# The changing nature of democracy

Edited by Takashi Inoguchi,
Edward Newman, and John Keane

# 1

# Introduction: The changing nature of democracy

Takashi Inoguchi, Edward Newman, and John Keane

Democracy is widely advocated and sought, but its meaning is widely contested. At a time when democracy is proliferating geographically it is appropriate to re-examine the perennial debates of established democracies and the tensions and opportunities evident in transitional societies as they embrace democratic institutions and norms. Is democracy fulfilling its promise both in established democracies and in transitional societies? A re-examination is timely also because the nature of democracy is diversifying as it proliferates and is conditioned by cultural and political differences and varying stages of economic and social development. In turn, as democracy evolves in this way, a standard definition or model of democracy is increasingly elusive. Furthermore, as the global political, economic, and technological environments rapidly change, we need to examine how these changes have affected the nature of democracy.

The language and aspirations of democracy are increasingly seen within the context of an emerging global ethos which purports to find points of unity in the human condition and perhaps even a fledgling global citizenship. Transparency, accountability, and performance more than ever before form the benchmark for authority, legitimacy, and "good governance," promoted by global media and communications. Subsequently, democracy is recognized as the primary vehicle for the fulfilment of individual and collective aspirations, the articulation of interests, and the nurturing of civil society. In turn, the fulfilment of human material and spiritual aspirations is increasingly seen to underpin both domestic and international peace and security. The wider conception of peace and security embraces all spheres of

life – economic, political, social, and environmental in addition to territorial and military security – and democracy is increasingly seen as an integral part of this matrix. Autocratic authority has been challenged across the globe in a "worldwide movement toward democracy."[1] As a part of the same process, the concept of democracy has been internationalized as never before, as state boundaries permeate issues that cause repercussions on all spheres of life across the globe. In addition to the geographic widening of democracy as a political system, there is a debate concerning its sphere of applicability. What areas of life are, or should be, subject to democracy and to the non-violent controversies about power within public spheres of debate and controversy?

## Definitions and criteria

Democracy and democratic theory are largely conditional on differing conceptions of citizenship, social needs, and human nature. These conceptions are in turn the result of social, cultural, and ideological variables. Clearly, the world reflects great diversity: the definition and criteria of democracy represent a major problem. Even the notion of a "definition" is contentious: should such foundational criteria be based upon procedural factors and institutions, or abstract outcomes? Yet, without an accepted definition of democracy, there will be no consensus in identifying problems associated with democracy and democratization. Without solid measures or concepts of democracy, the processes of democratization and democratic consolidation cannot be effectively monitored. However elusive and context dependent a definition of democracy is, the chapter by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan on democratic consolidation (ch. 4) argues that certain general conditions must exist for a political system to be reasonably described as democratic. From the time of the Greek city democracies, perennial tensions have existed in trying to apply the ideal of government by the people: individual freedom and rights, collective goods, state cohesion, minority rights, and social justice all compete in this. Indeed, the central dialectic is the achievement of collective public goods and the aggregation of common values without threatening private individual rights and freedoms. Yet, what is the "common good"? Where does the balance lie between efficiency and representation and legitimacy? The balance between these values represents a significant challenge for many political societies, as Bernard Crick's "Meditation on Democracy" (ch. 16) observes.

Moreover, the presence of identity groups – such as ethnicity and nationality – within many democratic polities exerts strains over and above these perennial democratic paradoxes.

The history of democratic theory and practice has reflected a number of political models, often categorized as direct participatory democracy, one-party people's democracy, social democracy, and liberal representative democracy. In the immediate post-Cold War context and with the ethos of the "end" of ideological history, the widely held assumption, especially in the West, has been that liberal democracy in the free-market context is the most efficient and equitable organizing principle of modern society. Social and people's democracies have effectively ceased to be contenders in the democracy debate in the post-Cold War world, and the demise of Keynesian welfare economics is now terminable. However, Claus Offe's contribution on social order and political agency (ch. 3) argues that the "neo-liberal" environment is not necessarily conducive to equal access to public goods, opportunities, or democratic processes. In an attempt to address this problem, Ian Marsh (ch. 9) examines the tension between democratic values – particularly representation – and economic competitiveness in the hope of achieving a synthesis.

Specifically, it is possible to question the extent to which liberal democratic institutions and norms hold all the answers for transitional and fledgling democratic societies. Post-communist, post-conflict, and other developing societies have been undergoing two symbiotic processes – the transition to political democracy, and the transition to the free market as the primary mechanism of economic production and distribution. These societies are also balancing domestic and international pressures. In considering experiences of democracy worldwide, especially within this post-Cold War ethos, there is also a danger of ethnocentrism in the West. The liberal, atomistic, and pluralist conception of democracy stresses individual freedom and safeguards against excessive governmental control and power. Accordingly, civil and political rights, in a free-market economic context, have greater emphasis than more communitarian ideas of duty and social justice. Yet this does not have universal acceptance.

Something of a paradox exists. Democracy is recognized as the prerequisite for legitimate authority and governance, and democracy covers an unprecedented geographic area of the world. The number of countries worldwide that might reasonably be described as meeting basic democratic criteria has jumped from 10 in 1896 to roughly

100 in 1996. Leaps of technology in electronic communication – some might even suggest a communications revolution – provide new opportunities for the transference of ideas and information and, perhaps, even opportunities for a revival of some form of direct participatory democracy. Simultaneously, however, a certain amount of disillusionment and stagnation has been observed in the structures and practices of the oldest democracies. While more and more countries in the developing world are moving toward democratic governance, old democracies have increasingly revealed their own deficiencies. In particular, the substance and scope of democracy appear to be thinning. As democracy prospers, so it declines.

Democracy is the political machinery that translates public preference into public policy. Without active participation on the part of citizens, democratic institutions cannot produce intended policy results. In many leading democratic countries, however, public disenchantment with politics and government has noticeably grown, seriously hampering the performance of political institutions. As the participants in democratic politics increase, a number of factors have emerged that have contributed to the undermining of democratic mechanisms. First, universal suffrage has reduced the incentives for privileged élites to participate in democratic politics. As economic globalization accelerates, the incentives for transnational businesses to voice their discontent in the national political arena diminish. Secondly, narrowing party cleavages and programme differences, and corruption, have rendered party competition less meaningful and even, in some cases, outright controversial or irrelevant.

"Old" democratic countries in Europe and North America, as well as Japan, have recently experienced tremendous electoral volatility as political parties are abandoned for new formations and leaders. The established democratic institutions and party systems of the old democracies have been put into question and even challenged by electorates and extra-constitutional groups; the liberal democratic premise of government of the people, by the people, and for the people must be examined anew. Low turnouts in elections, declining membership for political parties and a general dealignment of established political structures, and an increased resort to private local associations may reflect a waning of democratic vitality. The advancement of international communications has made political leaders more vulnerable to public opinion controversies. On the positive side, instant electronic communication has contributed to undermining authoritarian regimes by exposing their deficiencies and weaknesses.

4

Elihu Katz's chapter on mass media and participatory democracy (ch. 6) shows the historical impact of the various media upon the nature of public and private discourse and the modalities of democracy, offering a mixed conclusion about the relationship. CNN-style live coverage has reduced the efficacy of outdated propaganda and eroded the ability of political leaders to manipulate public opinion, while activating grass-roots movements all around the world. On the negative side, however, oversimplified, biased, distorted mass-media coverage has flourished, making political leaders today increasingly vulnerable to public moods.

Within the system, vested interests have become deeply institutionalized in entangled webs of bureaucracies that can hamper effective policy implementation. Moreover, the rise of global market forces has weakened the central role of the domestic body politic. Popular apathy and cynicism towards politics have subsequently grown. In a number of cases, unaccountable and unresponsive bureaucracies and institutionalized interests could lead one to conclude that the democratic process involves little more than a legitimizing of élites. Two decades ago, Theodore J. Lowi presented a critical analysis of America's interest group politics and bureaucratic expansion in his seminal book *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States*. Despite repeated attempts to downsize government and undertake privatization, government bureaucracies remain major obstacles to reform and to new policy initiatives at the national, state, and local levels in the United States. There and elsewhere, government bureaucracies were originally designed to implement public policy in the most efficient way, but have taken on a life of their own and represent entrenched interests. In newly democratizing countries, the complex bureaucratic structures nurtured over decades under undemocratic regimes likewise pose a formidable challenge to political leaders. As many democratic institutions fail to perform around the world, the efficacy of political systems has become an important issue. Even democratically elected leaders often cannot implement their policies, owing to political gridlock between the executive and legislative branches, continuous bureaucratic intensification, and bargaining between parties and interest groups. In highly institutionalized societies, political efficacy has become harder to attain. In some quarters, it is observed that democracy is not necessarily an efficient political system.

Under these circumstances, the performance of political institutions inevitably will be called into question. However, there are clearly

methodological problems in testing the "declining democracy" thesis, in terms of identifying tangible indicators. Party membership and electoral support are convenient quantitative indicators. However, they do not convey attitudinal factors or illustrate a distinction between levels of support for parties, personalities, and policies and support for democratic processes and structures themselves. A distinction should also be made between the institutions and procedures of democracy – such as elections, freedom of speech, the rule of law – and the content or substance of democracy. In any situation, the emphasis should be not just on the institutional criteria of democracy but on the results. Does it serve to fulfil the aspirations of citizenship – whatever these are defined as – and does it serve peace, respect for human rights, and development?

One can approach these problems by focusing on legitimacy and efficacy – two components of democratic governance, according to Seymour Martin Lipset. Currently, the most fashionable definition of democracy is a minimalist one, which merely requires holding free elections in a multi-party setting. This has been more or less achieved recently in a number of countries, including Cambodia and Bosnia. Yet, such a minimal democratic requirement has conflicting consequences for political legitimization: it renders the process of democratization easy in the first instance but more difficult to sustain in a meaningful and substantive way in the long term; it both requires the sociopolitical preconditions of democracy and understates the extent to which democracy is an unfinished, never-ending, political project.

## Regional characteristics of democracy and democratic transition

The prevailing global movement is clearly towards liberal-democratic procedures. However, do transitional societies have the social and cultural prerequisites necessary to support a participatory or representative democratic process? Can the alienation that existed amongst many sections of post-communist societies and those racked by (un)civil war be reversed in such a way as to cultivate a culture of civic competence and democratic empowerment? In the wake of overwhelming state intervention in post-communist societies, can social movements and the ethos of civil society fill the vacuum as the state recedes? In former communist societies there tends to be a lack of networks of non-state associations and movements of civil society that define citizenship and the community in a participatory and vol-

untary manner. This is not to suggest that post-communist societies have no traditions of civil society; more, that this tradition was muted and suppressed for many years in its relationship with the state and the one-party system. Indeed, in the Cold War context, civil society represented a vehicle of opposition in some situations and it is now being rediscovered as part of the fabric of citizenship in a more harmonious relationship with the state.

However, simply having elections and a constitution, and other such "top-down" mechanisms, does not necessarily create this culture of democracy where there has been a negative relationship between civil society and the state over a prolonged period of time. "Bottom-up" private associations, local democracy, and civil society evolve through a process of political socialization over many years. In societies where such activities have been stifled, the freedom and opportunities of liberal democracy may not necessarily be taken up, because the norms of civic activism and responsibility must be (re)learned. Similarly, there may not be a tradition of "loyal opposition" akin to the "Westminster model" of democracy. In post-conflict societies and former colonies, opposition has often been based on a tradition of extra-constitutional (and sometimes violent) forms of activism. In some contexts, opposition is reflected in street demonstrations and even riots, which can border on the anti-constitutional. This can represent an obstacle to the consolidation of fledgling democracy, which requires support from government and opposition alike. Thus, public politics in transitional societies may not always reflect the moderate mainstream – it may reflect the extremes. In such a context, the normalization of procedures and social norms – the institutionalization of both uncertainty and certainty, according to Philippe Schmitter's concept of democratic consolidation (ch. 2) – is the primary challenge.

Clearly, post-communist and post-conflict societies experience the dilemmas of competing agendas. A paradox exists: there are often parallel paths to market economics and democracy, yet the insecurities of economic transition can threaten and distort fledgling democratic structures. None the less, demands for effective public administration have continued to grow as the relationship between the state and the market has been turning towards the latter's favour. In many respects, the tyranny of the market seems much stronger than the tyranny of the state these days. Moreover, the relationship between the state and civil society has been changing towards the latter's favour as well. In transitional societies, security and economic devel-

opment must be balanced against political freedom and social welfare. The role of the state in this balance is debatable: it can nurture public dialogue and organize the modalities of transition at the same time as bargaining between competing domestic and international interests. In economic terms, the liberal thesis of Friedrich Hayek is often the guiding light of prosperity and development, but the economic rewards of this approach may not filter down evenly. The rolling back of public structures and uneven economic development have not been conducive to the consolidation of social cohesion and civic unity, in many societies. Moreover, the tenets of liberal democracy – an informed and motivated citizenship, a progressive party system, and a loyal opposition – have been slow to take root. Mihály Simai's chapter, "The Democratization Process and the Market" (ch. 8), explores these tensions in the post-communist states of Eastern and Central Europe, highlighting numerous fragilities.

Subsequently, some elements of post-communist societies look back to earlier and more secure times, to a paternalistic command economy that at least offered a modicum of security. Arguably, many voters in Russia were attracted to the Communist Party during national elections in 1996 as a result of the uncertainties inherent in the symbiotic transition to democracy and the market. As an extension of this, democracy can promote instability and even extremism; parallels can be made with the volatility of the interwar period in Europe. In transitional contexts there must also be a balance between the rural and urban societies. The social repercussions of economic and political transition have exacerbated the disjuncture between town and countryside, at the cost of the latter. Again, this is not conducive to social cohesion or the distribution of prosperity and can accelerate the alienation and regression of rural life. The consequences of modernization – of which democracy is an integral part – are not beneficial to all sections of society.

In many spheres of life, our conception of political space is defying the traditional state-centric enclosure. Within this context, democracy increasingly is a concept that extends beyond the domestic polity, partly as a condition of the globalizing trends of ideas and interaction. The internationalization of human rights and ideas of "good governance," in addition to the belief that the spread of democracy will underpin international peace and stability, have made democracy a legitimate issue of international relations. This can be seen as an evolution beyond the Westphalian conception of an international society of states: the classical criteria of sovereign state legiti-

macy did not specify any domestic conditions of governance. The post-Cold War language of multilateralism has often reflected the belief in an inexorable march, even a crusade, towards liberal political democracy as if it is a universal human right. However, there has clearly been resistance to the universalization of a cosmopolitan, liberal conception of human rights and democracy, especially in some non-Western cultures. A sensitivity to neocolonial, paternalist, or hegemonic designs has accompanied the internationalization of democracy. Some groups have rejected this crusade as an ethnocentric and paternalistic – perhaps arrogant – scheme of the West, with manipulative overtones. Rudyard Kipling's idea of the "White man's burden," a civilizing mission with superior pretensions, has been conjured up in this respect. Non-Western voices have certainly expressed concern towards the interventionist connotations attached to ideas of "good governance" and democracy, especially when these are seen as a pretext for interference or intervention. Takashi Inoguchi's chapter (ch. 11) explores the cultural dimension of democracy in an analysis of "Asian" norms and values, yet questions the validity of an East–West cultural dichotomy and its application to democracy.

This controversy threatens to distort the democracy debate. It is, therefore, essential to recognize that, beyond certain minimum criteria, there are different, even diverse, models of democracy, with equal worth. On the basis of basic human needs and aspirations, certain universal foundational criteria must exist for a society to be reasonably considered to be a democracy. However, the concept of rights, values, and governance will inevitably reflect the culture, history, and social processes of each society. Accordingly, sovereign statehood is not just a legal construct; it is an expression of community and should be respected on moral grounds. This communitarian thesis is an important counterbalance to globalizing forces and universalist ideas of human rights. The world is not homogeneous, and the democracy debate (as John Keane observes in chapter 14) must embrace cultural relativity. Democracy must stem from, and serve, local conditions; there is no comprehensive universal model. At the same time, cultural relativity should not be a normative barrier behind which states deny democracy or basic human rights. Clearly, a balance must be found that embraces both the communitarian instincts of all societies and cultures to find their own conception of democracy and the cosmopolitan belief that humans everywhere aspire to have some control over their destiny.

## Democracy and global forces

At the international level, the changing conception of democracy has a number of implications. According to the Kantian thesis and its modern adherents, republican or liberal democracies are most unlikely to go to war with each other. This provides the normative basis for the spread of democracy and liberal economics, for democracy within states will underpin a more peaceful and stable international society. Bruce Russett's contribution on a democratic, interdependent, and institutionalized order (ch. 10) elaborates upon the democratic peace thesis and argues that there are opportunities to strengthen and promote peaceful interaction between democratic societies on an institutional basis. Clearly, the wider conception of peace and security blurs the distinction between domestic and international peace and security; the existence of stable governance, empirical sovereignty, and human security are all integral to this. Democracy is a vehicle for the fulfilment of the political, economic, and social tenets of human security and therefore underpins the comprehensive and integrated conception of peace and security. Upon this basis, the hope is that democracy supports the idea of a peaceful society of states. However, transition to the market and democracy is inherently fragile within states and, as an extension of this, may introduce an element of uncertainty in the relationships between states. History has demonstrated that new democracies can be aggressive and expansionist. Therefore, democratic safeguards are essential for the society in question *and* for the wider international society – mechanisms that ensure that the adverse social and political consequences of transition do not undermine the processes of democracy and cause repercussions in the international system.

In practical terms, ideas of democracy and ''good governance'' have been attached to international trade, aid, and diplomatic relations. This emerging conditionality is evident in the United Nations, in international economic institutions such as the World Bank, in regional organizations, and in bilateral relationships. The ''most favoured nation'' status, international investment, loan approval, and membership of some regional organizations have reflected the concept of conditionality. This practice has generated disharmony in international relations and, again, indicates the extent to which the democracy debate is politicized. There are concerns that external intervention or manipulation through the vehicle of democracy is the hidden agenda of the democracy crusade. Crusades usually involve

the imposition of values or institutions. Moreover, the manner in which sanctions are imposed and conditionality is attached in the areas of diplomacy, trade, or aid is clearly inconsistent. A comparison of the cases of Indonesia, Haiti, and Nigeria demonstrates this. This inconsistency serves only to contribute to the worries that these practices reflect an agenda that is not entirely humanitarian. The debate on conditionality and sanctions also highlights an interesting division of opinion and policy towards democracy and international relations. There is the rough distinction between the cosmopolitan and nation-state/communitarian traditions. Adherents of the former – often in the West – advocate norms that transcend state boundaries and are applicable irrespective of cultural, social, and religious factors. This thesis is often accompanied by the belief that democracy within states forms the foundations of domestic and international peace. Accordingly, this approach sees international pressure – conditionality, sanctions, and even intervention – as a legitimate means of promoting domestic reform and democratization in the most recalcitrant cases, although cooperative methods are more ideal. In contrast, communitarian thinking rejects abstract and universal notions of rights and governance in favour of local processes and local solutions. This approach is, therefore, resolutely against ideas of conditionality, sanctions, and intervention, rejecting these as arrogant and hypocritical. This debate has been clearly reflected in a number of high-profile cases, and it is at the heart of the changing nature of democracy.

There is also often a tension between idealism and *realpolitik* in state decision-making, where statesmen and politicians employ the language of good governance and democratization when it suits but whose policy is determined by the effects that imposing conditionality and sanctions would have upon the balance-of-trade accounts. The Western countries cannot forego the market opportunities of undemocratic countries and usually defend this stance on the basis that if they did not deal with regressive or undemocratic states – on the basis of "constructive engagement" – then a competitor would. Moreover, there is a common argument that isolating undemocratic states is not the most effective way to encourage change. There is often a difference between words and deeds on the part of governments. It is important, therefore, to encourage even-handedness in the multilateral context in promoting democracy within states and not to allow democracy to be an instrument of external manipulation. The acknowledgement of different models of democracy according to

11

different social contexts is the first step in the process; the second step is imbuing a sense of responsibility and accountability in leading states and in international organizations and avoiding a manipulation of the democracy debate.

International organizations have played an important role in promoting and supporting democracy and pluralism, especially in transitional societies. The practical assistance of the UN system and regional organizations – often in conjunction with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – has taken a wide variety of forms. For the United Nations, assistance in establishing democratic institutions and a culture of democracy is conceived of in the context of the organization's comprehensive approach to peace-building and to social and economic development. Accordingly, the United Nations subscribes to a wide conception of peace and human security within which democracy is an integral component. The range of its activities in transitional societies includes assistance in monitoring and supervising peace settlements; establishing civil and legal institutions, human rights and humanitarian issues; and assistance with (re)building infrastructure. Organizing, supervising, monitoring, and validating elections are crucial activities in assisting the practicalities of – and giving confidence to – a fragile process. Historically, the United Nations' assistance in domestic transition to democracy may transpire to be comparable in importance to its role in decolonization, although it would be premature to pronounce all cases successful. The United Nations can assist in the establishment of the institutions and procedures of democracy and in giving a degree of confidence to democratic transition, but it cannot determine the content or substance. In addition, long-term commitment on the part of multilateral organizations is necessary to support the consolidation of democracy, yet the fatigue which pervades many international organizations is not conducive to this.

The impulse in the UN Security Council, for example, is to withdraw as soon as possible – to save money and to avoid complicated political entanglements. The message from many recent examples is that this is a false economy: democratization in post-conflict societies is not irreversible, and pulling out early can result in a loss of the effort expended. Unless the international community is satisfied with establishing merely cosmetic democracy, it must stick the course; this was one lesson learned in Central America. There is a paradox here: multilateral organizations are embracing a wider conception of peace and security which embraces democracy and human security and are

less preoccupied with the distinction between the domestic and international realms; yet multilateral fatigue and a shortage of money are imposing severe constraints upon what organizations can do on the ground.

A further issue relating to the increasing prominence of international organizations is the question of accountability and democracy *within* these organizations. Traditionally, the concept of democracy did not extend beyond the domestic arena, and a different set of norms governed international relationships. According to some observers, this tradition has evolved into a democratic deficit in many organizations. Even in the case of those that can wield enormous leverage upon the domestic policies of some states and exert a significant impact upon the lives of many millions of people, there is little transparency or public input into the policy of such organizations. Why should international organizations be exempt from democratic accountability and public participation? Daniele Archibugi (ch. 15) thus highlights the hypocrisy inherent in the structure of the United Nations and argues for an extension of democratic principles and procedures into the organization. There are pressures for change within and outside many international organizations, including the United Nations, where the reform agenda embraces various ideas to increase representation and participation. The Commission for Global Governance likewise encouraged proposals to reverse the democratic deficit.

The traditional conception of a dichotomy between domestic and international politics, where international politics is the realm of diplomats and statesmen, has created a vacuum of public involvement: the private citizen was seen as having no right or opportunity to be involved in international politics. This vacuum is being filled gradually by the proliferation of NGOs in a wide spectrum of activities, which represents a transnational – sometimes even global – mobilization of non-governmental opinion. This network of organizations exerts leverage upon governments and governmental organizations in agenda setting, in providing advice and information, and in administering policy, and it provides a forum for public discussion. The respective fate/logic of governmental organizations and NGOs has become closely intertwined, and the functional expertise of NGOs is now relied upon in many issue areas, such as the environment, human rights and humanitarian assistance, social and economic development, de-mining and disarmament, and refugee issues. The UN system has developed various mechanisms which embrace this expertise,

although NGOs are not formally enfranchised; the United Nations is state centric and this is still its organizing principle. NGOs are not necessarily democratic but, if one sees them as social initiatives that encourage participatory public politics, then this may lead to the idea of an emerging international civil society that imparts values which transcend the traditional agenda of state-centric international politics.

The implications of this for a democratic ethos at the international level and in encouraging the norm of democracy within state borders are interesting, because NGO networks embrace a wide spectrum of public involvement and, arguably, reflect an emerging cosmopolitan spirit or global ethos. Drawing upon the Kantian ethic of international peace and security, NGOs may serve to promote international cultural, economic, and political exchange and, therefore, affinities across borders. It has long been accepted that NGOs have a bearing upon the unit of analysis debate in international relations, but it appears that they are moving towards the mainstream of the international agenda. There is certainly room for research into the future role of NGOs in the matrix of international networks. Of course, the proliferation of NGOs has not been entirely positive: the motives and practices of some of these organizations have been questionable, and many suffer from a democratic deficit at least as severe as that of governmental organizations. Nevertheless, in tandem with the UN system, NGOs have the potential to be a major force for social and economic development and democratic pluralism.

## Democracy and the social framework

Gender is a relatively recent focus to the study of democracy and a part of the new agenda. The application of gender to political theory has encouraged the re-examination of established notions of social structures and the distinction between the public and private spheres. Democracy is inextricably linked with the concept of equality, but political equality – in the sense of enfranchisement – has not reversed the underrepresentation of women in public political life, despite their prominent and vital role in private life and in the economy of most countries. In established countries there have long been efforts to redress this imbalance through various corrective measures, including anti-discriminatory legislation and positive discrimination. However, progress has been slow, although attitudinal changes are occurring towards an equal citizenship between the sexes. The role of gender in post-conflict and transitional societies is interesting. In a

number of cases, women played a major role in liberation struggles – including the adoption of traditionally ''male''-oriented tasks – and, with the return of normality, the issue is whether women should maintain momentum for public political leverage or revert to the traditional private spheres of activity.

Transitional societies may well be among those that have to contend with the development of democracy in the context of social fractures and different identities. Ethnicity, religion, and nationalism are examples of subgroups or identities that have a bearing upon the consolidation of a democratic culture and democratic institutions. Whilst these forces are integral to the state-building process in many circumstances, they can harbour an ideology of exclusion and ''otherness'' towards minorities which obstructs the development of a healthy culture of democratic equality among citizens. The phenomenon of fragmentation and identity politics inevitably finds expression in the democratic process; arguably, democracy and democratization even encourage fragmentation and identity politics. They can also lead to expressions of majoritarianism and resentment. If religious, ethnic, or national minorities do not feel that they are represented in the political process, there can be conflict. In particular, in situations of ethnic cleavages and irredentist pressures, the democratic process can be threatened by the resurgence of identity politics. In giving expression to, and encouraging, identity politics and majoritarianism, the democratic process can itself promote disharmony in multinational and fractious states. The ''common good'' is elusive. Again, democratic safeguards are necessary.

Amongst the myriad forms of identity politics, religion is often singled out as having a bearing upon the theory and practice of democracy. Religion is inherently exclusionary in the sense that it distinguishes between believers and non-believers. Religion, therefore, has a bearing upon the relationship amongst people and between citizens and the state. Religion clearly imparts a particular conception of the rights and duties of citizenship, and, in societies which embrace a number of religions, this has an impact upon public dialogue and democratic processes. When religion and public policy occupy the same space, questions can be asked regarding governance and democracy; if multiple religions share the same space, the outcome can be more delicate. The typical liberal or secularist conception of democracy has seen a separation of church and state. However, religion, along with all other identities and associations, is not inherently antithetical to democracy when the democratic process

and the public sphere of the society are able to accommodate differ-
ent – and even competing – conceptions of citizenship. It is only when
incommensurable ideas and practices clash that democracy is threat-
ened. Incommensurable ideas can occupy the same space, if the
democratic process allows the expression of all views and if there is a
culture of tolerance from the bottom up. In particular, some com-
mentators have questioned if Islam – especially in its Islamist inter-
pretation – is compatible with democracy, owing to its world view,
its prescriptions regarding gender relationships, and its exclusivist
tendencies. If a religion does not accept equality and inviolable rights
to all, can it be truly democratic? However, in the West there is the
danger of generalizing from a few Islamic states and groups to the
Islamic world as a whole. Indeed, some of the ''most'' democratic
countries in the world have Islamic majorities and enjoy representa-
tive legislatures and governments, including the representation of
women at the highest office. Saad Eddin Ibrahim's chapter (ch. 13)
explores the area of Islam, civil society, and democracy and argues
that Islamic societies are experiencing a sociopolitical transition that
can put religion at odds with democracy. Nevertheless, in its truest
interpretation, Islam is the epitome of tolerance and can coexist with
other faiths in a democratic context. And there are contexts, such as
Turkey, where the revival of Islam may have democratic effects.

In post-conflict societies, the transition to democracy and recon-
struction can be particularly fragile. The continuation of fear, suspi-
cion, and hostility; the need for justice; and the presence of groups
that do not support the peace process, can undermine the transition
and reignite violence. The balance between reconciliation and justice
is fragile: justice is necessary for reconciliation and reconstruction,
but the search for justice can hamper reconciliation. The holding of
free and fair elections is essential in giving confidence and reflecting
desires, but elections themselves may not bring democracy other than
in a cosmetic sense. Elections do not create a culture of democracy if
there is no general will for reconciliation or for an emerging civic
competence which transcends past enmities. The situation in Bosnia–
Herzegovina is one such example, where the election process may
merely reflect the social and nationalist discord that still remains.
The role of party-political leadership is crucial to the post-conflict
peace-building process in supporting and encouraging an inclusive
democratic process and cohesive social reconstruction. A revisionist
leadership can undermine fledgling democracy and processes of
reconstruction by manipulating latent enmities and causing panic. An

16

impartial and independent judiciary, armed forces, and police force are similarly critical factors in the establishment and consolidation of democracy.

The media have a major, if unpredictable, role in established democracies. An informed citizenship is the basis of a healthy democracy, and the media serve the function of communication of ideas, cultivating civic awareness and public discourse. Moreover, the media form the most significant arena of public debate for the majority and one of the most direct forms of interface of communication between the people and the government. Thus, the media can help to create and sustain political democracy and serve civil society. Yet the relationship between the media and the democratic process is an ambivalent one: the media inevitably filter information and represent their own political agenda; they can be an instrument of control or of instability and subversion, especially in a conflict or post-conflict situation.

## The new agenda: Invigorating democratic ideas and institutions

It is not easy to establish a framework for analysis for the study of democracy and democratization. Democracy involves tangible characteristics, such as free and fair elections, legislatures, the rule of law, and an independent judiciary. It also involves less tangible factors regarding culture and participation. How does one measure democracy and attitudes towards participation and democratic processes, as distinct from personalities and parties? Is it possible to construct a methodology through which it may be possible to investigate these issues?

This volume embraces a plethora of ideas which reflect the breadth of the democratic debate. A number of issue areas form the agenda for a re-examination of democracy in the context of a number of changes and pressures: globalizing pressures and global issues; the expansion of the sphere of activity which is considered to be legitimately conditioned by democracy; the resurgence of identity politics and fragmentation; the proliferation of market economic systems; developments in thinking relating to peace and security and, in particular, the emphasis on human security; changes in leadership style and expectations; and the blurring of the distinction between public and private, and domestic and international, are some such issues. To make democracies perform, social scientists and policy makers need to examine the causes of democratic decay and explore the means of

revitalizing democratic political processes. The challenge for transitional societies and the consolidation of democracy is to achieve safeguards against the worst rigours of economic change and to foster a sense of public empowerment in the changes. In turn, confidence in public-life changes helps to achieve support for democratic norms and institutions and to avert support for anti-democratic and regressive movements. The role of the state will, in time, reach an equilibrium, and the participatory culture of democracy will determine the balance between top-down governmental structures and bottom-up movements. It is within this context that the development of civil society weaves together a matrix of governmental and non-governmental activity.

In an era of democracy, academic communities must devise a widely applicable analytical framework for increasingly diverse democracies and establish criteria to compare various types of democratic societies. In this regard, the importance of synthesizing the results of previous empirical studies on both old and new democracies cannot be overemphasized. Furthermore, we must critically examine the changing environment for democracy in this information age and study its implications for democratic politics. Democracy may be an obsolete idea, an atavistic instinct, and an outdated institution. Nevertheless, it seems to be the only feasible institutional arrangement to promote civil and political freedoms, social and economic rights, human dignity, and international harmony. Perhaps, we still cannot rebut Winston Churchill's dictum that democracy is an inefficient system, but it is better than any other alternative. The main areas of concern and interest that arise from the contributions to this project pose a number of questions and issues:

- How have the oldest democracies evolved in terms of content and procedure; is there disillusionment towards established party structures, institutions, or even the democratic system itself? Is disillusionment a natural phase of mature democracies or can it be reversed? Can democracy be revitalized?
- How can transitional societies safeguard against the most adverse effects of political and economic change? How does the market shape the democratization process and the consolidation of democracy? Where is the balance between development and prosperity, and social support? How can such societies safeguard against the alienation of sections of society brought about by the transition process? As the transition to democracy and market economics

accelerates the divisions between rural and urban life, how can the adverse effects of this process be cushioned?

- What is the role of civil society in transitional societies, and are voluntary associations and movements fulfilling a different function here than in mature democracies?
- What is the role for external actors – and particularly international organizations – in assisting the transition to democracy and in militating against the problems and tensions of this process?
- Are there universal foundations of democracy? How are religion, culture, and social contexts reflected in different models of democracy? Where is the balance between universal cosmopolitan and communitarian conceptions of democracy and citizenship? Is there a global ethic of democracy?
- Are democratic systems and fledgling democracies successfully accommodating the challenges posed by fractious states?
- Is gender a viable focus for the study of democracy? Has the renaissance of democracy fulfilled its pretensions of equality?
- How can the opportunities of the communications revolution be harnessed for increased levels of participation? Are globalizing forces de-territorializing democracy?
- How can the pressures for democracy and accountability beyond the state be utilized? Do NGOs reflect and embrace an emergent international civil society? How can accountability and transparency in international organizations be improved?
- As democracy evolves, has its sphere of applicability enlarged? What areas of life are, or should be, conditioned by democratic processes? Are there attitudinal changes regarding this sphere of applicability, and are institutions and procedures responding to such changes? Are conceptions of ''public'' and ''private'' evolving?

## Notes

1. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, ''Democracy: A Newly Recognized Imperative,'' *Global Governance* Winter 1995; 1(1): 4.