



Democracy in the South

Participation, the State and the People

Edited by **Brendan Howe, Vesselin Popovski** and **Mark Notaras**

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**United Nations
University Press**

TOKYO • NEW YORK • PARIS

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Introduction: Participation, the state and the people

Brendan Howe and Vesselin Popovski

The concept of democracy or “rule by the people” has assumed such a positive normative value that to be seen as criticizing its fundamental tenets (or being overtly “undemocratic”) is to be stigmatized as a social pariah, and to be seen as deviating from its accepted tenets in practice is to invite the label of “rogue state”. However, this project argues that democracy is an essentially contested concept rather than conforming to a single universal model.

Even if we agree that the essence of democracy is “government of the people, by the people and for the people”, there exist different interpretations of which element is more important and how best to implement these ideals in practice. “Pure” democracy does not and cannot exist because of inherent contradictions within the underlying principles and practicalities of governance, making trade-offs essential. An emphasis on different pushes and pulls has led to the evolution of different models, all of which deviate from the ideal in some aspect. Thus the Northern or Western consensus on the balance that should be reached between competing pushes and pulls does not have the sole claim to legitimacy, nor is it transferable in all instances.

The problem addressed herein is the extent to which Southern models and practices may nevertheless be considered democratic under certain conditions, irrespective of Northern censure, and may in fact outperform Northern models in fulfilling the prime objectives of democratic governance in the Southern context.

Collective decision-making

Since the rise of the modern state there has been a need for a form of collective decision-making that takes into account competing desires in an increasingly complex and interdependent environment. The consensus through most of the contemporary international environment is that democracy is the best/only form that this collective decision-making can/should take.

Most commentators start with the assumption that everyone's interests should be protected and everyone's autonomy maximized. Throughout history there are examples of individuals and groups choosing participation in the political process over other gains (such as material ones). Thus poverty-stricken independence is generally seen as preferable to (relatively) well-off dependence and/or occupation; or a destitute state of freedom as preferable to being a well-fed slave.

In this context, choice and participation are seen as the most important political achievements, and collective decision-making systems should attempt their maximization, as all other things are worthless if one is not responsible for the fulfilment of one's own dreams. As a result, even benevolent dictatorship is automatically rejected. This also forms a criticism of the various élite models of government – even if other groups are better able to look after our interests, they should not be allowed to do so. Rather, it is intrinsic to our development as human beings that we should be allowed to make our own mistakes and (hopefully) learn from them.

Furthermore, no matter how enlightened an élite is placed over the common people, it is unlikely that it will give equal consideration to interests that it does not share and which are not represented among its number. This may not necessarily be as a result of any callous disregard, but merely due to the pressure of time and the complexities of government. Thus, in order for the wishes of all to be represented, the people must rule and exercise power. According to Ross Harrison, "For someone to exercise power is for their wishes to be effective. So someone is a ruler if it is the case that what happens, happens because it is in accordance with their wishes. If, then, the people rule, this means that the people's wishes are effective."¹

The nature of democracy

However, while the concept of rule by the people is all very well in theory, and perhaps in cases of small political communities administered by

direct democracy, it is clear that the complexities of administering modern states require some degree of alienation of administrative power. Every required political decision cannot be submitted to the masses for their approval. It is impossible for many thousands, let alone for millions, of individuals to be given equal opportunity to express their views, or for their divergent views to be taken into account and given equal weight when decisions are made.

Indeed, members of the demos in Switzerland, which is often held up as the closest model of governance to direct democracy in the modern world, appear to be experiencing opinion-expression fatigue as a result of the large number of plebiscites presented to them. This phenomenon manifests in declining voter turnout and participation. Not only, therefore, might it be seen as impractical to consult the demos for every decision, it might also be seen as undesirable.

Moreover, only if absolutely everyone agrees which option is preferable, and it is thus chosen to be implemented, can we truly say that what happens happens because it is in accordance with everyone's wishes and that everyone rules. Rather the tendency is for modern "democracies" to be ruled by representatives in the interest of the majority.

It can be argued that these necessary departures from the pure theoretical form of democracy negate the validity of claims by all modern political systems to be democratic. However, if we accept that political systems can depart from an "ideal" position in practice and yet still retain democratic characteristics, we can move to a more useful Wittgensteinian definition, that of "family resemblance". That is, numerous political systems may be accepted as democracies despite varying degrees of "democraticness". In fact we can make reference to a "scalar" evaluation of democracy, according to which different models of democracy (whether theoretical or in practice) can be compared in the degree to which they restrict the right to, opportunity for and actual occurrence of political equality, and the extent to which these restrictions are justified.

We are now faced by the problem posed by Robert Dahl: "If democracy is both an ideal and an attainable actuality, how are we to judge when an actual regime is sufficiently proximate to the ideal that we can properly regard it as a democracy?"² A further problem in the policy world concerns the question of "Who gets to decide on the sufficiency of the proximity?"

In general, Western commentators have taken up this challenge, passing judgement in the policy statements of presidents and prime ministers, and in the pseudo-scientific measurements of academic think-tanks such as Freedom House or Polity IV. However, even if Western commentators do not express a conscious bias, there is still a danger that unfamiliar models, or voices originating from an alternative cultural context, may

attract an “undemocratic” label because they are insufficiently proximate to the Western democratic tradition.

Here we have to return to basics – if democracy means rule by the people, who are the people, and to what extent do they rule? In other words, we must consider who is actually enfranchised as part of the demos (the quantitative element of collective decision-making), as well as how democratic the system is for those who are able to participate (the qualitative element). Together, these elements reflect a Rousseauian concept of identity of sovereign and subject. Lively has summarized a range of possible positions within our scalar concept of democracy in which the “people” may loosely be said to “rule”.

- That all should govern, in the sense that all should be involved in legislating, in deciding on general policy, in applying laws and in governmental administration.
- That all should be personally involved in crucial decision-making; that is to say, in deciding general laws and matters of general policy.
- That rulers should be accountable to the ruled; they should, in other words, be obliged to justify their actions to the ruled and be removable by the ruled.
- That rulers should be accountable to the representatives of the ruled.
- That rulers should be chosen by the ruled.
- That rulers should be chosen by the representatives of the ruled.
- That rulers should act in the interests of the ruled.³

The top end of the scale would seem to be closer to the democratic ideal, as it comes closest to providing the identity of sovereign and subject that we seek. However, as previously mentioned, in most cases this form is not practicable. Some alienation of people power is required in the name of efficiency. Madison even claims that representative government overcomes the excesses of “pure democracy” because elections themselves force a clarification of public issues.⁴

On the other hand, many commentators would reject the opposite end of the scale as being too “undemocratic”, as they claim it is most unlikely that the rulers would be able or willing to act consistently in the interests of the ruled. Thus many countries in the South are accused of being “undemocratic” precisely because their political structures bear more resemblance to the bottom end of Lively’s scale than the top.

Yet, as mentioned above, this judgement as to which parts of the scale “count” and which do not is in itself subjective, and it is at least conceivable that it is generated by the cultural experience and occidental prejudice of Northern commentators. Likewise, it is at least possible that other expressions of “people power” may exist in the traditions of other political societies.

It is fairly easy to dismiss authoritarian dictatorships such as the “Democratic” People’s Republic of Korea as being democratic in name only. However, many other cases in the South are far less apparent once we delve below the Western prejudices of commentators and the global media. For instance, President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela has been able consistently to manifest huge demonstrations of popular support both at the ballot box and in the streets, but is accused of being undemocratic by the West, in part because of dubious constitutional changes and concerns over media control, but also because of his very popularity. On the other hand, in Africa one-partyism is sometimes viewed not necessarily as anti-democratic in itself, but rather as a way to preserve the interests and participation of the demos as a whole against tribal factionalism and domination expressed through multi-party processes.

In the South in particular, there is a democratic tension between the demands of majoritarianism and the protection of the rights of the opposition, minorities and plural avenues of political expression and power. This can be ably demonstrated through consideration of the recent political turmoil in Thailand. The news that Thailand’s revered monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, had supported a military coup against the democratically elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was greeted with dismay by many commentators, particularly those in another well-known “constitutional monarchy”, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Indeed, such was the outrage that one of the most prominent right-leaning (and pro-monarchist) publications in the United Kingdom, the *Daily Telegraph*, commented that the king’s actions “shamefully makes the country, along with Burma, an odd-man-out among the Association of South-East Asian Nations”.⁵

However, Thaksin’s regime had itself been roundly criticized, despite a huge popular mandate at the ballot box, for abusing human rights (particularly those of the Muslims in the south), for arbitrary justice (including shooting suspects on sight), for rampant corruption and for riding roughshod over the interests of many sections of society through a majoritarian dictatorship.

By contrast, the military coup was welcomed by many sections of the Thai demos (particularly among urbanites). On 19 August 2007 the interim government managed to secure around 70 per cent of the vote, with a turnout of 60 per cent, in a referendum on a new constitution. This charter was designed to prevent the re-emergence of an elected strongman with a built-in majoritarian power (Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai won 375 out of 500 lower-house seats) and instead to preserve political plurality.

While critics say the new constitution is less democratic, as it proposes that the Senate should be only partly elected, proponents claim that there

were too many loopholes in the old charter that allowed Mr Thaksin to abuse power, and that the new charter has many other clauses, like those recognizing minority rights, which are more liberal than before. As noted by the BBC's Jonathan Head, this referendum was about a lot more than the 194-page constitution, which few Thais are likely to have read. It was also a vote on the coup itself.⁶ Which then is the more democratic, the populist majoritarian government of the previous regime or the plutocracy of the current one?

It seems the jury is still out on this one, both within the country and among external commentators. The January 2008 elections saw the majoritarian People's Power Party (PPP) return to power even in the absence of Thaksin. But in October and November 2008 a second round of political upheaval in Thailand saw the anti-Thaksin People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) effectively bring the functioning of government to a halt and even manage to close Bangkok international airport. In December 2008 the PPP government was dissolved by a court ruling (raising further questions of guardianship) and a new administration under Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva was voted in by the democratically elected representatives of the people in parliament. However, immediately the new administration was challenged on the streets, with the prime minister being prevented from addressing parliament amid claims by PPP supporters that he came to power in a virtual coup d'état.

It is important, in examining the democratic traditions and credentials of states in the South, to establish whether some form of non-Western values may be at play in determining the acceptability of forms of governance to both the citizens of these countries and the wider regional communities.

Democratic trade-offs

What most political societies aim for is some balance between democracy and efficiency that lies between the two scalar extremes listed above by Lively – although as a result of such reasoning, many areas of social existence (especially in the realm of economics) are often placed outside the scope of democratic accountability entirely. Thus we reach our first qualification of the democratic principle, namely to strive for the maximum participation that is consistent with the degree of efficiency required in practice. As all societies have, in practice, to reach the same sort of compromise, an evaluation that holds one version absolutely superior might be seen as unjust.

Competence is related to the concepts of efficiency and the justifiable limitations of people power. Due to the technical nature of many col-

lective decisions that need to be made, specialists or experts in the relevant field often handle some elements of decision-making. Even in the North this is often the case. Thus unelected judges process legislation, unelected military officials carry out defence procurement and unelected “quangos” (quasi-NGOs) have proliferated in many other fields of human endeavour.

While it is true that these groups and individuals usually remain answerable to the elected representatives of the people, who also usually control the purse strings, they are nevertheless granted a considerable degree of authority. Policies do not flow directly from elections. Instead, proposals are filtered through specialized committees in legislative bodies and administrative agencies staffed by highly qualified people of exceptional expertise. In fact, expertise is so important in all systems of government that they have sometimes been called a “mixture of democracy and meritocracy”.⁷

Competence also becomes an issue when related to the extent of the franchise, or the quantitative element of the demos. Persons under a certain age are denied the vote in all “democracies”, on the grounds that they are not sufficiently socially developed to understand the consequences of exercising power over others (which in essence is what voting is). Likewise, certain categories of insanity are deemed to exclude one automatically from participating due to perceived lack of competence. It is also one of the arguments used against granting the vote to transient foreigners.

All these categories are subject to the rules of society in the form of laws passed by a “sovereign” body despite having no formal influence upon the formulation of these laws. Thus, competence is the second generally accepted limitation placed upon functioning democracy. One argument often put forward in the South is that societies have not reached the level of competence in a number of fields for “democratic” procedures to be implemented, thus “pure” democratic principles may be considered “unfeasible”. That Northern commentators reject such pragmatism when it occurs in unfamiliar surroundings might therefore seem inconsistent at best.

Democratic hurdles in the South

In principle, democratic participation should be as broad as possible. Firstly, any group that is excluded from the demos is likely to have its interests neglected (we are assumed to be the best judges of what is in our own best interest). Secondly, if we assume that any one individual has a slightly better than 50 per cent chance of making a correct decision, then

the more individuals whose opinions are aggregated to make a collective decision the better chance there is of the choice made being the correct one. This explains the need for democratic accountability of leaders, and some of the reasoning behind the claim that democracies are less likely to go to war. Thirdly, we have the widely assumed educational benefits of participation – the fact that one belongs to the demos and participates in such acts as voting improves one’s competence to perform these very tasks. Finally, we have the moral value of participation in the political process as part of the demos. It is an all-important expression of identity.

James Hyland points out that “all we need to do is to imagine the contrary situation, imagine ourselves, that is, as publicly proclaimed inferiors, unfit for the responsibility of self government”.⁸ In addition, participation can lead to moral development, an opportunity for “gaining a more mature sense of responsibility for one’s actions, a broader awareness of the others affected by one’s actions, a greater willingness to reflect on and take into account the consequences of one’s actions for others, and so on”.⁹

Yet, as with our previous limitations on democracy, we are faced with a balancing act between the desirability of “pure democracy” and the harsh reality of what is feasible based on the competence of the people. In many countries in the South, lack of exposure to the philosophical principles upon which democracy is founded may tip the balance in practice in favour of feasibility and other participatory means over democratic purity.

As demonstrated above, there are further concerns regarding the operation of strict majority rule, particularly in Southern societies whose boundaries, having been drawn by Northern imperialists, often include multiple political communities each with a substantially different concept of the common good. An entrenched majority may fail to take into account the consequences of their actions for persistently disadvantaged minorities.

Some Northern commentators may dismiss this as a non-problem, claiming it is unlikely that the same people will always end up in the majority on every issue, and thus they will take into account the interests of minorities, as they are likely on future issues to find themselves part of a smaller group. Alternatively, in many stable, consolidated Northern democracies, any group of rulers relies on a coalition of interest groups, and cannot afford to offend the vital sensibilities of even relatively small parts of the electorate. Yet this reflects an ignorance of the make-up of many Southern societies, where it is quite likely that the same people will end up in the majority or minority on every issue, and where some rulers are able to entrench power based on only one part of the electorate.

Even in the North sufficient concern persists for many political societies to have introduced somewhat “undemocratic” procedures in order to safeguard the interests of minorities against abuse by elected majorities. These measures include “super-majorities”, whereby more than a “50 per cent plus one” vote margin is required for the passing of certain legislation (e.g. a two-thirds majority), and the introduction of some kind of restraint upon the power of the demos in the form of a written constitution or an unelected group of paternalistic guardians whose job it is to protect the interests of all.

The problem with the first of these solutions is that it gives more power to minorities to block legislation than is allowed to majorities to pass it. With the example given above of a two-thirds super-majority, the interests of 65 per cent of the demos could be thwarted by the remaining 35 per cent. Hyland suggests that proportional representation overcomes this problem, but this could still leave a small party with perhaps only 15 per cent electoral support wielding undue and undemocratic influence over those parties which received far more of the vote.

The problem with the second solution is that it deprives people of their autonomy. “To the extent that a people is deprived of the opportunity to act autonomously and is governed by guardians, it is less likely to develop a sense of responsibility for its collective action. To the extent that it is autonomous, then it may sometimes err and act unjustly.”¹⁰ So another painful balancing act must be performed. In addition, the construction and functioning of constitutions are often themselves a source of political conflict in the South, as can be witnessed from Thailand to Iraq, in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe.

This issue is key to many of the problems faced in the South, but is substantially ignored in Northern discourse. Indeed, when problems of this nature arise in the South they are often dismissed by Northern commentators (with much hand-wringing) as being the result of implacable tribal enmities, rampant corruption or a lack of “democraticness”, rather than a product of Northern imperialism and the actual functioning of Northern democratic models.

Alternative models of democracy

A post-modern criticism often levelled at modern democracies is that simple equality with regard to the right to vote is not enough. Hyland contrasts the right to vote without interference (a negative right) with the positive right of equal ability to vote:

From this point of view, saying that everyone is equally entitled to rights of democratic participation, implies that there are obligations incumbent on a society as a whole, and ultimately on the government of that society, to ensure the provision to everyone of all those conditions, economic, educational and cultural, necessary to render effective political participation possible for all.¹¹

Barriers to attaining this sort of freedom and equality are overt (such as physical and financial ability to participate in the political process), invisible (such as access to information and educational achievement necessary for comprehension of issues), social (socialization of groups to think in ways contrary to their natural interests – thought control) and structural (agenda setting). Dahl refers to this concept as distributive justice. “Distributive justice requires a fair distribution of crucial resources – power, wealth, income, education, access to knowledge, opportunities for personal development and self-worth, and others.”¹²

Again, there are particular problems with achieving such a democratic ideal in the infrastructure- and capital-poor environment of the South. However, instead of following a Northern model and insisting that distributive justice should emanate from the central governmental structure of a state for it to be considered democratic, a more practical model for the South could be one that promotes personal development in the regions.

In addition, democracy in the North has tended to take a *laissez-faire* liberal, or even libertarian, approach to this problem, leaving many citizens effectively disenfranchised through lack of education, infrastructure, opportunity or incentive to join in the agenda-setting participatory process. If countries in the South were to demonstrate a similar approach to even more serious barriers, it is unlikely that Southern democracy would ever reach the identity of sovereign and subject desired.

Having accepted that democracy may persist in a form somewhat deviant from the ideal of identity of sovereign and subject, and yet still be worthy of the name, we must consider what restrictions are justified by the above concerns, and whether there exists a superior alternative to universal adult suffrage representative government as it is commonly conceived.

Condorcet suggested the possibility of “restricting unenlightened citizens temporarily in the full exercise of their political rights, while still offering them a mathematical guarantee of the rationality of the political decisions taken on their behalf”.¹³ The competence of the electorate would be improved by the expedient of removing the least competent members. We wouldn’t have to worry about the accountability of the rulers, as they would be constrained by the inescapable logic of “social mathematics” to act in the rational interest of all.

Moreover, although Condorcet was convinced that there were matters upon which the majority were more likely to decide erroneously and against the common interest of everyone, nevertheless:

It is still for the majority to designate the matters concerning which it ought not to rely directly upon its own decisions; it is for the majority to determine those whose reason it believes it must substitute for its own, and to establish the method that these men must follow to arrive more assuredly at the truth; and it cannot abdicate the authority to decide whether or not their decisions violate the common rights of everyone.¹⁴

Aside from the dubious concept of social mathematics, the major criticism of Condorcet's system is that by reducing demos participation to such a level, it is likely to prove a disincentive to voting, especially when the electorate are reassured that everything will be taken care of by an élite that is not only far more capable than the people, but is also guaranteed to be trustworthy. Voter apathy would mean that the majority *would* abdicate the authority to decide whether or not the decisions of the élite violate the common rights of everyone. In addition, as the masses become steadily depoliticized, they would lose the moral benefits of participation. Finally, such a model would do nothing to alleviate the particular problems facing democracy in the South identified above, and in fact would be more likely to exacerbate them.

J. S. Mill didn't propose to disenfranchise anyone. Rather, his solution was to give more votes to those of higher professional and educational achievement. He pointed out that "though everyone ought to have a voice – that everyone ought to have an equal voice is a totally different proposition".¹⁵ Mill acknowledged the value of allowing all to be enfranchised and receive the benefits of participation, but pointed out that far from the pooled judgement of the many automatically producing better-reasoned decisions, in fact the lower levels of intellect will drag down the higher due to their greater number. Thus, instead of a centralizing tendency, we have a tendency towards the lowest common denominator.

Few, however, would accept that Mill's solution would still fall into the democratic family, as it blatantly goes against the concept of "one man, one vote". A further problem with Mill's proposal is that it doesn't take into account the questions raised above about resource allocation. If we accept that we are living in a society where some groups are more blessed with material and educational resources, if these social advantages are then made a condition of receiving power and influence, the higher social strata will have the opportunity to turn themselves into a self-perpetuating oligarchy – precisely one of the social structures that

Mill was trying to avoid, and one to which Southern democracies may be particularly prone.

However, both Condorcet and Mill make the valuable observation that education is the key to resolving many of the difficulties facing the implementation in practice of democratic theory, in particular those of voter competence and ruler accountability. This is also reflected in the words of Thomas Jefferson: "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate power of the society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion."¹⁶ Incompetence could be a result of lack of opportunity for responsible involvement rather than a justification for permanent denial of such opportunity.¹⁷

As Dahl points out, in the real world no system will fully meet the criteria for a democratic process. "At best any actual polity is likely to achieve something of an approximation to a fully democratic process . . . However, the criteria serve as standards against which one may compare alternative processes and institutions in order to judge their relative merits."¹⁸ In a like manner we can also use the criteria outlined above as a way of setting new targets within existing Southern democracies.

Democratic models in the South

In studying democracy and social movements in the South, it is important to consider alternative expressions of "people power" and representation found in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Rather than concerning ourselves with the degree to which such models match the Northern vision of sufficient democraticness, we should address the degree to which "the people" can be said to rule, the extent to which these models function in the interests of the people and the practical benefits offered by adopting these approaches in the South over more Northern-centric templates.

On the other hand, it is also important to look at specific limitations to democracy in the South, asking whether they are justifiable, and, if not, in what ways they can be overcome. Particular emphasis should be placed on non-traditional avenues for participation in the South, and upon educational projects aimed at improving the political expression of those most disadvantaged. Even political processes in Southern states that are particularly reviled by the North for their lack of democracy can thereby contribute substantially to our understanding of the Southern political and social operating environment. In all cases, movements in the South can be examined to see whether Northern models would function bet-

ter in providing equality between rulers and the ruled, or whether indigenous practices excel due to a “horses for courses” phenomenon.

That is to say, it is not necessary to look at the transferability of Southern models to the North, or to advocate them as universally superior, only to open our minds to the possibility that, given conditions on the ground, indigenous practices may outperform Northern models in terms of both efficiency and participation. It may well be, however, that there is some possibility of transfer of Southern models within the South where similar ground conditions pertain. The advantage of choosing deliberately controversial case studies from the South for further analysis is that by uncovering people-power elements in states considered by the North to be the most undemocratic, we force a radical re-evaluation of the notion of identity of sovereign and subject.

Chapter overview

This book is subdivided into analysis of case studies from the three major geographical regions that are seen to constitute the “South”: Latin America, Africa and Asia. These regions also represent distinct “voices” offering alternatives to, and often criticisms of, the dominant Western or Northern discourse.

Chapter 2 offers a detailed analysis of the dynamic tension between populism and democracy from a uniquely Latin American perspective, focusing on one of the most controversial Southern models of representative government. One of the dangers arising from Northern approaches to the subject is the assumption that democracy is synonymous with populism – after all, it is common to talk of the popular vote. However, as Nicole Curato points out in her chapter on Venezuela, in a Latin American context the distinctive logic of populism is to simplify a complicated and fluid political terrain by splitting the social field into two distinct and seemingly irreconcilable camps – “the people” versus the “dominant bloc”.

Curato analyses the dynamic tension between populism and democracy, and concludes that when normal representative channels are occupied by oligarchic élites, the people have to fight back through a more direct and radical expression of people power. Populism may win votes, but if not translated into good governance it leaves empty promises and disappointment. In a situation where populism replaces representative government, the notion of democracy may be seen as an “empty signifier” – an essentially contested concept, especially in the context of a polarized country where competing visions of democracy abound.

Olga Lucía Castillo-Ospina's chapter on Colombia demonstrates that even if a state bears a superficial resemblance to a "free" state in accordance with the Northern democratic tradition, it may nevertheless fall far short of the radical democratic imperatives of functioning in the interests of all and with the participation of all. Indeed, Castillo-Ospina characterizes Latin America's "oldest democracy" as a flawed or make-believe democracy, functioning as it does in the interests of oligarchic élites.

The Colombian state has relatively strong power and autonomy as part of a democratic system immersed in a framework of national and global social relations. Not all democratic elements and rule of law are present in countries like Colombia, and Castillo-Ospina makes recommendations on how to escape from the vicious circle of both structural and circumstantial failures. One example that she presents is the lack of cohesion of the traditional political parties on the subject of privatization of the state, leading to a progressive distortion of democracy, contradictory to the fundamental supposition of the "common good", to favour only the industrial, financial and political élites in Colombia.

In Chapter 4 Mariana Garzón Rogé and Mariano Perelman identify the dual threats to adequate representation of the people in Argentinian democracy. First, the imposition of an intellectual hegemony concerning what "counts" as democratic can lead to the suppression of disenfranchised voices. Second, toleration as a democratic virtue can lead to continued support for anti-democratic forces. Democracy in Argentina has often run the risk of relapse to authoritarianism, with democratic governments forcefully replaced by military ones. In 1983 the end of the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* was followed by a considerable period of democratic developments, but these were more concerned with formal procedures than substance. The Argentinian political community has not engaged deeply in all elements of democracy, but rather has focused on political rights, and remains limited and unable to address inevitable ideological conflicts within itself. From a more theoretical perspective the authors suggest an interesting idea – that to radicalize democracy, one needs to understand it as an existence of an eternal conflict.

The authors underline two important characteristics. On the one hand, contemporary Argentinian democracy is a political regime in which formal procedures constitute the essence and social protests are seen by civil society as anti-democratic actions. Acceptable exercise of rights in such a democracy includes voting and freely driving in the streets, but not protesting because of the levels of unemployment. On the other hand, democracy in the current Argentinian image is a consensus where every political position is allowed in the name of pluralism, even those which vindicate the last and bloodiest military dictatorship.

All three Latin American cases demonstrate that formal democratic institutions and models following the Northern pattern are insufficient to represent and protect the people. By contrast, the key theme running through the African cases represented in this book is how best to overcome the problems and dangers of multi-ethnicity in colonial legacy states.

In Chapter 5 Moses Metumara Duruji introduces us to the problems of governing a large, heterogeneous society like Nigeria. In particular he is concerned with the extent or degree to which provisions and practices meant to accommodate diversity in a heterogeneous polity conform to the principles of democracy. He is concerned not only that the majoritarian principle of democracy is problematic in an artificially created and conflictual heterogeneous society, but also that another democratic ingredient, responsible for creating the space for groups to emerge and thrive, rather destabilizes the democratic polity of the country due to the emergence of ethnopolitical groups with conflicting extreme agendas.

Nevertheless, Duruji feels that because democracy as a system of governance offers the generality of citizenry a say in their own affairs, it holds a continued allure for many in Nigeria. The colonial experience united the peoples to stand up against that evil; the victory over colonialism presented the challenge of nation-building; and in that journey, since the country attained independence in 1960, a lot has been learnt, including from a bitter civil war and incessant military intervention in politics. It is these experiences that are reflected in the unique brand of democracy the country is practising, yet the period of learning and perfection is still ongoing.

In Chapter 6 James Ogola Onyango critically evaluates how the fundamentals of ethno-linguistic vitality have impinged on the democratic practice in Kenyan general elections. He identifies undercurrents of distrust between large ethno-linguistic groups and, of large groups by small groups, and the emergence of ethnic alliances with undercurrents of mega-ethnicity.

The violence that followed the election in December 2007 presented a great challenge to the credentials of democracy in Kenya. The opposition challenged the election results, accusing the ruling party of stealing the elections (upheld by international monitors), and more than 1,000 people died in the unleashed violence. Many criticized the elections, presenting them as a reason for the violence. In fact it was the opposite: the violations of the normal electoral rules – equality, fairness, transparency, respect for minorities, etc. – were the factors leading to the violence. Interestingly, however, Ogola Onyango concludes that since Kenya has never had a successful military coup, the ballot has been the sure way to

gain power and therefore this means ethno-linguistic vitality will remain an important index in “democratic practice” in Kenya.

Finally, in Chapter 7 Gbenga Afolayan addresses the dual dynamic of democracy and markets in Ghana. The relationship between democratic and economic forces is extremely complex, and often commented on in the North, but it can be pivotal in the South. Afolayan questions whether in Ghana democratization is viewed as a process by which popular control over public decision-making is made more effective and more inclusive – the relative roles of the public and private sectors, for example. Rather it is viewed, he argues, as a means to implement an a priori decision that the state’s role must be reduced.

Using a Marxist political economy perspective, Afolayan critiques the uni-dimensionality of liberal democracy and criticizes the over-positive image of Ghana which has emerged, he claims, based mainly on procedural political equality animated by elections but which ignores the political and economic causes of conflict. As such, the idealized image of Ghana has created concealed uproar and the author advocates moving away from fixing analytical lenses on procedures of democratic transitions in Africa – an aspect that has been over-researched – and refocusing on an equally important area: the dangers that political economic deficits of liberal democracy pose to peace. For Afolayan, decentralization can be viewed in a similar way, valued less for its potential to realize more effectively the key democratic principles of popular control and political equality through devolution of democratic decision-making to subnational levels, but valued more for its role in further reducing the power and authority of the central state.

The key unifying theme for the Asian case studies represented in this book is the extent to which Northern models have failed consistently to address the needs of people in the region and therefore have become openly challenged. In Chapter 8 K. Deepamala addresses the ways in which the Dalits of India are failed by the functional mechanics of what is supposed to be the world’s largest democracy. She points out that while the Indian system has, on paper, comprehensive laws outlawing inequality and injustice resulting from the caste system, in practice many Indians face great social inequality because these laws are ineffective in protecting their rights.

A fundamental defect is the lack of engagement of its politicians with the issue. The author advocates raising awareness that caste is the single most disruptive element in Indian society and a barrier standing in the way of economic development and national integration. She concedes that it will be difficult to wipe out age-old traditions, but contends that nevertheless the adverse influence of caste can be diminished by strong leaders who are able to rule with conviction. Without the eradication of

social injustice and inequality, India will remain a democracy in name only.

In Chapter 9 Narayanan Ganesan shows how the political party system in Thailand has metamorphosed since the 1970s, when political parties first appeared and underwent a process of adjusting to some non-democratic constraints. Relatively liberal attitudes, the weakened political role of the military and socio-economic changes that enlarged and empowered the middle class set the stage for democratic norms to take root in the 1990s. Ganesan explores the populist Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's tenure and its impact on the political party system in Thailand, showing that the personality and policies of the maverick politician and businessman, while endearing him to the new business élite and rural poor, deeply alienated traditional centres of power and the urban electorate that had always wielded disproportionate influence in determining national politics in Thailand, thereby laying the groundwork for a military coup.

Thailand's experience alerts us to the fragility of democratic consolidation when not ingrained in political culture or the structural mechanics of the state. Just as important as good governance to the maintenance of a stable democracy is the existence of a loyal opposition, by which is meant an opposition that, while it may oppose the government, does not oppose the institution of democratic government. Ganesan demonstrates that there are many features of the Thai system that clearly differ from democracy as it is practised in the developed world. The first and most striking feature is probably the deep reverence that the citizenry generally have for the monarchy and the present king. The system, despite being a constitutional monarchy, clearly allows the king both political intervention and the conferment of legitimacy on political developments that are unmatched in other similar systems. Ganesan recommends that the Thai public should be weaned away from the belief that coups are an acceptable way to institute change when the political situation is deemed unacceptable.

The final case study chapter on democracy in the Philippines by Gladstone Cuarteros shows why this country is considered to share a political culture with both Latin America and other Asian countries. Not only have democratic institutions in the Philippines consistently been undermined by abuses from oligarchic élites, but there are also a number of anti-democratic movements fuelled by discontent with the performance and corruption of democratically elected governments. Cuarteros sees the Philippines as an example of an élite democracy dominated by political families and clans dating back 100 years or more to the earliest introduction of electoral politics by the then American administration. The power and influence of political families survived the dictatorship of

Ferdinand Marcos and his removal from power by the so-called people power revolution. The domination of political clans naturally raises questions concerning the representation, participation and well-being of large sections of the Philippine demos.

Cuarteros feels that the conditions under which political élites can fall from power or be removed have been left unattended in the literature. He notes that even if flawed democratic elections can help undermine the position of old élites, they are likely to be insufficient to cause the collapse of entrenched political families, who most of the time have no misgivings in employing authoritarian practices. It is therefore necessary for the candidate of democratic opposition to have linkages to a section of the national élite, and for the media to play an activist role instead of just delivering the news and information to the people. Meanwhile, grassroots organizations and movements can raise people's awareness of economic and social issues in many towns in the provinces, eventually making it easy to mobilize them in electoral advocacies.

The concluding chapter of the book summarizes how, as an essentially contested concept, one-size-fits-all Northern democratic models do not necessarily fit best in practice when applied in the context of Southern regions. Indeed, attempts to impose assumed universal principles can in themselves store up problems for the equitable governance of countries in these regions.

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United Nations University Press
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United Nations University Office at the United Nations, New York
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United Nations University Press is the publishing division of the United Nations University.

Cover design by Mea Rhee

Printed in Hong Kong

ISBN 978-92-808-1178-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Democracy in the south : participation, the state and the people / edited by
Brendan Howe, Vesselin Popovski and Mark Notaras.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-9280811780 (pbk.)

1. Democratization—Developing countries—Case studies. 2. Democracy—
Developing countries—Case studies. 3. Political participation—Developing
countries—Case studies. 4. Developing countries—Politics and government—
Case studies. 5. Comparative government—Case studies. I. Howe, Brendan M.
II. Popovski, Vesselin. III. Notaras, Mark.

JF60.D443 2010
321.809172'4—dc22

2009047759

Democracy in the South: Participation the State and the People

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Traditionally, studies on democracy have focused on the orthodox so-called Northern models of democratic governance, and within this framework, the extent to which Southern models are considered democratic. *Democracy in the South* is the first truly international collaboration that draws attention to the complex problems of democratic consolidation across the majority world. Nine case studies, three each from Africa, Latin America and Asia, shed light on the contemporary challenges faced by democratizing countries, mostly from the perspective of emerging theorists working in their home countries.

Students of comparative politics will benefit from this book's refreshing approach in broadening the level of analysis required for discussions on democracy. This book will enable an already growing literature on democratization to become more relevant to theorists, practitioners and policymakers in democratizing countries, where much of the world's population lives.

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"As we learn from the studies in this book, democracy is not an end in itself, but a means towards achieving those goals in highly unique local contexts."

—Albrecht Schnabel, Senior Fellow, Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces

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ISBN 978-92-808-1178-0
272p US\$35.00



**United Nations
University Press**

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