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978-1-107-04711-2 - Diffusion of Democracy: The Past and Future of Global Democracy

Barbara Wejnert

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Diffusion of Democracy

This book explores the course and causes of the worldwide diffusion of democracy via an assessment of the political and economic development of individual countries in the years 1800 to 2005. Using this extended range of data, and examining multiple variables, Barbara Wejnert creates a conceptual model for the diffusion of democracy and to measure national democratization. The author characterizes each nation's political system, its networking with other countries, level of development, and media advancement, in order to pinpoint what leads to national and regional progress to, or regress from, democratization. Her innovative findings challenge established thinking and reveal that the growth of literacy does not lead to democratization, but is instead an outcome of democracy. She also finds that networks between non-democratic and democratic states are more important to a nation's democratization than financial aid given to non-democratic regimes or the level of national development.

BARBARA WEJNERT is an Associate Professor in the Department of Transnational Studies at the University at Buffalo. Her interdisciplinary research is focused on the world-wide diffusion of democracy and globalization of the world and their effect on social inequality. She is an author and editor of ten books on issues of post-communist transitions, democracy, and global development, and their impact on social inequalities, including gender inequality.

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Preface

Having lived for many years in communist Poland, the principles of democracy, human rights, and the opportunity for economic development were among my main concerns in life. My introduction to democracy as a political system and to democratic processes, however, was initiated by activism in the pro-democracy Solidarity Movement in 1980–1981. I was a student at that time and a member of the student section of the Solidarity Movement. Participation in occupational strikes at the A. Mickiewicz University in Poznan, my alma mater, was the best and the most important lesson for me on the nature and processes of democratization. This activism prompted eagerness to record the history unfolding before my very eyes. I collected copies of circulating documents, students' poetry and songs, as well as recorded interviews with striking students. I watched hours of video recordings of the student negotiations with Polish government members (a phenomenon equivalent to workers' negotiations). I also visited other campuses on strike across Poland. The documentation I collected and recorded was presented as a doctoral dissertation, and constituted a significant part of two books.

Participation in the Solidarity Movement taught me an unforgettable lesson about the power of individuals united by a common goal. I was able to witness how united citizens' concern about the future of their country could overpower totalitarian regimes (i.e., communist regimes) and initiate their breakdown. Consequently, the issue of democratization and democratic movements initially became the central focus of my research, and more recently, for comparative, empirical research on world democratic transitions over the past two centuries. I realize that democratization is a long process that starts with democratic political changes and democratic elections, and also that it takes many decades for its institutionalization. It requires the experience, knowledge, and skills of domestic politicians and the existence of certain economic, political, and cultural structures conducive to democratic growth.

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Hence, democracies cannot be implemented solely by outside advisors or be a copy of democratic structures already established elsewhere. I also realize that democracies are sustainable only if they are born within countries and are mainly the outcome of grassroots initiatives or initiatives of governments responding to societal demands.

Not surprisingly, considering my professional and personal background, I joyfully welcomed opportunities to analyze democratic processes when teaching at Cornell University, being appointed as the editor of the journal *Research in Political Sociology*, and collaborating with international scholars on research concerning democracy and its outcomes. My interest in democracy and its importance to global development were enriched by an opportunity to create and to chair the Department of Global Gender Studies at the University at Buffalo, which led to an extension of my research networks across the globe and allowed me to teach on democracy to American and international graduate students.

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