



IS DEMOCRACY FOR EVERYONE?

Larry Diamond

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Interviewed by John D. Sullivan, Executive Director of the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)

The Spirit of Democracy

Sullivan: Good morning. I'm John Sullivan with the Center for International Private Enterprise – CIPE for short. I'm here this morning with Larry Diamond. Larry is a fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and he's also the author of a new book titled *The Spirit of Democracy*. Larry and I are here today in Kiev, Ukraine, attending the World Movement of Democracy – the fifth World Movement, actually, which brings me to another of Larry's titles. He's also the co-editor of the *Journal of Democracy*.

We want to talk to Larry about some of the thinking, the research, and the findings that have gone into this new book of his. What captured my attention immediately was your bold statement at the beginning of the book that you want to figure out: Can the world become democratic? Can all of the countries of the world become democratic? So what did you conclude?

Can the whole world become democratic?

Diamond: Yes. And the reason why, John, is because, as I document in *The Spirit of Democracy*, over the last 30 years we've gone from a quarter of the world's states being democracies (at least electoral democracies with truly free and fair elections) to about 60 percent of all the world's states. And several of them are Muslim-majority states like Indonesia, Senegal. Perhaps Pakistan is returning to democracy. And a number of them are very poor states. You have about two in every five very poor states that are now democracies. So these are things we've never seen before. And they all bode very well for the future.

Sullivan: So you're not a believer in the argument that Islam is incompatible with democracy.



Diamond: No, not at all. And the reason is if you look outside the Arab world, there are about 43 Muslim-majority states in the world. Twenty-two of them are members of the Arab League; 21 are outside the Arab League. And if you look at that other 21, they have considerably more experience with democracy, much higher levels of freedom as measured by Freedom House.

Are Islam and democracy compatible?

You have Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia, Senegal, and Mali that are already democracies now for at least 10 years. You have other big Muslim-majority countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh with a lot of experience with democracy and probably returning to democracy these days.

So there's something about the Arab world that's well beyond Islam that represents a serious problem, partly the way that Islam is mobilized, partly the ongoing so-difficult-to-resolve Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and, let's face it, partly oil in the Gulf region. We've got 23 states in the world that derive most of their export earnings from oil and gas, and not a single one is a democracy.

Sullivan: Flipping now to another region of the world where many have argued we'll see a stalling of democracy or rather not even the beginning of a transition. And that is Asia, specifically China. The idea is that you can have an authoritarian capitalist regime as an alternative model. What is your view on that?

Is Chinese model an alternative to democracy?

Diamond: Well, it's an alternative model in the largest country in the world whose economic dynamism has increasingly impressed people around the world. It's an alternative model for the moment. But the question is how long it will last. As I say in my book, I think we can be reasonably confident – I'm certainly very confident – that, thirty years from now, India will have more or less the same democratic constitutional system it has. They may make some more refinements and amendments, but India will continue to be a federal democracy, flexible rule-of-law based.

China is likely to have a very different political system than it has now, because its political institutions are not able to allow for the kind of participation, self-determination, protest, redress of



grievances that the Chinese people – increasingly educated, increasingly organized, increasingly angry over the abuse of power – are demanding. So something’s going to have to change. The Chinese system is either going to have to evolve incrementally toward more constitutionalism, freedom, law-based society. Or, there’s going to be some drama that’s probably going to bring down Communist rule.

The changes underway in China

Sullivan: Well, you know, across the south of China, we’ve been involved through our Center with what has been a truly remarkable development, and that is the rise of truly independent business associations and other kinds of civil society organizations. Do you see those as being vehicles for part of this change that you’re talking about?

Diamond: Oh, I think they’re at the cutting edge of change. People say that the “capitalist class,” some of which has been drawn into the Communist Party and one of Jiang Zemin’s legacies, has just been co-opted and signed itself to Communist rule. But I think what you are finding in your work in China and what I have found in my visits to China is that there are a lot of businessmen, particularly below the level of the giant capitalists, mid-level capitalists, who feel the heavy corrupt hand of the state on their neck, who resent the intrusion, who want a more rule-based, law-based, transparent society and economy, and who increasingly have the resources to demand it.

And you combine that with the growth of pluralism in the mass media, the growth of intellectual pluralism, not only the universities but even in the Communist party schools, not the least the Central Party School in Beijing, and the growth of other kinds of non-governmental organizations in civil society, particularly in the environmental movement, not to mention human rights and religious groups. All of these constitute the stuff for pressing forward for democratic change and, at some point, possibly even in unexpected circumstances, actually a transition to democracy in China.



Are we in a democratic recession?

Sullivan: One last question, Larry, in order to end on a really positive note. You're among those who have said that the third wave of democracy has ended. Are we in a backlash? How do we get to this world of democracies that you've described so eloquently in your book *The Spirit of Democracy*?

Diamond: I don't think it's going to happen overnight. I think we will have a day – as I say to my students – it may not be in my lifetime, but it will be in your lifetime when all the states of the world will be democratic. And I say that because you can see the trends over time. They're very positive in terms of the growth not only in the number of democracies, but in the stability and rootedness of some democracies in the developing world.

One could never have expected Brazil, for example, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and others in Latin America would go as far as they've gone. I think we can now say for the most part, the era of the military coup is over in Latin America. We've got Korea now a stable democracy – look at its history – and Indonesia, the largest Muslim country where democracy is doing very well.

So I think it's going to take several decades of sustained economic growth, reforming economic structures, reforming government structures, a continuation of change in values, the progress of globalization where the values and ideas of democracy, through a variety of media, including this one, are diffusing around the world.

Global spread of democratic norms

And I think that if you look at the trends in terms of global norms and look at the growth of these norms in international covenants and charters, most recently the Community of Democracies. Look at how these have been increasingly codified in the Charter of the Organization of American States, which now has a democracy charter for the Americas, and in the new Charter of the African Union. And even the way that deeply authoritarian governments like that in Russia, Vladimir Putin, crave some level of approval of the West and try so hard to mask their authoritarian practices with a veneer of democracy. All of this suggests that democracy



continues to be the only truly legitimate form of government in the world.

And that's a very hopeful sign. If we keep our will, if we keep our wits, if we persist as an international community – and the United States has the largest democracy – in peacefully supporting movements for democracy around the world and these norms of good governance in a variety of respects, if we can use our aid programs collectively around the world, our development assistance programs more intelligently and somewhat more critically to link them to expectations for better governments rather than unconditionally pouring money onto states, no matter how corrupt they are (this a major theme of *The Spirit of Democracy*) then I'm actually very optimistic about the future.

Sullivan: Thank you, Larry.

Diamond: Thank you, John.

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