Universal Human Rights and Democratization

Mark Strege
University of Florida

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Over the course of the past decade, and particularly since the fall of the Berlin Wall, a much noted wave of democratization has swept over the world. From Argentina to Zambia, Bangkok to Bamako, authoritarian regimes have been challenged and forced to yield to popular governments legitimized by free elections. Considered in conjunction with the demise of the Soviet Union, these events have led some observers to speculate that democracy, and specifically its classically liberal form, has become the universal political ideal.

Perhaps the most celebrated example of such theorizing is Francis Fukuyama's article entitled, "The End of History." Published in the *National Interest* in 1989, Fukuyama's article created a considerable intellectual stir. Informed by the thought of the German philosopher George F. W. Hegel, the author argued that liberal democracy "may constitute the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution," and as such, would be the final form of human government. History in the Hegelian sense had come to an end, since the ideal, though not necessarily the implementation, of liberal democracy could not be improved upon.[1]

Fukuyama's article engendered a number of skeptical responses, not the least of which was the contention that liberal democracy's appeal was hardly universal. Recent events notwithstanding, political scientists such as Elie Kedourie have suggested that the values and traditions of many non-Western nations are incompatible with the requirements of democracy.[2] On the other hand, theorists from the developing world, such as Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda, have argued that authentic democracies are not universally liberal, but instead vary according to the culture in which they exist.[3] Both of these positions imply that liberal democracy is a distinctly Western construct, whose claims to universal validity are undermined by an appreciation of the culturally relative nature of political norms and values.

And yet democracy currently appears to be a cross-cultural standard of political legitimacy. As Giovanni Sartori has noted, no nation claims to be anti-democratic.[4] How can we reconcile the claims of cultural relativism seen in the work of Kedourie and Nyerere with the outbreak of liberal democratic government all over the world? The answer to this question may lie with the increasing acceptance worldwide of a universal standard of human rights.

Fukuyama Revisited
Fukuyama, however, has a different explanation for the cross-cultural

embrace of liberal democracy. In *The End of History and the Last Man*, he points to the rise of the scientific method during the Enlightenment and the technological revolution which ensued. Technological advances led to new forms of economic organization and the eventual ascendancy of a particular economic structure: the market, or liberal, economy. The superior organizational efficiency and technology of liberal economies are now self-evident and universally appreciated.

Liberal economies lead to liberal democracies as a result of what Fukuyama terms the universal drive for "status recognition." All humans possess a longing for recognition, status, or a certain degree of social distinction. Fukuyama argues that as nations embrace liberal economics, the industrialization which results inevitably produces a more educated and wealthy populace. Increasing education and social mobility promote the spread of egalitarian ideas as well as a demand for recognition from society and its government. Liberal democracy emerges from this process as the best possible political answer to the demands for status recognition, equality, and free-market economics. While Fukuyama admits that liberal democracy has its flaws, the increasing number of liberal democratic states, particularly in the industrialized "first" world, is held to constitute the universal recognition that liberal democracy is the most "rational" form of human government.

Fukuyama has in effect built on the work of early scholars in the field of development studies, such as Seymour Martin Lipset and Walt Rostow.[5] By adding a psychological universal, i.e. the drive towards status recognition, Fukuyama's theory rests on a presupposition regarding human nature open to debate. Even if one accepts this assumption, *The End of History* does little to help us understand why nations such as Paraguay, Benin, and Bangladesh have all adopted liberal democratic regimes, three nations whose only commonality may be their largely pre-industrial economies. Nor can the author explain why an inegalitarian society such as India has managed to guard its "post-historical" liberal democratic institutions for the past forty-five years. In passing, one might note that given the delicate state of the global environment, the sort of Westernized industrialization that Fukuyama envisions on a worldwide basis may give "the end of history" a whole new meaning. Reservations with regards to Fukuyama's assessment of the triumph of liberal democracy are not without reason.

An Alternative Tact

While Fukuyama's theory may or may not give insight into recent political changes in relatively developed nations such as South Korea or Chile, the rise of liberal democratic regimes in many of the world's less advanced countries can be more accurately explained by a different dynamic. Many of these democratic revolutions appear to be driven as much by a popular desire to

empower governments which respect basic international standards of human rights than by the arrival at a particular stage of economic development. This observation is especially relevant in Africa, where a score of nations have undergone unprecedented liberalization and/or democratization during the past five years. As Bratton and Van De Walle have observed, these changes have occurred despite stagnant, if not deteriorating, economic performances by states across much of the continent for over two decades.[6] While obviously hopeful that new regimes would facilitate economic development, the popular movements which sprung up to challenge the authoritarian status quo were often united primarily by their opposition to political oppression and corruption.[7] Their goals were the establishment of democratic polities which respected basic human rights and provided for a degree of political accountability, regardless of their economic policy. This suggests that the impact of political variables, and particularly the development of the concept of human rights, ought to be examined by political scientists as a prime component of the recent wave of democratization, as opposed to solely economic and presumed psychological factors.

However, human rights are a concept as subject to the critiques of cultural relativists as is liberal democracy. There would seem to be a legion of differing formulations and interpretations stating exactly which rights constitute basic human rights. But as Jack Donnelly points out in his book, *Universal Human Rights In Theory and Practice*, the standards of human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1948) and the International Human Rights Covenants (which came into force in 1976) are recognized by nations around the world, in word if not in deed. The cross-cultural consensus these standards, known collectively as the International Bill of Human Rights, reflect is taken to represent certain universal political ideals. These ideals are considered universal owing to the degree of cross-cultural consensus regarding the indignities and injustices against which every individual has the right to be protected by virtue of being human. For example, Articles 3 and 22 of the Universal Declaration protect the right to life and food respectively, while Articles 4 and 5 protect against slavery, torture, and other inhuman or degrading treatment. Donnelly argues that the widespread acceptance of the Universal Declaration and the Covenants can be explained by the fact that this list "responds to the major perceived threats to human dignity" in the world today. Since any particular formulation of human rights is a list of the principal threats to human dignity in a given era, Donnelly expects that human rights standards will continue to evolve and expand in response to changing ideas of human dignity, as well as the rise of new threats to these ideas. He goes on to argue that the universal recognition of human rights renders legitimate only those sorts of political regimes which insure their respect.[8]

Donnelly's approach is not without its critics. Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab argue in their book, *Human Rights: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives*, that there is no universal concurrence on the meaning of human rights. Rather, the standards of human rights represented by the International Bill of Human Rights are a particularly Western interpretation of the concept, grounded in a cultural heritage of individualism alien to much of the non-Western world. From this perspective, any attempt to justify a given political system by virtue of its respect for human rights would be culturally biased. For human rights do not substantiate any universal political ideals, concepts or aspirations.[9]

Pollis and Schwab also state that concepts of human dignity are so culturally subjective that little more than vague generalities can be made about cross-cultural similarities. Political norms and values vary from society to society, and the outside observer is in no position to pass judgement on the standards of an alien culture. Any universal list of human rights is then suspect, as in all likelihood such a list reflects a particular, subjective conception of political, social, or economic threats to a dignified life. While the human rights ideals which the West commonly accepts may more or less perfectly represent Western standards of human dignity, other conceptions of human dignity and human rights are just as valid.

A Critique of Cultural Relativism

At first glance, such arguments appear convincing to any reader who appreciates the culturally relative nature of norms and values. However, the ramifications of such a line of thought are unsettling. If we accept Pollis's and Schwab's position, do we really have no response to a Pol Pot who claims his regime reflects authentic Cambodian values? Can we not condemn a cannibalistic Jean Bedel Bokassa for firing upon school children? Are we forced to accept Idi Amin's attempts at genocide were he to tell us that's just the way things are done in Uganda? Have we no right to impose our biases, our standards of human dignity and human rights, on an Islamic regime in Sudan brutally imposing *shari'a* law on a Christian and Animist minority?

In short, without universal standards of political morals and political norms, have we no choice but to embrace behavior we find despicable, acknowledge actions we abhor, and turn a blind eye to conduct that seems indefensible? Of course, this is not how cultural relativists choose to pose the question. Instead, since all societies do appear to have concepts of human dignity and injustice, one can hold regimes responsible to the standards of the societies in which they exist. Presumably, that would allow us to condemn the Idi Amins and Pol Pots according to the political norms of their own cultures.

However, cultural norms and values are not static. They change along with the opinions and behavior of the individuals who constitute the society in

question. As Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im points out, "Society is never an entity separable from the individuals who compose it." He goes on to note that, "No civilization has in it any element which in the last analysis is not the contribution of an individual. Where else could any trait come from except from the behavior of a man or a woman or a child?"[10] Thus, cultures do not have an independent existence. Rather, they exist in flux, as the evolving mental constructs, world views, and behavioral norms of a given society. While many aspects of a given culture are consistently passed down from generation to generation, all cultures continually incorporate the ideas, habits, and values among its contemporary members. As an example, one may examine the history of colonialism in Great Britain. In 1905, the majority of English considered colonialism in the non-Western world perfectly acceptable, so much so that it was taken for granted by British subjects. But by 1945, the colonial ideal was becoming increasingly disputed within the United Kingdom, and by 1985, it was no longer seriously entertained. British cultural attitudes changed as a result of an evolution in the views of individual English subjects.

Once one recognizes that cultures are not static, any attempt to hold regimes who violate a given human rights standard accountable to their own cultural norms becomes problematic. If Mao's Great Leap Forward could be said to respect and reflect the changed, Revolutionary morality of hundreds of millions of Chinese, attempts to apply pre-Communist cultural norms would be out of place.[11] Claims of a similar nature might invariably be made by the Pol Pots and Hitlers who plague our world. Those wishing to depend on differing cultural concepts of human dignity can give no moral rejoinder to the assertion, "that's just the way we do things around here now," without first undertaking extensive empirical research in an attempt to refute it.

Though clearly an impractical task, rationalizations by such tyrants could indeed be empirically tested. But what if large numbers of individuals in a given society actually engage in conduct universally condemned by outsiders? If, by chance, a majority of Hindus are willing to coerce widows into committing suttee, the culturally subjective position would be to condone such practices. If a large percentage of Serbs believe actions aimed at "ethnic cleansing" are morally acceptable, the relativist has no ground on which to condemn them. If a theocratic Iranian government wishes to place a bounty on the head of a writer who has insulted Islam, the Ayatollahs may well be acting in a manner consistent with contemporary Persian conceptions of justice. Once we recognize that cultural norms exist only in the minds of the individuals who share that culture, the implications for the culturally subjective position on human rights are considerable. For it would seem to mean that any formulations held by a majority of a given society must be considered valid, morally defensible constructs of human dignity. If such a society engages in conduct consistent with these constructs but which violates the human rights standards of outsid-

ers, we might disagree but not condemn.

In order to escape this dilemma, one could of course simply choose to act on the basis of one's subjective standards of human rights. The Westerner could simply state, "This is my conception of human dignity and I am perfectly happy upholding certain human rights as a defense against threats to this view." Then, in concert with others, one could attempt to impose those subjective personal beliefs about human rights on a universal basis. How far such an approach will get us in today's world is open to question. The attempts to impose a human rights regime consciously based on any one particular understanding of human dignity smacks of cultural imperialism. Indeed, it may be counterproductive. A prime factor contributing to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in much of the Muslim world would appear to be perceptions of just that sort of cultural imperialism by the West.[12] The fundamentalist movement expresses a frustration born of the belief that the West is trying to impose its political norms, ideas, and values on these societies. Thus, the aggressive pursuit of alien concepts of human dignity and human rights by outsiders may often lead to a destructive backlash of opinion within the society in question. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of such a position is that it suggests that those wishing to hold us to their understandings of human dignity are also justified in seeking to impose their standards upon us. A Hobbesian battle of all against all amongst competing human rights regimes is hardly conducive to diminishing threats to human dignity universally.

An Emerging Universal Human Rights Standard

The dilemma posed by an appreciation of cultural subjectivity for those wishing to act on a standard of human rights appears unresolvable. However, as history unfolds this dilemma is becoming less and less important. For it appears that a cross-cultural convergence is occurring with regard to international standards of human rights. This emerging human rights standard is an important contributing factor to the recent wave of democratization worldwide, and its influence is particularly profound in many African cases.

How can any particular conception of human rights possibly be representative of political norms cross-culturally? The realization that cultural conceptions of human rights are in fact the aggregate of the views of individuals sharing that culture opens up a new line of inquiry. The possibility of a middle ground between the claims of cultural relativists and cultural imperialists may exist regarding human rights regimes. When individuals in a society collectively change their individual ideas, habits, and values, the standards of their culture change as well. According to Inglehart, cultural change occurs as an adaptive response to economic, technological, and political shifts.[13] In fact, as Wildavsky notes, cultural change and cultural stability are essentially two sides of the same coin, since individuals in a given culture are continually confronting novel situations requiring great effort to maintain familiar patterns of social relations and inhibit change.[14] Cultural change and stability occur only then within the context of social relations and social adaptation. In the realm of human rights, new understandings of human dignity have emerged on a global basis which are substantiated by new formulations of human rights, conceptions which operate as a mechanism of social adaptation in response to the historical legacy of the 20th century. As a result of developments which will shortly be addressed in more detail, what appears to be occurring in much of the world today is a continuous, if largely imperceptible, process of culture change. This dynamic has resulted in considerable convergence of cultural ideals of both human dignity and human rights, which in turn has led to the success of political movements promoting these ideals.

This suggests that a culturally authentic universal standard of human rights is emerging. It is a process which is dialectical and subject to change, but nonetheless, it represents a trend towards a global conjunction of minimal standards of human dignity. Obviously, its manifestation is more apparent in Bamako and Seoul than in Belgrade and Teheran. It must also be noted that such change is more apparent among those who are educated and residing in urban areas, which may reflect a certain class bias. Such observations demonstrate the continuing political importance of economic, psychological, social, and historical factors. In this regard, all one can say is that some cultures appear more amenable to rapid changes of this sort than others. Nevertheless, this trend has resulted in the increasing acceptance of a cross-cultural understanding of human rights significantly influenced by Western Europe.

Donnelly suggests that "human rights represent a distinctive set of social practices tied to particular notions of human dignity that initially arose in the modern West in response to the social changes produced by modern states and modern capitalist market economies."[15] The spread of similar changes to other parts of the world facilitated their adoption universally. However, a globalization of conceptions of human dignity appears to be manifest even in societies with weak, ineffectual governments and pre-modern economies. Thus, these developments are not simply a result of industrialization or political development. A more important factor is the discernible change in the mental constructs, world views, and behavioral norms of large numbers of individuals from a multitude of different cultures. Individual Africans, Asians, and Americans have internalized the concept of rights as a response to threats against their understandings of personal human dignity. While many of these societies may have traditionally had concepts of collective or group rights shared by the individuals of the given group, as well as refined conceptions of human dignity, the idea of rights against the state for the individual qua individual appears to have been introduced to these societies by the West. Once these new formulations of standards of human dignity have been adopted by a large enough

number of individuals in a given society, reformed understandings of human dignity and human rights become authentic standards of that culture. Therefore, the claims of cultural relativists that Western-influenced international standards of human rights are ethnocentric impositions prove to be unfounded if such standards have become elements of cultures across the globe. In the African context, it may well be that a substantial majority of rural producers hardly possess the sort of refined understanding of human rights encapsulated by the Universal Declaration. That said, this author's experiences living in rural West Africa suggest that the political understanding and consciousness of African peasants is often much more sophisticated than those in the West tend to assume.

Colonialism and Communism

The question then becomes one of whether evidence exists that the globalization of standards of human dignity is in fact occurring, and if so, why? While talk of an emerging "global village" is a common, if dated, idea congruent to this conception, a more empirical approach to the question is needed. The fact that governments representing nations with very different cultural traditions have recognized the International Bill of Human Rights suggests that there is evidence for the first contention. Examining how the globalization of human dignity constructs has happened in greater depth will in turn provide a fuller justification.

The spread of Western conceptions of human dignity and human rights is a result of the development of two very different influences, though both with origins in the West. As European nations colonized most of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, individuals from Western and non-Western cultures began an era of sustained interaction. Colonialism introduced individuals from both Europe and the rest of the world to differing social artifacts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits, and values. Paradoxically, the spread of Communist ideologies may also have contributed to the globalization of human rights ideals. Despite the fact that Communist doctrines have no place for individual rights as claims against society, its conception of oppression is a powerful idea fueling the expansion of concepts of human dignity. When coupled with the idea of rights as a protection against threats to a dignified life, the concepts of oppression which Communism introduced were an important contribution to the evolution of standards of human dignity throughout the world. Colonialism itself contributed to the spread of radical ideologies, as the arrogance, inequality, and hypocrisy of colonial rule amplified the appeal of Communist critiques. Attempts by colonialists to inculcate indigenous peoples with inferior self-conceptions were in part thus belied. Instead, as various individuals in different non-Western societies experienced prolonged contact with Western ideals, their personal conceptions of human dignity were naturally influenced by a process of acculturation. Eventually, an appreciation of new

human rights constructs developed, too.

This is not to suggest that such cultures can now be identified as "Western." Nor does it imply that the impact of colonialism and Communism were unidirectional, or that the West was not influenced by its colonial experience. What is being argued is that Western culture has become to some degree globalized. Those individuals swayed by the ideals which Communism and colonialism upheld wed new conceptions of human dignity to their own indigenous understandings. Even if the vast majority of individuals in a particular culture did not come into direct contact with Western ideals, new concepts filtered back to them through those members of their society who had. Thus, while exact understandings of human dignity and human rights may differ significantly across cultures, most all have been influenced in an important manner by Western constructs. For example, Articles 8 through 12 of the Universal Declaration provide legal rights against the state, such as due process and protection from arbitrary arrest.[16] Such understandings may well be in the process of becoming almost universally accepted, though great cultural latitude exists among the various social institutions and legal systems upholding this right.

In fact, given the revolutionary impact of Western technologies on pre-industrialized societies in the developing world, it would be more surprising if individuals in these nations remained unaffected by the West. The Western cultural legacy was reinforced by the arbitrary manner in which colonial cartographers jumbled traditional political boundaries while delimiting the territories which were eventually granted independence as sovereign nations. These new states, created by Western colonialism, are likely to justify their political existence to one degree or another by Western political norms. The claims to legitimate authority made by the elites of these states could only be partially based on traditional norms. Thus colonialism and Communism initiated a process by which Western world views were introduced to societies all over the globe.

Let us return to the question of whether evidence exists to support the contention that a convergence of conceptions of human dignity is occurring. In addition to the recognition of the International Bill of Human Rights by nations around the world, other developments support the assertion of an emerging cross-cultural understanding of human dignity. One of the first ideals to take on such a universal appeal is the principle of self-determination. The global acceptance of this right was one of the prime factors leading to decolonization after World War II. There is little suggest that this ideal is more than a few hundred years old in the West, and the same would appear to be true for much of Africa and Asia. The widespread embrace of this principle by peoples as diverse as the Vietnamese, Indians, Arabs, and numerous African and Carib-

bean societies implies that it has evolved into a cross-cultural political ideal. A look at the experiences and impact of individuals such as Ho Chi Minh, Mohandas Gandhi, and Kwame Nkrumah, who led the drive towards self-determination and decolonization in the Third World, demonstrates the influence of Western thought on the first cross-cultural understandings of human dignity and political rights.

Some Brief Case Studies

As with all cultural developments, the spread of new political ideals, habits, and values take time to manifest themselves in political institutions. Only when the number of individuals operating on the basis of new political ideals reaches a level akin to a "critical mass" will significant change take place. It is now, a generation after the end of colonialism, and with the failure of Marxist-Leninism readily apparent, that the degree of cross-cultural consensus regarding human rights standards has made itself evident. The importance of this consensus can be seen in the insistent calls for democratization in nations all over the world, but its impact may be greatest in Africa. This seems particularly true in the Francophone states, where many previously authoritarian regimes have been forced to liberalize or abdicate. The driving force behind these changes was a refusal of large numbers of Nigeriens, Congolese, Togolese, Cameroonians, and Gabonese, among others, to accept continued oppressive rule by leaders willing to violate international standards of human dignity and new understandings of basic political rights.

The examples of the Beninois and Malian revolutions serve to illuminate this point. Until 1989, Mathieu Kerekou appeared firmly in control of politics in Benin, where a one-party state with Marxist-Leninist pretensions buttressed the power of this military strongman. In December of that year, the seventeen-year old regime was rocked by street protests after the police opened fire on striking students and teachers.[17] What had begun as the latest in a series of salary demands escalated into a political crisis of historic proportions. As Africans from throughout the region followed the unfolding events in Benin with acute interest, Kerekou was forced to concede sovereignty to a hastily organized constitutional convention. Nicephore Soglo was chosen as Benin's Prime Minister in a transitional government, and Kerekou was stripped of his power.[18] Free elections were called which confirmed Soglo's position as Benin's new leader. This process, in which popular demonstrations against a repressive regime eventually resulted in democratization, set a precedent closely noted by opposition groups throughout the continent. Though economic frustrations were an important element fueling discontent, both those nations among Africa's least developed and those that were relatively affluent experienced political crises, as the cases of poverty-stricken Niger and oil-rich Gabon demonstrate. Thus, economic considerations, though significant, cannot explain these revolutionary changes. Instead, the galvanizing factor in all of these

countries was a popular demand that democratic, accountable governments which respected norms of human dignity be established.

The Malian case is, if anything, an even clearer example of this phenomena. The regime of General Moussa Traore, in power since a 1968 *coup d'etat,* had periodically brutally repressed liberalization movements over the course of its twenty-two year rule. However, encouraged by the events in Benin, neighboring Cote d'Ivoire, and elsewhere in Africa, as well as a nascent free press, several opposition movements sprang up to challenge the Traore regime in early 1991. Large street demonstrations took place in the capital, Bamako, in late March, and the Army was called out to quell the disturbances. After a bloody showdown in the streets, a reformist military clique led by Lt. Col. Amadou Toumani Toure seized power and arrested Traore. The new regime quickly promised to step down after new elections and organized a national convention to draw up a democratic constitution.[18] Within a year, a civilian politician, Alpha Oumar Konare, had been elected President of Mali's new Third Republic. The key to this political transition? A popular revulsion with authoritarian rule and a widespread desire amongst the politically informed in Mali to implement a regime respecting political and civil rights.

Black Africa is not the only region of the world where new understandings of standards of human dignity have had major political ramifications. Even in the Arab world, where Islamic fundamentalism has reinforced traditional political norms and values, change can be seen. An excellent example of this is Algeria, currently undergoing an intense struggle between fundamentalists and a modernizing governing elite. After the former ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), turned to democratization as a method of diffusing general political discontent, Islamic fundamentalism emerged as the most powerful opposition movement in Algerian society. Government calculations that the fundamentalists, organized around the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), could be controlled through elections proved misguided when in December, 1991, the FIS came within a hair's breath of achieving a majority in the first round of parliamentary elections. Rather than concede power to a party labeling democracy "blasphemy" and promising to institute Islamic law, the Algerian military seized power. They terminated the electoral process and cracked down on fundamentalist militants. The near-victory of Algerian fundamentalists might seem to call into question the thesis of this paper regarding the spread of Western political ideals. Certainly, Algeria is no Benin or Mali. What is particularly interesting from the perspective of the argument presented in this paper is the reaction to these events among those Algerians opposed to the fundamentalists. Surprisingly, the Army received widespread support from trade unions, intellectuals, and women's groups. Significant elements of Algerian society opposed a return to the political norms and standards of fundamentalist Islam which the FIS promised, despite an Islamic

cultural legacy as profound as any in the region. Many of those most insistent in their calls for democratization were willing to accept an interlude of military rule so as to insure that their conceptions of human dignity were not violated in the name of Islamic fundamentalism.[20] While democratization may have been nipped at the bud, the importance placed on the respect for human rights displayed by many Algerians suggests that it may find fertile soil in the future.

Liberalism vs. Liberal Democracy

The globalization of human rights standards can be seen in protests for democracy all over the world. Recent work by Theodore Draper suggests that the role played by the human rights organization Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Revolution" is another example of how conceptions of human rights and human dignity have been the primary force in recent democratic transitions.[21] Similarly, Chinese students in Tianamen Square, democrats protesting a military coup in Thailand, and demands by Kenyans for free and fair elections all demonstrate the adoption of universalized political values and standards around the world. Any number of deposed autocrats and oligarchies can testify that continued repression of human rights and democratic institutions are now viewed as illegitimate in their nations.

Why democracy? A non-democratic liberal regime could theoretically be just as effective in guaranteeing human rights. But as Giuseppe DiPalma has observed, democracy's increasing attraction outside the West is due in large part to its "unique virtue as protection against the oppression of arbitrary and undivided rule."[22] DiPalma terms this the "demonstration effect" as those in the developing world observe the ability of liberal democratic nations to curtail political oppression. The universalization of political values renders any government's legitimacy increasingly dependent on respect for emerging standards of human rights. Empirical observation suggests that democracies uphold these values better than any other political system. Liberal democratic theory is particularly relevant to such concerns with its distinction between the public and private spheres. The very concept of human rights implies that all political regimes are obliged to accept at least some minimal areas where the state cannot tread. One should also note that unlimited majority rule is hardly the ideal of the recent democratization movements. While emerging liberal democracies in Africa and elsewhere may still be a pale reflection of their established Western brethren, both share fundamental concerns regarding the prevention of human deprivation and indignities.

There is an additional explanation of why democracy has been embraced around the world. Colonialism and Communism did not only influence cultural understandings of human dignity and human rights. While their impact in these areas was probably more profound, they also influenced other aspects of the political ideals held by individuals in the developing world. The

domestic practice of democracy among the principal colonial powers and the egalitarian justice Communism preached were attractive notions to elements of societies in the Third World. Individuals in these regions incorporated such concepts into their world views and political ideals, particularly those who were more educated and politically engaged. The members of these developing societies who are politically aware and active are often more likely to have consciously adopted political views influenced by democratic ideas. They associate the respect for human rights with democratic practices and are willing to push for both.

Conclusion

It is of course true that other factors contributed to the wave of democratization we have seen and are seeing. The end of the Cold War lessened external supports for authoritarian regimes allied with either camp. The importance of international donor nations and lending agencies cannot be overlooked in the African context. But the global convergence in conceptions of human dignity and human rights have created new universal standards of political legitimacy. These new ideals appear to be a political variable as important as any other contributing to the demise of authoritarian regimes around the world. Additionally, it would appear that the past decade has shown that cultural norms and values may be able to evolve in a fundamentally compatible manner.

While the identification of a cross-cultural norm of human rights influencing, and sometimes driving, political change in the developing world may be a welcomed development in the West, it is hardly cause for celebration. For while it appears that this trend will continue in the foreseeable future, though certainly with starts and stalls, there is nothing inevitable about cultural change. Certainly, the Fukuyama thesis identifying recent moves towards democratization with "the end of history" is out of order. It is quite possible that Western and non-Western political norms will begin to diverge at some point in the future. Thus, the problem of relativism and human rights may be "passé" only in the short run. All that one can say with a degree of confidence is that currently a global convergence in conceptions of human dignity is creating a universal standard of human rights and that this standard is empowering democratization in much of the world.

Endnotes

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[18] "What Hope Democracy?" *West Africa*, 7-13 May 1990, p. 760.

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