

Zitierhinweis

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Democracy was under siege during the 1970s. Terrorism, civil disobedience, and political instability were widespread, even in Western Europe. Elsewhere, dictatorships held sway and military intervention was a regular occurrence in many regions. A democratically elected left wing government was overthrown in Chile in 1973, with the active support of the United States. This environment changed dramatically during the 1980s. The so called 'third wave' democratisation began in Southern Europe but spread to other parts of the world including Latin America, Taiwan, and South Korea. The end of the Cold War facilitated the unification of Germany and permitted the democratisation of former Soviet satellites in Central and Eastern Europe, processes actively supported by the European Union. These changes also reinforced the acceptance of majority rule in South Africa.[1]

By the 1990s, there was widespread support for democracy as an ideal and as an institutional form, while non-democratic options were increasingly excluded. Reflecting these trends, the United Nations General Assembly declared, in 2005, that 'democracy is a universal value', drawing on the work of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. In similar tone, the UN General Secretary provided an optimistic, if not utopian, endorsement of this thesis; 'democracy, based on the rule of law, is ultimately a means to achieve international peace and security, economic and social progress and development, and respect for human rights—the three pillars of the United Nations mission as set forth in the Charter of the UN'.[2] However, this was the high-point for democratic optimism. The failure of the 'Arab spring', the success of populism in Europe and the United States, and the assertiveness of authoritarian alternatives in Russia and China have seriously challenged the optimism of the earlier period. The prime minister of Hungary confidently asserts that the 'era of liberal democracy is over' and has used the opportunity of the coronavirus crisis to aggregate even more authoritarian power to himself. It is ironic that, if Hungary was seeking to join the European Union in 2020, its application would be rejected.[3]

Sheri Berman would not be surprised by these challenges to democracy in Europe or elsewhere. Her welcome and original study returns repeatedly to how difficult it is to secure democracy, especially in its liberal democratic form. Set-backs are only to be expected, she argues, 'countries that stumble along the way to democracy are the norm rather than the exception' (p. 406). This might be taken as a warning that all political outcomes are contingent and other outcomes are possible in the future (even anti-democratic ones). The belief that 'it couldn't happen here', (in Europe, the United States, or the United Kingdom), may be both misguided and arrogant.

There are a number of major strengths in this book. The first is the author's insistence that important changes, such as democratisation, can only be appreciated over the *longue durée*. Establishing the long-term historical conditions in a comparative context for successful democratisation is central to the author's case. Europe is the focus for the study; on the grounds that 'so many types of political regimes and such immense economic and social diversity existed in Europe provides

an opportunity to study how democracies and dictatorship develop and decay over time and in various contexts' (p. 3). A further strength is that it takes a qualitative rather than quantitative approach to these questions. There is an implied criticism of quantitative studies of democracy in her conceptual framework. Political science has spent a considerable amount of energy identifying 'requisites' for democracy, developing increasingly complex models to explain the likelihood of democracy emerging and consolidating. By providing detailed historical analyses of different states in Europe, Berman offers a depth that is often missing in quantitative studies.[4]

She also stresses the weakness of short-term considerations when addressing democratisation. The failure to appreciate the complex nature of the past, and its impact on the present, leads to mistaken analysis and inappropriate policy prescriptions. For Berman, 'short-term analyses misunderstand or at least oversimplify what is going on. In particular, the historical perspective adopted in this book will help us see how Europe's current problems have their roots in the decay of the foundations upon which liberal democracy was (re)built after the tragedies of the interwar period and the Second World War' (p. 3).

The most important claim made is that 'consolidated liberal democracy is a rare and recent phenomenon'. Indeed, it is only since 1945 that democracy was consolidated in most of Western Europe after 150 years of instability and violence. Consequently, 'the idea that a gradual, liberal, non-violent path to democracy exists is based on a misreading or misinterpretation of history', (pp. 8-9). Berman traces the evolution of democracy and dictatorship in Western Europe from the 17th century down to 1945 (chapters 2-13). This provides the historical context for discussing the consolidation of democracy in Western Europe after 1945, the imposition of Soviet rule in East-Central Europe after 1945, and the subsequent transition to democracy in Spain and East-Central Europe (chapters 14-17). The final chapter assesses the lessons that can be drawn from this exercise. The author focuses primarily on five cases: England/Britain; France; Prussia/German; Italy; and Spain. It is possible to quibble about the absence of a specific case (as I do later in the review), but the cases adopted provide a robust sample for qualitative historical/comparative purposes. Specialists in one or other of these cases may find fault with the author's interpretation, but this is to miss the point of the exercise.

By assessing differences as well as similarities, Berman draws attention to long-term underlying patterns that help to explain specific outcomes. For example, England had a particularly violent 17th century, with two revolutions, a civil war, and the execution of a king (not including the extreme violence in Ireland). Yet England (Britain after 1707) became one of the most stable states in Europe, successfully managing political, social, and economic change without serious instability subsequently (Ireland remains the exception to this). In France, the existing order was also challenged in numerous ways during the 17th century, but achieved stability under the centralising absolute monarchy of Louis XIV and his successors. When the revolution did come to France in 1789 it did not

lead to stability but to over 150 years of political instability, regime change, and partisan division that frequently brought the country close to civil war. Berman believes that, by understanding these and other outcomes, it is possible to understand why liberal democracy was established in one case earlier than another and what contributed to these different outcomes. Bringing in Germany, Italy, and Spain provides another layer of analysis to enrich that focus, as does the later discussion of East-Central Europe.

A key question is what does Berman mean by democracy, democratic consolidation, and liberal democracy? Berman uses liberal democracy and consolidated democracy interchangeably, though not all authors would necessarily do so. Her definition, however, is plausible: 'a consolidated democracy requires that all groups are allowed to participate in political life and voice their demands, as long as they do so within the "rules of the game"; the basic rights of minorities and individuals are respected by the government as well as other citizens; and support for democracy is principled rather than conditional' (p.7). She emphasises that liberal democracy in this consolidated form is rare historically and has only been institutionalised fairly recently in most cases. For example, the United States could not be considered a liberal democracy before the end of the 1960s, though it is one of the oldest democracies in the world.

Prior to 1945, most European states would not fulfil these conditions for consolidation. Indeed, for most of the book, authoritarian political solutions appear more attractive than democracy to many groups, especially to conservatives.[5] Berman wants to contrast consolidated democracy not only with authoritarianism but also with electoral or illiberal democracy. Electoral and illiberal democracies have had a much longer and successful history than the former, though often providing the opportunity for successful anti-democratic outcomes (as in Germany and Italy). She does not deny that these latter forms are democratic, but rightly suggests that without consolidation, democracy is at risk (as has proved to be the case with Hungary). Historically, most people did not have the right to vote due to restrictions imposed by the state.

Notwithstanding this, there is a reasonably clear line between electoral democracies (even if illiberal) and non-democratic political systems. Minimum requirements would include, 'free and fair elections', the right to associate and form political parties, freedom of the press, and compliance with elections results. These requirements provide the means to distinguish democratic political systems (no matter how restricted) from authoritarian or oligarchic systems (no matter how benign they may be).[6] Berman's analysis suggests that ending dictatorship and establishing the minimum requirements for an electoral democracy is not enough. She warns that, while 'free and fair' elections are necessary, they are 'not sufficient to make a political system fully democratic' (p.5). In a final chapter, 'Lessons from Europe', Berman highlights key lessons, while referring back to the individual cases to illustrate them. This is a challenging discussion, which leads to both positive and pessimistic conclusions. The most important lesson is that consolidating liberal

democracy takes time to achieve, that the process is usually violent, and that it can be reversed. Berman argues that the reason liberal democracy is so rare is that to achieve it there has to be not only a transformation of the political system/institutions but also socio-economic transformation. If the pre-modern socio-economic system remains strong (landed elites; military; churches) the stakeholders of that system will form the core centre of opposition to liberal democracy. These forces are not just pre-modern, they are anti-modern, especially when modernity takes the form of capitalism, secularism, individualism, and political equality (p. 386). France provides an important demonstration of how difficult consolidation is to achieve. This status eluded France between 1789 and 1958, despite long periods of democratic government. The experience of the Fourth Republic (1946-58) is particularly illuminating here. Despite the changed circumstances after 1945 and the presence of a more benign environment for consolidation, France became the 'sick man of Europe' politically in the 1950s. The Communist Party and the Gaullists were anti-system parties whose opposition fatally weakened the republic. This was compounded by defeat in Vietnam, the Algerian crisis, and the threat of civil war and military rule. Many on the left considered Charles de Gaulle a potential dictator and opposed his 1958 constitution that established the Fifth Republic. It is also difficult to consider Italy a consolidated democracy during the post 1945 period. Italy, for the most part, was a one-party political system that coalesced around the DC (Christian Democracy Party) to exclude the PCI (Italian Communist Party) from participation in government.

The British case is considered exceptional by Berman, because it avoids revolution and the destabilising effects of modernisation that appear to have undermined democracy elsewhere. She interrogates the 'comparatively puzzling behaviour of the British landowning elites' (p. 391). The 1688 Glorious Revolution sets England/Britain apart from other major states in Europe. A new constitutional and parliamentary order was established which subtly changed the balance of power between crown, the land-holding elite, and other sections of society. Berman identifies three factors that contributed to this outcome. The first is the enduring political strength and influence of the land-holding elite. The second is this group's commitment to maintaining the post 1688 order intact. But, thirdly, the land-holding elite demonstrated a capacity and willingness to accommodate political demands from excluded groups for inclusion in the political process. This is persuasive and can be appreciated in the way successive waves of voters were incorporated and socialised during the 19th century. Even more dramatic were the concessions made to Irish Catholics, in the face of widespread and popular hostility to Ireland and Catholicism among the British public. While there are frequent examples of repression and authoritarianism during the 19th century, what is exceptional in the British context is the accommodationist nature of conservatives in respect to demands for change. What is also notable is that, despite the strength of the land-holding elites in Britain, the parliamentary system and later democracy were reinforced rather than undermined. Britain is truly the exception

when compared to the anti-democratic role played by the land-holding elites in Germany, Italy, and Spain.[7] As Berman explains, 'By the time pressure for democracy began to build in the nineteenth century, Britain already had a strong and legitimate state as well as a fairly strong sense of national identity that facilitated compromises and the incorporation of new groups into the political order' (p. 392).

Another lesson is that divisions based on national identity are the most difficult to resolve. When there is disagreement over 'who the people are', consolidating democracy is especially problematic. To national minorities within new states, nation-building can appear as a form of colonialism, as Berman notes in the case of Italian unification, and among the successor states in inter-war Europe. Berman's analysis makes for pessimistic reading, as the costs of national homogeneity is extremely high. They extend from genocide to ethnic cleansing and include population transfers, partition, and coercive 'national' integration. The author acknowledges that even in 'Western Europe state—and nation—building were extremely violent and coercive', recognising that today these policies would be described as colonisation and ethnic cleansing (p. 395).

Nor have these challenges disappeared in 21st century Europe. Most states remain multinational and are dominated by a majority nationality (the English in Britain for example). Northern Ireland provides an important example of how, even within the United Kingdom, consolidated liberal democracy can prove elusive.[8] I am less persuaded by the author's claim that, in certain circumstances, nation-building can be advanced without coercion (p. 395). This is the view from the perspective of the state and its dominant national majority. From the perspective of the Irish, Corsicans, or Catalans, among many others, such nation-building nearly always appears coercive as its intention is nation-destroying. In the case of Britain, the attractions of Unionism for the English, Scots, and Welsh have been replaced over the past 50 years by a reassertion of national identity over state (British) identity.

It is easy to find fault with a book that covers so much ground and which provides such historical and conceptual depth. I find the overall argument compelling and the evidence in most cases convincing. In this spirit, I would like to make some additional suggestions for the author's consideration in the context of her overall argument. The first is the role of religion, especially Catholicism, in maintaining democracy. The Catholic Church was one of the most determined opponents of democracy, liberalism, and modernity in the 19th century. Yet, in Belgium, when a crisis erupted between Liberalism and Catholicism, the church there (with the support of the Pope) pursued a moderate position, even when the Catholic Party won a parliamentary majority in 1884. Kalyvas has argued that this decision consolidated democracy in Belgium, providing the means for the peaceful evolution of democracy there. The church also openly sided with the democratic parties in opposition to the radical right Rexist movement in 1937. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the Catholic Church's support for parliamentary democracy in the Irish Free State, 1922-37.[9]

Despite these examples, the Catholic Church and political Catholicism remained attracted by authoritarianism in much of Europe, especially during the inter-war period. A key moment for Catholicism comes after 1945, when Western Europe becomes liberal-democratic. Berman emphasises the importance of the 'social-democratic order' in reinforcing the consolidation of liberal democracy after 1945. While social democracy made a major contribution, it is possible to underestimate the importance of Christian-democracy. Anti-democratic forces were concentrated on the right and Christian-democracy provided the means for the right to democratise, attracting voters who had often identified with authoritarian movements previously. It is arguable that Christian-democracy had a greater impact on much of Western Europe after 1945 than social-democracy. Not only did it democratise conservative politics, it was the main promoter of European integration, and it devised a specifically Christian form of welfare state, distinguishable from the better known social-democratic model. Expenditure on social security by 1960 was on average higher in political systems dominated by Christian-democrats than in social-democratic ones. Politically, Christian-democracy dominated the politics of Germany, Italy, Austria, and the Netherlands, among others, for many decades after 1945.[10]

Two other points are worth considering. One is in respect of the failure of democratic regimes during the inter-war period. Not enough attention has been paid to those states that remained democratic during this period. Was it inevitable that Britain, Denmark or Belgium retained their democratic status? Even more significant are two cases where the conditions for democracy were never promising. The Irish Free State and Finland were new states; both experienced civil wars after independence and had to meet major challenges to state-making and nation-building. Both also successfully neutralised threats from militant anti-democratic movements by democratic (if illiberal) means.

The other is the neglect of smaller states in this analysis. The Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, and Sweden in the 19th century and Norway after 1905 provide an alternative, and more optimistic, reading of this period, in some respects similar to Britain. The cases of Ireland and Finland after 1917 might also fit this approach. A study of these cases suggests that, while the evolution of democracy is not conflict-free, 'a gradual, liberal, non-violent path to democracy' might be possible.

[1] Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, Yuan-han Chu, and Hung-mao Tien (Eds.), *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives* (Baltimore, 1997)

[2] Cited in Christopher Hobson, *The Rise of Democracy: Revolution, War and Transformation in International Politics since 1776* (Edinburgh, 2015), 4; Amartya Sen, 'Democracy as a Universal Value' *Journal of Democracy* 10: 3 (1999), pp. 3-17

[3] See articles by Timothy Garton Ash in *The Guardian*

[4] Seymour Martin Lipset, Kyoung-Ryung Seong, and John Charles Torres, 'A comparative analysis of the social requisites of democracy', *International Social Science Quarterly*, 45: 2 (1993), pp.

155-75; Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development & Democracy*, (Cambridge, 1992); Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Michael D. Ward, 'Diffusion and the International Context of Democratization', *International Organization*, 60: 4, (2006), pp. 911-33

[5] Marc Mulholland, *Bourgeois Liberty and the Politics of Fear: From Absolutism to Neo-Conservatism*, (Oxford, 2012).

[6] Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens, *Capitalist Development*, (Chicago, 1992), pp. 303-08

[7] See also Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens, *Capitalist Development*, p. 84; Britain is the only major state with a strong agrarian elite that remains democratic during the inter-war period; Daniel Ziblatt, *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy* (New York, 2017)

[8] Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 2019), volumes II & III.

[9] Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'Democracy and Religious Politics: Evidence from Belgium', *Comparative Political Studies*, 31: 3 (1998), pp. 292-320; Brian Girvin, *Union to Union: Nationalism, Democracy and Religion in Ireland* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 63-105

[10] Brian Girvin, *The Right in the Twentieth Century: Conservatism and Democracy* (London, 1994), pp. 94-126; Kees van Kersbergen, *Social Capitalism: A study of Christian democracy and the welfare state* (London, 1995)