

10-29-1999

Democratic Problems in Spreading Democracy

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1999) "Democratic Problems in Spreading Democracy," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 7 : Iss. 17 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol7/iss17/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

Title: Democratic Problems in Spreading Democracy

Author: Editor

Volume: 7

Issue: 17

Date: 1999-10-29

Keywords: Democracy, Evaluation

Abstract. This article describes difficulties in causally linking programs intended to spread democracy with the appearance of democracy.

One commonality of many political entities professing to be representative democracies is the embracing of the spread of democracy as a highly valued political objective that has strategic security, ethical, and moral benefits. These benefits are assumed not only for those entities that already are democracies but also those that are democracies of the future--i.e., all non-democratic entities. However, there are a number of difficulties in demonstrating that programs intended to spread democracy actually do so.

First, how does one identify and sort out the effects of an infinite number of phenomena that precede the appearance of a desired objective--e.g., democracy--and make the determination of which phenomena had what causal effects? The real world is often uniquely unsuited to so-called controlled experimentation and systematic empirical observation. Yet there seems to be a penchant among program developers and implementors for assuming that their intended effort to achieve a desired objective preceding the appearance of that desired objective is *prima facie* evidence that the former caused the later. However, a similar penchant for assumption is often shared by clinical paranoids and the superstitious among others. Often enough, the desired objective occurring after an act intended to achieve that objective has not been caused by that intended act.

Even if the above concern can be resolved, there is a second difficulty. Case studies that purport to support the efficacy of various democracy-producing techniques often focus on structure and process to the exclusion of function. In other words, the effort to operationalize the construct of democracy as dependent variable may emphasize its trappings but not its essence. One may point to the presence of a constitution, a tricameral political edifice, elections, candidates, ballots, voting, even the name of a country--e.g., the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or the Democratic Republic of the Congo--but not necessarily assume that these inevitably signify democracy. Non-democratic political leaders certainly are aware of this. Just as Soviet workers pretended to work and the Soviet regime pretended to pay, non-democratic leaders pretend to build and maintain democracy while some erstwhile, earnest, and ersatz seekers of democracy pretend to see it. The latter's pretending can lead to a pretension that may be unconscious and fueled by the fervent desire to see the ideal become the real, conscious and fueled by the desire to be perceived as correct, or yet other psychological combinations.

A third difficulty is a cognitive response set characterizing many efforts to evaluate the effects of programs to spread democracy--whether or not these evaluations are formally or informally effected by the very individuals or sponsors behind the programs' planning and implementation. The evaluators' response set--as implied above--is primed to find success and approximations to it. More interestingly, the response set seems biased against the very notion that democracy programs may result in a worsening of situations--so that democracy is even and ever farther away.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Democracy programs may help spread democracy where there is a will but less of a way. However, such programs may lose their way and attenuate the will. Where there is a way but no will or no way and no will, there is little to suggest what will or won't be at least somewhat effective. Yet politics and policy processes may demand democracy program development and the choice of very "hard targets." As can be seen, political psychologists interested in helping to spread democracy have much to contribute. (See Reichenbach, R. (1998). The postmodern self and the problem of developing a democratic mind. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 26, 226-237; Rosenberg, T. (October 25, 1999). America finds democracy a difficult export. *The New York Times*, p. A26; Sekulic, D., & Sporer, Z. (1998). Toward democracy or to the new authoritarianism? The case of Croatia. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 24, 129-169; Sullivan, J.L., & Transue, J.E. (1999). The psychological underpinnings of democracy: A selective review of research on political tolerance, interpersonal trust, and social capital. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50, 625-650; Warwick, P.V. (1998). Disputed cause, disputed effect: The postmaterialist thesis re-examined. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 62, 583-609.) (Keywords: Democracy, Evaluation.)