

17.50, Introduction to Comparative Politics (Fall 2006)  
Prof. Chappell Lawson  
**Session 8: The Causes of Democracy**

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Today

- 6 main theories: 2 structural, 1 cultural, 1 institutional, etc.
- GDP pc vs. change in GDP pc
- Modernization, GDP, and outliers
- Uruguay case, 1972 election and the Double-Simultaneous Vote

### **The Theories**

1. **Moderate social cleavages** (social structure argument)
  - Thinking here is that democracy can't survive polarization
  - Alternative version of this argument is to avoid cumulative cleavages
2. **Level of development** (also a social structure argument)
  - Richer countries seem to be more democratic
  - "Modernization theory"

*NB: Important to distinguish between **level of development** and **rate of growth***

- Rate of growth tends to favor incumbents, whether authoritarian or democrats
- Level of development tends to favor democracy systematically

3. **Political culture** (cultural argument)
  - Norms of political tolerance, peaceful competition for power, etc.
    - Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
    - Gaye Almond and Sid Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*
    - Problems with cultural theories?
    - Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*
  - Echoes De Tocqueville's argument about democracy in America
  - Elite values
4. **Institutions** (institutional argument)
  - Presidentialism bad, parliamentarism good
  - Problems?
  - Other funny rules
  - The nature of the old regime
5. **Leaders**
  - We've talked about people and institutions that allow them to choose their leaders
  - What about leaders? Key argument: during political transition, they matter
6. **External influences**

### **The Evidence**

Must look at both:

- Countries that became democratic
- Countries that didn't become democratic
- Democracies that survived

- Democracies that broke down
- Look across countries, over time
- Look within countries

### **In general, what do we find?**

1. Very few democracies that broke down had only one problem
2. Very strong support for modernization theory
3. Mixed support on social cleavages
  - No strong correlation on socioeconomic inequality
  - Cross-cutting cleavages seems to work pretty well
  - Interaction between cleavage and institutions may matter
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4. Mixed support on institutions
  - It's clear that certain clusters of institutions don't work well
  - Winner-take-all system with permanent minorities (e.g. ethnically divided societies)
  - Excessive veto players
  - Electing a Vice President and a President on separate tickets.
5. Role of culture still uncertain
5. Leaders
  - Powerful evidence in some cases during transition
  - Or course, leaders can also fail
  - Question is whether they matter that much when system is already established
  - Scattered systematic evidence that cohort change can have a big effects on system
  - Socialization of elites may be crucial

### **Perfect country**

OK – let's design a country from scratch so that it's destined to be democratic

- What traits would it have?
- Level of development? Why?
- Ethnic cleavages? What's the logic?
- Socio-economic cleavages? What's the logic?
- Culture?
- Leaders?
- Institutions?
- *English-speaking Sweden with Nelson Mandela as Prime Minister?*