

Mississippi Model Security Council Issue Papers

Democratization & Elections Monitoring

“Supporting democracy is a central mission for the United Nations. Although the word democracy does not appear in our Charter, the United Nations does more than any other single organization to promote and strengthen democratic institutions and practices around the world.”-Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, September 15, 2008

Few movements defined the twentieth century more than the struggle for democracy. Although there is no standard definition of democracy that has been adopted by the United Nations, the United Nations Democracy Fund has recognized that the ability for citizens to influence their government is the identifying factor in identifying a nation as a democracy. This ability breaks into several factors, identified as follows: the ability to amend the Constitution, elections at national and sub-national levels, legislative structures at the regional and national level, the rule of law, human rights, public participation and political parties, transparent administration and public administration. Democracy must occur at more than just the national level, it also must occur at regional and local levels. Recognizing the impact of democracy on human rights and international security and the impact of elections on domestic security, the United Nations has taken an interest in promoting democracy and monitoring elections through several methods¹.

Democracy matters for several reasons. According to Ban Ki-moon’s 2008 International Day of Democracy address, “Consolidated democracies do not go to war against each other. Human rights and the rule of law are best protected in democratic societies. And development is much likelier to take hold if people are given a genuine say in their own governance, and a chance to share in the fruits of progress.” Secretary General Ki-moon makes an important qualification to his democracies though, they must be consolidated democracies. Consolidated democracies are democracies in which democracy is the only respected method of getting things done in a society². Citizens in a consolidated democracy respect the democratic process and the notion of basic human rights that come with the system. Consolidated democracy is a structure of popular opinion in which the citizens consider it, “the only game in town.”³

Democratization is the process by which institutions are changed to follow democratic

¹ UN Democracy Fund. (2008). “Situating the UN Democracy Fund in the Global Arena.” Retrieved September 28, 2008, from <http://www.un.org/democracyfund/XSituatingDemocracy.htm>.

² UN Department of Public Information. (2008). “Democracy essential to achieving fundamental goals of peace, human rights, development, says Secretary-General on International Day.” Retrieved September 28, 2008, from <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/sgsm11791.doc.htm>.

³ Linz, J. a. A. S. (1996). "Toward Consolidated Democracies." *Journal of Democracy*: 20 pp.

principles. Previous theories of democratization focused on the Western experience and its application to non-Western nations. Many of the non-Western democracies based on Western models have fallen. Current democratization theories therefore stress organic models of democratization that emphasizes the culture of the nation. These theories are often grouped by similar culture, i.e. the theory of democratization for East Asia is different than that for Latin America, which is different from the one for Islamic states. Attempts to democratize societies must therefore be guided not by past experience with democratization but an analysis of the society one tries to democratize⁴.

As identified above elections are important to the democratic process. In a paper published in the American Political Science Review, Edward N. Muller and Mitchell A. Seligson analyzed various factors (including regime repressiveness, land distribution and income inequality) that could affect political violence. One of the significant variables in their model was regime repressiveness. The authors explained the importance of impact of regime repressiveness by analyzing how the electoral system affected political behavior. If a society has an electoral system, which does not respond to the actual voters, change cannot occur through peaceful means. This leaves violence as a safe method of executing change in a society. Contrast this with societies that have functioning electoral systems. In such systems change can occur through peaceful, electoral methods. It is therefore important that elections be fair and accurate representations of popular opinion so that violence does not result⁵.

Several organizations within and outside the United Nations are responsible for democratization and elections monitoring. The United Nations Democracy Fund is the primary organization responsible for democratization; it conducts research and evaluates the progress of nations as they move towards a sustainable democracy. The United Nations Department on Political Affairs is responsible for much of the elections monitoring done by the United Nations as well as linking democratization efforts by the UN to many of its other efforts. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights makes efforts to promote human rights, especially through promoting democratization. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime promotes democratization through analysis of the issue of corruption in countries. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs work to promote good economic social policy in nations by tying it to effective public administration. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations handles much of the democratization and elections monitoring in post-conflict and transition states in which they operate (often with the assistance of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs). The United Nations Development Fund for Women promotes the equal involvement of women in government. The United Nations Resident Coordinator System seeks to enforce the consistency and complimentary of the United Nations programs. Various International Financial Institutions outside of the UN structure also play a role in planning the macroeconomic policy necessary to build the economic support for democracy. NGOs and other international

⁴ Wiarda, H. J., Ed. (1999). *Non-Western Theories of Development: Regional Norms versus Global Trends*. Orlando, FL, Harcourt Brace Publishers.

⁵ Seligson, M. and Passé-Smith, J. (2003). *Inequality and Insurgency. Development and Underdevelopment: The Political Economy of Global Inequality*. M. A. S. a. J. T. Passe-Smith. Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

organizations play a crucial role in the democratization process, these include the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the Club of Madrid, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Several regional organizations also have established procedures for when democracy is under attack in their region⁶.

Recently Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon reorganized the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. After many years of being seen as a corrupt body, Ki-Moon brings to it a reformist zeal. A by-product of this, is a drive for the office to follow through on such issues as elections monitoring. Such an issue is crucial to further democratization efforts, as having legitimate elections are the centerpiece of a democratic society.

In conclusion, Democratization is a complex issue and one of most importance to the modern United Nations. Ki-Moon stated in his address on International Democracy day "Experience has taught us, time and again, that democracy is essential to achieving our fundamental goals of peace, human rights and development." Thus, the UN's quest for a proliferation of democratic societies in the world goes hand in hand with its mission to see an end to Human conflict.

⁶ Fund, U. N. D. (2008). "Situating the UN Democracy Fund in the Global Arena." Retrieved September 28, 2008, from <http://www.un.org/democracyfund/XSituatingDemocracy.htm>.