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Introduction

Poor People and Democracy

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Social scientists have steadily believed that democracies will more likely exist in richer rather than poorer countries. Analyses of cross-country data have consistently shown democracy to be more prevalent and more stable in countries that have higher-than-average per capita incomes.[1] Based on these statistical observations, a law-like regularity has been postulated, proposing social prerequisites for democracy, stated in terms of material achievement. Continuing in this vein, a comprehensive analysis concluded that the probability democracy will survive in a country "increases steeply and monotonically as per capita incomes get larger. Indeed, democracy is almost certain to survive in countries with per capita incomes above $4,000." Below this level of per capita income, democracy is considered to be at grave risk: "We have learned that the bonds of poverty are difficult to break, that poverty breeds dictatorships" (Przeworski, et al. 2000: 273, 277).

[1] Affirmations include Barro (1997); Bollen and Jackman (1985); Cutwright (1963); Huntington (1984); Lipset (1963, 1994); Lipset, Seong and Torres (1993); Londregan and Poole (1996); Posner (1997); Przeworski et al. (2000); Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992); and Winham (1970). Rare challenges are provided by Arat (1988), Mainwaring and Perez-Linan (2003); Mueller (1992), and O'Donnell (1973), who suggest that the effects of economic advancement can be more varied for democracy.

These expectations are, however, confounded by some recent events. Over the past few decades, democracy has broken out of its erstwhile confines. Today, democracy is no more "the exclusive preserve of wealthy lands," states Karatnycky (2004: 83). "Many poor and developing countries achieve a record of respect for political and civil liberties . . . the survey data show that there are 38 [democratic] countries with an annual Gross National Income per capita (GNIpc) of US$3,500 or less. Of these [countries], 15 are places where yearly GNIpc is below US$1,500" – that is, less than half the threshold level proposed by Przeworski et al. (2000). Apart from India, where democracy has been in place for more than five decades, countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, Mali, Malawi, and Mozambique also now elect their governments and have gained some degree of experience with democratic rule.

Doubts remain about how firmly democracy's roots will become entrenched within the impoverished soils of these newly entered domains. In Guatemala, Honduras, Mali, Malawi, and Mozambique where, respectively, 56 percent, 53 percent, 63 percent, 65 percent, and 69 percent of all citizens live in poverty, can democracy become the only political game in town?[2]

Most often, this question has been answered negatively. It is a view consistently upheld – an empirical regularity close to a social science law – that the existence of mass poverty poses a substantial challenge to democracy. A number of reasons have been put forward in support of this view, foremost among which relates to the attitudes and behaviors of poor people.

"Only in a wealthy society in which relatively few citizens live at the level of real poverty could there be a situation in which the mass of the population intelligently participate in politics and develop the self-restraint necessary to avoid succumbing to the appeals of irresponsible demagogues," asserted Lipset (1963: 31). Later analysts, examining the interrelationship between democracy and economic development, have predominantly hewed to a pessimistic view about the abilities of poor people to support and take part in democracy.

[2] These poverty data are taken from World Bank (2005: 258–9).

The Conventional Wisdom: Poor People Provide Poor Support for Democracy

Because they have very little time and money to spare, it is claimed, poor people are unable and unwilling to take part in democracy. Barro (1996: 24) claimed that democracy is "a sort of luxury good. Rich places consume more democracy because this good is desirable for its own sake." In addition, "Human beings appear to frame their values at least partly in response to what psychologist Abraham Maslow . . . termed a 'hierarchy of needs'" Diamond (1992: 126). "With rising incomes, [they] become more willing – and more able – to supplement the necessities of life with luxury goods [such as] democratic governance" (Landa and Kapstein 2001: 269).

Thus, individuals' preferences for democracy are expected to rise together with their incomes. Because "the marginal utility of consumption is lower at higher levels of income" (Przeworski and Limongi 1997: 166), relatively richer individuals are expected to have greater concern for democracy, whereas poorer ones are regarded to be more willing to trade off democracy (and other such "luxuries") for greater material consumption at the present time. "Because the resources of the wealthy are more ample, they do not face the same hard tradeoffs" (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993: 13).[3]

Poor people make poor democrats, according to this hierarchy-of-needs hypothesis. It is only when individuals break out of poverty that they begin to demand a role in and provide support for democracy. Thus, the removal of mass poverty is essential to inculcate within the population the attitudes and behaviors that are supportive of democracy. Economic growth "leads to an increase in the number of individuals with sufficient time, education, and money to get involved in politics" (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2005: 79).

Additional arguments have been put forward that further buttress this view. "Extremist and intolerant movements in modern society

[3] A variant of this hypothesis, proposing shorter time-horizons for poorer people, is suggested by Varshney (2000: 730): "For the poor, poverty alleviation measures that are direct carry a great deal more weight in the short run than measures that are indirect and have a long-run impact."

are more likely to be based on the lower classes than on the middle and upper classes . . . the lower class way of life produces individuals with rigid and intolerant approaches to politics . . . the lower strata are relatively more authoritarian . . . more attracted to an extremist movement than to a moderate or democratic one . . . once recruited, they will not be alienated by its lack of democracy, while more educated or sophisticated voters will tend to drop away [from authoritarian movements]. . . . The more well-to-do are more liberal, the poorer are more intolerant" (Lipset 1963: 87, 89, 92). One "should not be upset to learn," claimed (Lipset 1960: 271), "that poverty, insecurity, and ignorance do not produce as 'decent' people as do wealth, security, and knowledge."

Short of money and time, and imbued additionally with the wrong set of values, poor people are presumed to make poor democrats. Similar views, holding out an elite theory of democracy, were also advanced by Schumpeter (1950), and Adorno (1950) equated poverty with an authoritarian personality.

Subsequent arguments about a supposed "culture of poverty" have further tended to bolster the view that poor people are less supportive of democracy. The poor "are a different kind of people," claimed Michael Harrington (1962: 146). "They think and feel differently" from other people. Poverty "is a way of life," declared Oscar Lewis (1963: xxiv), which is "remarkably stable and persistent, passed down from generation to generation along family lines. The culture of poverty has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members . . . [it] affects participation in the larger national culture, and becomes a subculture of its own." In particular, the poor are expected to participate much less than others in various democratic activities, constituting an enclave of apathy or – if you believe Adorno and Lipset – actual hostility toward democracy.

As people become richer, their values are supposed to change, becoming increasingly more supportive of democracy. "Democracy has an intrinsic value that is increasingly sought after as populations become better off" (Helliwell 1994: 246). "Economic development is linked with coherent, and to some extent predictable, changes in culture and social and political life. . . . Industrialization leads to . . . broader political participation and less easily led publics" (Inglehart

and Baker 2000: 21). "Rising levels of existential security and autonomy change people's firsthand life experiences fundamentally, leading them to emphasize goals that were previously given low priority, including the pursuit of freedom. . . . [These changed] values bring increasing emphasis on the civil and political liberties that constitute democracy" (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 2–3).

Different traditions of research – including rational choice, encapsulated in the hierarchy-of-needs hypothesis, but also political culture approaches – have commonly arrived at the same conclusion: poorer people make less reliable democrats than richer ones. Democracy is therefore not expected to become firmly entrenched until people become richer and a substantial middle class takes shape.

Poor people living in rural areas are expected to be especially worse off in this regard. Although the depiction of the *urban* working class as apathetic or hostile has been stridently challenged – with Rueschmeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992: 8) labeling this group as "the most consistently pro-democratic force" – no similar contentions have been expressed about the poor in rural areas. "The rural population," stated Lipset (1963: 105), "both farmers and laborers, tends to oppose civil liberties and multi-party systems more than any other occupational group." Additionally, "The secular evolution of a participant society appears to involve a regular sequence of phases. Urbanization comes first," asserted Lerner (1958: 60), on whose work Lipset drew to a considerable extent.

Participation in democracy is thus expected to be especially unlikely in rural areas. Small farmers or rural laborers, who constitute the bulk of the poor in South Asia, and self-provisioning peasants, constituting most of the poor in Sub-Saharan Africa, are considered in the conventional wisdom as least likely to come out in support of democracy. "The people of poor societies and societies with high percentages working in the agrarian sector tend to hold traditional values, while the people of richer societies with a higher percentage of the labor force in the industrial sector tend to hold secular – rational values" (Inglehart and Baker 2000: 38). Traditional values, it must be remembered, are supposed to be antithetical to democracy. Thus countries where large numbers of people are in the agrarian sector – and poor to boot – are the ones in which democracy is least likely to gain mass support.

The prognosis for the new democracies of the South is therefore grim, according to these views. Most individuals in these countries are not expected to be particularly democratic in their attitudes and behaviors. Lack of time and lack of money, along with a particular set of values associated with this lifestyle, are expected to diminish support and deter mass participation in democracy. Support for democracy, if there is any, is likely to be confined within a relatively small group of westernized city-based elites, who have ascended to middle-class status, acquiring values associated with urbanization, industrialization, and exposure to mass media. The essays in this volume show that the truth is much less clear cut.

Empirical Holes in the Conventional Vision

Although it has held sway for a very long time, there is a stunning lack of supportive empirical evidence for the conventional wisdom. Analyses supporting such conclusions have *not* directly demonstrated that poor people in poor countries in fact show little support for democracy.

Empirical evidence has been provided demonstrating that at any given point in time poor *countries* are less likely to be democratic than richer ones. Evidence has also been advanced showing that poor people in *rich* countries participate in democracy at a lower level than their fellow citizens.[4] But it is only a stretch of the imagination that extends these arguments to apply to poor people in poorer countries.

Most analysts, including Lipset, have relied on aggregate, that is, country-level and cross-sectional, data. Conclusions about individual behavior are both assumed in and derived from these aggregate-level analyses. Thus, for example, Bilson (1982: 103), after analyzing differences across countries, nevertheless feels prompted to predict for the individual level "a positive correlation between freedom and real income. On the demand side, freedom must be considered a luxury good so that the resources devoted to the attainment of individual freedom are likely to be greater when per capita income is high. On

[4] Including Almond and Verba (1965); Jackman (1987); Jackman and Miller (1995); Lijphart (1997); Powell (1982); Rosenstone and Hansen (1993); Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978); Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995); and Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980).

the supply side, it is undoubtedly more costly to repress a wealthy person than a poor person and the need to do so is probably less acute."

Using aggregate data does not make clear whether the regularities observed in the past at the country level will necessarily continue into the future. Although statistical analyses have been consistent in showing that at any given point in time democracy tends to be stronger in richer rather than poorer countries, it does not follow that as any particular country becomes richer, it will also simultaneously *become* more democratic. In fact, Arat's (1988: 33–34) longitudinal analysis "yields widely varying relationships between levels of socioeconomic development and democracy . . . [showing that] democracy is not a one-way ladder that countries climb" as their economy expands.

Even though the data do not make clear what governments and concerned others should do in order to support democracy in the future, analysts holding the conventional view have been hardly shy about proposing programs of action that would, in effect, deny democracy to people in poor countries – or at least, withhold it until mass poverty was removed. For example, Barro (1996: 24) proposes that "the advanced [W]estern countries would contribute more to the welfare of poor nations by exporting their economic systems, notably property rights and free markets, rather than their political systems, which typically developed after reasonable standards of living had been attained. If economic freedom can be established in a poor country, then growth would be encouraged, and the country would tend eventually to become more democratic on its own. Thus, in the long run, the propagation of Western-style economic systems would also be the more effective way to expand democracy in the world."

Apart from the lack of any clear causal framework, the lack of robust micro-foundations makes any such argument deeply suspect. No evidence is available to show whether and how poor individuals in poor democracies care any more or less for democracy than their richer counterparts. "The relation between the 'macro' socioeconomic changes and the 'macro' political change has to be mediated through 'micro' changes in the attitudes, values and behavior of individuals. The [lack of] explanation of the latter is the weak link in the causal change that is assumed to exist," stated Huntington (1971: 310).

Neither the hierarchy-of-needs hypothesis nor culture-based arguments have been empirically tested at the individual level within developing country contexts, especially not after the establishment of democracy in these countries.[5] Within industrialized democracies, surveys have shown repeatedly that poor people participate less vigorously than others in democracy – particularly in its "more intensive and time-consuming forms" (Lijphart 1997: 1), such as contacting, organizing, demonstrating, and protesting – and this evidence regarding lower participation levels among poorer people in the West has been projected uncritically to posit a lower general regard for democracy in countries where large numbers of people are poor.

Even as the third and fourth wave of democracies became established in Asia, Africa and Latin America, this conventional wisdom has held sway, albeit without firm empirical underpinnings. The key anomalous case of India, for decades among the world's poorest nations, but also among the most resilient democracies, has often been brushed aside, or explained away as a legacy of the British colonial tradition (Bollen and Jackman 1985; Lipset, Seong, and Torres 1993), even though that same tradition did not yield democracy in many other settings.

It is time, therefore, to subject the conventional wisdom to systematic empirical testing. If democracy were, indeed, a luxury good, as stated in these arguments, valued and practiced by richer more than poorer individuals, then one would expect to find systematic differences in average levels of democratic attitudes and behavior. Within each country, people with higher incomes should exhibit significantly greater support for democracy, *and* their levels of participation in various democratic activities, particularly the more time-consuming

[5] Inglehart and Welzel (2005: 233–4), although collecting data at the individual level and framing their hypotheses in terms of individuals' motivations and values, nevertheless expect their conclusions about value change to operate exclusively at the aggregate national level. They hold that "aggregate data represent mass tendencies that are almost exogenous to each of the individuals from which they are calculated." However, they do not explain at what particular level of aggregation – locality, district, province, or region – these mass tendencies begin to make themselves manifest. Why should it occur only at the level of the nation – a recent, incomplete, and often, an artificial construct in many non-Western contexts?

ones, should be systematically greater than those of poorer individuals. And if cultural values were, in fact, systematically different among relatively poorer and relatively richer individuals, with some nonparticipative culture of poverty being particularly embedded within the former group, then levels of support and participation rates should diverge further across income groups. An extensive empirical examination, spanning twenty-four countries and more than thirty thousand individual interviews, reveals that these expectations are hardly justified.

The Argument in this Book: Poor People Are *Not* Less Democratic

The essays in this volume present the first set of robust empirical results from a geographically diverse selection of countries spanning three continents. The authors take advantage of the globalization of public attitude survey research that has followed in the wake of democratic transitions in developing countries (Heath, Fisher, and Smith 2005). Undertaken independently of each other, with no prior knowledge or communication among the researchers concerned, these studies nevertheless report a striking common conclusion.

The conventional wisdom, these studies uniformly find, is *wrong* – or at least, if ever correct, it is no longer true. In countries of Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, poor people do not value democracy any less than their richer counterparts. Their faith in democracy is as high as (and sometimes higher than) other citizens', and they participate in democratic activities no less (and sometimes more) than other citizens. These results are empirically robust, geographically widespread, and they provide new and exciting grounds for optimism regarding the future of democracy.

Democracy is widely welcomed in the new domains where it has been introduced. By large majorities, both rich and poor citizens prefer democracy to alternative forms of government, and they turn up in large numbers to participate in various democratic activities.

Social science theories tend to seriously underpredict the vast mass of support for democracy observed among poor people in poor countries. Neither rational choice nor culture-based arguments predict well the actual attitudes and behaviors reported by thousands of

individuals, relatively rich and relatively poor, who were interviewed for the separate research projects reported in this book.

An earlier empirical examination undertaken in India showed that poor people and those with lower social status voted in significantly larger numbers compared with their richer counterparts (Yadav 1999, 2000). Examining voting behavior, Yadav (1999: 2397) concluded that the "textbook rule about political participation is that the higher you are in the social hierarchy, the greater the chance of your participating in political activity, including voting. . . . India is perhaps the only exception to this rule. . . . The continuous influx of people increasingly from the lower orders of society in the arena of democratic contestation provides the setting, the stimuli, and the limits to how the election system unfolds." The evidence presented here extends this conclusion to different countries, showing that India is not the only exception to the putative "textbook rule."

The data examined here show that poor people's positive affinity for democracy is by no means confined to voting. People can vote for a variety of reasons, and if the cynics have it right, poor people might even on occasion be paid to cast their votes. It is found, however, that in terms of a vast variety of engagements with democracy – including campaigning, contacting, protesting, and other time- and resource-intensive forms – poorer people are hardly behind richer ones, and in many instances they are even ahead by a significant distance.

Neither participation nor faith in democracy suffers on account of individual poverty. Poor citizens participate equally vigorously in a plethora of democratic activities. It stands to reason that they should do so; democracy provides an avenue that poor people can utilize for overcoming generations of domination or neglect.

In chapter 2, Michael Bratton examines data from a series of recent Afrobarometer surveys for fifteen countries in sub-Saharan Africa, countries that are among the poorest in the world, with large parts of the population residing in rural areas, mostly self-provisioning peasants following an agrarian lifestyle. He finds a "clear absence of any anti-democracy constituency among the African poor." People at all levels of material well-being tend to have nearly similar views on political tolerance, political accountability, and political equality. In terms of behaviors, poor people in these countries, even very poor ones, vote