history had international forces—political, economic, and cultural—been so supportive of democratic ideas and institutions. During the last decades of the twentieth century, then, an epochal shift occurred in the world's political climate that greatly improved the prospects for democratic development.

CONTROL OVER MILITARY AND POLICE

Unless the military and police forces are under the full control of democratically elected officials, democratic political institutions are unlikely to develop or endure.

In contrast to the external threat of foreign intervention, perhaps

the most dangerous internal threat to democracy comes from leaders who have access to the major means of physical coercion: the military and the police. If democratically elected officials are to achieve and maintain effective control over military and police forces, members of the police and military, especially among the officers, must defer to them. And their deference to the control of elected leaders must become too deeply ingrained to cast off. Why civilian control has developed in some countries and not in others is too complex to describe here. But for our purposes the important point is that without it, the prospects for democracy are dim.

Consider the unhappy history of Central America. Of the forty-seven governments in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua between 1948 and 1982, more than two-thirds gained power by means other than free and fair elections—most frequently by a military coup.²

In contrast, Costa Rica has been a beacon of democracy in the region since 1950. Why were Costa Ricans able to develop and maintain democratic institutions when all their neighbors could not? A part of the answer is to be found in the existence of the other favorable conditions. But even these would not have sustained a democratic government in the face of a military coup, as so often occurred in the rest of Latin America. In 1950, however, Costa Rica dramatically eliminated that threat: in a unique and audacious decision, the democratic president abolished the military!

No other country has followed Costa Rica's example, nor are many likely to. Yet nothing could illustrate more vividly how crucial it is for elected officials to establish and maintain control over the military and police if democratic institutions are to be established and preserved.

CULTURAL CONFLICTS WEAK OR ABSENT

Democratic political institutions are more likely to develop and endure in a country that is culturally fairly homogeneous and

less likely in a country with sharply differentiated and conflicting subcultures.

Distinctive cultures are often formed around differences in language, religion, race, ethnic identity, region, and sometimes ideology. Members share a common identity and emotional ties; they sharply distinguish “us” from “them.” They turn toward other members of their group for personal relationships: friends, companions, marriage partners, neighbors, guests. They often engage in ceremonies and rituals that, among other things, define their group boundaries. In all these ways and others, a culture may become virtually a “way of life” for its members, a country within a country, a nation within a nation. In this case society is, so to speak, vertically stratified.

Cultural conflicts can erupt into the political arena, and typically they do: over religion, language, and dress codes in schools, for example; or equality of access to education; or discriminatory practices by one group against another; or whether the government should support religion or religious institutions, and if so, which ones and in what ways; or practices by one group that another finds deeply offensive and wishes to prohibit, such as abortion, cow slaughter, or “indecent” dress; or how and whether territorial and political boundaries should be adapted to fit group desires and demands. And so on. And on.

Issues like these pose a special problem for democracy. Adherents of a particular culture often view their political demands as matters of principle, deep religious or quasi-religious conviction, cultural preservation, or group survival. As a consequence, they consider their demands too crucial to allow for compromise. They are nonnegotiable. Yet under a peaceful democratic process, settling political conflicts generally requires negotiation, conciliation, compromise.

It should come as no surprise to discover, then, that the older and

politically stable democratic countries have for the most part managed to avoid severe cultural conflicts. Even if significant cultural differences exist among citizens, they have generally allowed more negotiable differences (on economic issues, for example) to dominate political life most of the time.

Are there no exceptions to this seemingly happy state of affairs? A few. Cultural diversity has been particularly significant in the United States, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Canada. But if diversity threatens to generate intractable cultural conflicts, how have democratic institutions been maintained in these countries?

Their experiences, though very different, show that in a country where all the other conditions are favorable to democracy, the potentially adverse political consequences of cultural diversity can sometimes be made more manageable.

Assimilation. This was the American solution. From the 1840s to 1920, the dominant culture, which during two centuries of colonial rule and independence had been solidly established by white settlers who mainly came from Great Britain, confronted waves of non-British immigrants from Ireland, Scandinavia, Germany, Poland, Italy, and elsewhere—immigrants who could often be distinguished by differences in language (except for the Irish), religion, food, dress, customs, manners, neighborhood, and other characteristics. By 1910 almost one in five white persons residing in the United States had been born elsewhere; in addition, the parents of more than one in four of the native-born whites had been born abroad. Yet within a generation of two after immigrants reached the United States, their descendants were already assimilated into the dominant culture, so fully indeed that although many Americans today retain (or develop) a certain attachment to their ancestral country or culture, their dominant political loyalty and identity is American.

In spite of the impressive success of assimilation in reducing the

cultural conflicts that massive immigration might otherwise have produced in the United States, the American experience reveals some crucial shortcomings in that solution.

To begin with, the challenge of assimilation was greatly eased because a great many of the adult immigrants who came to the United States to achieve the better life it promised were fairly eager to assimilate, to “become real Americans.” Their descendants were even more so. Thus assimilation was mainly voluntary or enforced by social mechanisms (such as shame) that minimized the need for coercion by the state.³

If a massive population of immigrants was, on the whole, successfully assimilated, when American society confronted deeper racial or cultural differences the limits of that approach were soon revealed. In the encounters between the white population and the native peoples who had long occupied the New World, assimilation gave way to coercion, forced resettlement, and isolation from the main society. Nor could American society assimilate the large body of African-American slaves and their descendants, who, ironically, had like the Indians been living in America well before most other immigrants arrived. Coercively enforced caste barriers based on race effectively barred assimilation. A somewhat similar failure also occurred in the late nineteenth century when immigrants arrived from Asia to work as laborers on railroads and farms.

There was one further great divide that assimilation could not bridge. During the early nineteenth century a distinctive subculture, economy, and society based on slavery developed in the southern states. Americans living in the southern states and their compatriots in the northern and western states were divided by two fundamentally incompatible ways of life. The ultimate outcome was an “irrepressible conflict” that could not be resolved, despite great effort, by peaceful negotiation and compromise.⁴ The resulting civil war lasted for four years and took a huge toll in human lives. Nor

did the conflict end even after the defeat of the South and the abolition of slavery. A distinctive southern subculture and social structure then emerged in which the subjection of African-American citizens was enforced by the threat and actuality of violence and terror.

So much for the past failures of assimilation. By the end of the twentieth century it was unclear whether the historic American practice of assimilation could cope successfully with the steadily increasing Hispanic minority and other self-conscious minorities as well. Will the United States develop into a multicultural society where assimilation no longer insures that cultural conflicts are managed peacefully under democratic procedures? Or will it become one in which cultural differences produces a higher level of mutual understanding, toleration, and accommodation?⁵

Deciding by consensus. Distinctive and potentially conflicting subcultures have existed in Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. What can we learn from the experiences of these three democratic countries?

Each created political arrangements that required unanimity or broad consensus for decisions made by the cabinet and the parliament. The principle of majority rule yielded (in varying degrees) to a principle of unanimity. Thus any government decision that would significantly affect the interests of one or more of the subcultures would be made only with the explicit agreement of the representatives of that group in the cabinet and parliament. This solution was facilitated by PR, which insured that representatives from each of the groups would be fairly represented in parliament. They were also represented in the cabinet. And under the consensual practices adopted in these countries, the cabinet members from each subculture could exercise a veto over any policy with which they disagreed. (Arrangements like these, which political scientists refer to as “consociational democracy,” vary greatly in details among the three countries. For more, see Appendix B.)

Clearly, consensual systems like these cannot be created or will not work successfully except under very special conditions. These include a talent for conciliation; high tolerance for compromise; trustworthy leaders who can negotiate solutions to conflicts that gain the assent of their followers; a consensus on basic goals and values that is broad enough to make agreements attainable; a national identity that discourages demands for outright separation; and a commitment to democratic procedures that excludes violent or revolutionary means.

These conditions are uncommon. Where they are absent, consensual arrangements are unlikely. And even if they are somehow put in place, as the tragic example of Lebanon indicates, they may collapse under the pressure of acute cultural conflict. Once described by political scientists as a highly successful "consociational democracy," Lebanon plunged into a prolonged civil war in 1958, when internal stress proved too great for its consensual system to manage.

Electoral systems. Cultural differences often get out of hand because they are fueled by politicians competing for support. Authoritarian regimes sometimes manage to use their massive coercive power to overwhelm and suppress cultural conflicts, which then erupt as coercion declines with steps toward democratization. Tempted by the easy pickings provided by cultural identities, politicians may deliberately fashion appeals to members of their cultural group and thereby fan latent animosities into hatreds that culminate in "cultural cleansing."

To avoid this outcome, political scientists have suggested that electoral systems could be designed to change the incentives of politicians so as to make conciliation more profitable than conflict. Under the arrangements they propose, no candidates could be elected with the support of only a single cultural group; they would need to gain votes from several major groups. The problem, of

course, is to persuade political leaders early in the process of democratization to adopt arrangements of this kind. Once a more divisive electoral system is in place, the spiral into cultural conflict may be all but irreversible.

Separation. When cultural cleavages are too deep to be overcome by any of the previous solutions, the only remaining solution may be for cultural groups to separate themselves into different political units within which they possess enough autonomy to maintain their identity and achieve their main cultural goals. In some situations the solution might be a federal system in which the units—states, provinces, cantons—are sufficiently autonomous to accommodate the different groups. A critical element in the remarkable harmonious multicultural society created by the Swiss is their federal system. Most of the cantons are fairly homogeneous culturally; for example, one canton may be Francophone and Catholic and another German-speaking and Protestant. And the powers of the cantons are adequate for cultural needs.

Like the other democratic political solutions to the problem of multiculturalism, the Swiss solution also requires unusual conditions—in this case, at least two. First, citizens in different subcultures must be already separated along territorial lines, so that the solution imposes no severe hardships. And second, though divided for some purposes into autonomous units, the citizens must have a national identity and common goals and values sufficiently strong to sustain the federal union. Although both conditions hold for Switzerland, neither is at all common.

Where the first condition exists but not the second, cultural differences are likely to produce demands for full independence. If one democratic country becomes two by peacefully separating, the solution seems impeccable when judged purely by democratic standards. For example, after almost a century of near independence in a union with Sweden, in 1905 Norway peacefully gained full independence.

But if the first condition exists only imperfectly because the groups are intermingled, then independence may impose severe hardships on the minority (or minorities) to be included in the new country. These may in turn justify their own claims either for independence or for remaining, somehow, within the mother country. This problem has complicated the issue of independence from Canada for the province of Quebec. Although many French-speaking citizens of Quebec wish to gain full independence, the province also includes a sizable number of non-Francophones—English-speakers, aboriginal groups, and immigrants—who wish to remain Canadian citizens. Although a complicated territorial solution is theoretically possible that would allow most of those who preferred to remain in Canada to do so, whether it will prove to be political possible is unclear.⁶

The disheartening fact is, then, that all the solutions to the potential problems of multiculturalism in a democratic country that I have described, and there may be others, depend for their success on special conditions that are likely to be rare. Because most of the older democratic countries have been only moderately heterogeneous, they have largely been spared from severe cultural conflicts. Yet changes began to set in toward the end of the twentieth century that will almost certainly end this fortunate state of affairs during the twenty-first century.

DEMOCRATIC BELIEFS AND CULTURE

Sooner or later virtually all countries encounter fairly deep crises—political, ideological, economic, military, international. Consequently, if a democratic political system is to endure it must be able to survive the challenges and turmoil that crises like these present. Achieving stable democracy isn't just fair-weather sailing; it also means sailing sometimes in foul and dangerous weather.

During a severe and prolonged crisis the chances increase that

democracy will be overturned by authoritarian leaders who promise to end the crisis with vigorous dictatorial methods. Their methods, naturally, require that basic democratic institutions and procedures be set aside.

During the twentieth century the collapse of democracy was a frequent event, as the seventy instances of democratic breakdown mentioned at the beginning of this chapter attest. Yet some democracies did weather their gales and hurricanes, not just once but many times. Several, as we saw, even overcame the dangers arising from sharp cultural differences. And some emerged with the democratic ship of state even more seaworthy than before. The survivors of these stormy periods are precisely the countries we can now call the older democracies.

Why did democratic institutions weather crises in some countries but not in others? To the favorable conditions I have already described, we need to add one more. The prospects for stable democracy in a country are improved if its citizens and leaders strongly support democratic ideas, values, and practices. The most reliable support comes when these beliefs and predispositions are embedded in the country's culture and are transmitted, in large part, from one generation to the next. In other words, the country possesses a democratic political culture.

A democratic political culture would help to form citizens who believe that: democracy and political equality are desirable goals; control over military and police should be fully in the hands of elected leaders; the basic democratic institutions described in Chapter 8 should be maintained; and political differences and disagreements among citizens should be tolerated and protected.

I don't mean to suggest that every person in a democratic country must be formed into perfect democratic citizens. Fortunately not, or surely no democracy would ever exist! But unless a substantial majority of citizens prefer democracy and its political institutions to any

nondemocratic alternative and support political leaders who uphold democratic practices, democracy is unlikely to survive through its inevitable crises. Indeed, even a large minority of militant and violent antidemocrats would probably be sufficient to destroy a country's capacity for maintaining its democratic institutions.

How do people in a country come to believe in democratic ideas and practices? How do democratic ideas and practices become an intrinsic part of the country's culture? Any attempt to answer these questions would require us to delve deeply into historical developments, some general, some specific to a particular country, a task well beyond the limits of this book. Let me say only this: Lucky is the country whose history has led to these happy results!

But of course history is not always so generous. Instead, it endows many countries with a political culture that, at best, supports democratic institutions and ideas only weakly and, at worst, strongly favors authoritarian rule.

ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH A MARKET ECONOMY

Historically, the development of democratic beliefs and a democratic culture has been closely associated with what might loosely be called a market economy. More specifically, a highly favorable condition for democratic institutions is a market economy in which economic enterprises are mainly owned privately, and not by the state, that is, a capitalist rather than a socialist or statist economy. Yet the close association between democracy and market-capitalism conceals a paradox: a market-capitalist economy inevitably generates inequalities in the political resources to which different citizens have access. Thus a market-capitalist economy seriously impairs political equality: citizens who are economically unequal are unlikely to be politically equal. In a country with a market-capitalist economy, it appears; full political equality is impossible to achieve. Consequently, there is a permanent tension between democracy