Democratic Governance and the Challenges of 'Hybridity'

Caroline Hughes, Joakim Öjendal and Kimchoeun Pak discuss the conceptual evolution of democratisation, and the concept of hybridity as a governance system. *

This article introduces the concept of "hybridity", here refered to as a state of governance combining the elements of both authoritarianism and democracy (Karl 1995). The article starts by presenting a conceptual evolution of democratisation, followed by the concept of hybridity as a governance system as discussed in the literature. It then reflects on how hybridity might be applied in the context of Cambodian governance, especially within its emerging decentralisation and deconcentration (D&D) reforms, as an analytical research framework for the Governance and Decentralisation Unit of the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) for the new programme phase from 2007 to 2010.

The Third Wave

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a "third wave" of democratisation supposedly swept the globe (Huntington 1991). Countries in southern Europe, Latin America, eastern Europe, Africa and Asia came to embrace some sort of multi-party system. Two new features of the spread of democracy were notable in this wave. Huntington (1991) suggested that global, rather than local, factors were largely responsible for its force and reach, while O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986) seminal study of *Transitions from Authoritarianism* turned the study of democratisation upside down by emphasising the importance of "elite pacts" rather than the rise of pro-democratic social forces, in prompting transitions to democracy.

The idea that transitions to democracy could be consciously designed and delivered by the actions of elites in response to international "demonstration effects" represented a new departure in an area of political science that had long been dominated by a focus on structural preconditions and the *longue duree* (di Palma 1990; Lipset 1969; Moore 1968). The focus on elite pacts prompted new research agendas that focused less on the question of the evolution of pro-democratic social forces at the grass roots and more on the ways in which elites

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* This article is based on the concept of "hybridity" as a useful analytical research framework for CDRI's Democratic Governance and Public Sector Reform programme. Caroline Hughes, lecturer at the Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham, UK; Joakim Öjendal, associate professor, Department of Peace and Development Research, Goteborg Univesity, Sweden and Kimchoeun Pak, research associate at CDRI.

in democratising countries used their power to support or undermine institutions built or reformed in line with international policy prescriptions.

In policy terms, new theories of democratisation backed democracy promotion in the policies of western powers. Democratisation as a foreign and aid policy goal emerged from two related theses. The first held that the creation of democratic institutions at the top would promote democratic politics at the bottom, even if a "democratic political culture" was not already in place. Explaining this position, Luckham, Goertz and Kaldor (2003) draw a distinction between "democratic institutions" and "democratic politics". The former comprise the apparatus of elections, assemblies and parties familiar from democracy promotion policies, while the latter focuses on the political context within which these operate—a context of informal structures of authority, local communal bodies and other non-state and possibly non-national social forces. Transition theorists argued that the design of new institutions would elicit transformed political behaviour from the population, who would increasingly adapt their political strategies to the rules of the democratic "game" (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). When political actors were sufficiently "habituated" to these rules so that democracy had become "the only game in town", consolidation was deemed to have taken place (Linz and Stepan 1997). In the wave of optimism surrounding the end of the Cold War, consolidation was considered to be the default outcome of democratic transition, although "reverses" due to renewed military intervention were granted to be possible.

The second thesis that encouraged democracy promotion policies was the democratic peace thesis. This links democracy to peace, drawing upon Kantian arguments that autonomous rational actors will not go to war, because it is not in their interests, and that democracy is the form of government that best preserves rational actors' autonomy. For example, in his 1992 *Agenda for Peace*, then United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali drew upon revived versions of Kantian democratic peace theory to assert:

> *"There is an obvious connection between democratic practices—such as the rule of law and transparency in decision-making—and the achievement of true peace and security in any new and stable political order." (Boutros-Ghali, 1995).*

Throughout the 1990s, increasingly complex political settlements sponsored by international organisations to deal with a variety of civil wars incorporated democracy promotion, most prominently multi-party elections, as a means to cement peace. This concern transformed democracy promotion into a declared national security strategy for some western states (Evans 1994).

This attitude encouraged the deployment of democracy advisers to governments around the world, assisting with drafting laws, establishing institutions

and organising elections. This trend was reinforced by the post-Cold War need to solve many internal conflicts and to re-establish workable governments that respected human rights and strove for democracy. Often this took place through international interventions "inserting" democratic procedures into political systems from outside and from above (e.g. Doyle and Orr 1996). Elections to legitimise new constitutional regimes in the aftermath of civil war became a feature of almost every internationally sponsored peace process in the 1990s.

Defining Democracy

One of the problems of post-Cold War democracy promotion, however, has been defining democracy itself. In the theoretical literature, "democracy" is widely regarded as an "essentially contested concept"—one that can never be satisfactorily defined because it denotes evaluation as well as description (Gallie 1956). However, policy concerns to promote and evaluate democracy around the world prompted the widespread use of simplified definitions in the 1990s. Democratic transition was conceptualised as a process by which institutions of authoritarian or communist rule were replaced or reformed in line with the requirements of a limited polyarchy, incorporating some level of choice over representatives, participation in formulating political agendas and respect for civil and political rights and freedoms. This "minimalist" conception of democracy, drawn from Dahl's formulation of "polyarchy" as comprising choice, participation and respect for human rights (Dahl 1971) has operated as the core definition for international policy makers, with relatively little discussion.

This emphasis on rules, procedures and institutions, rather than on cultures, values and norms of interaction, renders the study of transitions unproblematic, shifting difficulties in characterising a more widespread democratic *politics* to a later phase of "consolidation" (Luckham *et al.* 2003:15"). However, proceduralist definitions of democracy have been criticised on two counts: first, they de-link issues of formal political participation from issues of substantive social justice; second, these definitions tend to be circulated with little reference to the fact that in established democracies of the North, formal procedures often function poorly in terms of mobilising enthusiastic and informed political participation.

Hybridity as a Divergent Transitional Outcome

Beyond the problem of defining democracy, the empirical record over the course of the 1990s also caused problems for the transition paradigm. The idea that top-down democratic institutions give rise to bottom-up democratic politics was rarely borne out in practice. While a few countries that initiated transitions as part of the "third wave" became fully fledged democracies, many more were observed to get stuck in a "grey zone" variously called "hybrid", "semi-" or "pseudo–" democracy, combining "elements of both authoritarianism and democracy" (Karl

1995). In such grey zones, forms of political interaction that, from the point of view of democracy promotion, appeared as "profound pathologies", were apparently durable for sustained periods (Carothers 2002; Inoguchi and Bacon 2003). In hybrid democracies, the democratic nature of institutions did not generate a democratic politics at the bottom. A number of explanations have been put forward for this.

Authoritarian disingenuity: some transitions were subsequently regarded as cosmetic affairs, in which elites offered a degree of liberalisation to assuage the concerns of donors, while ensuring that formal democratic institutions remained marginal to actual politics and consequently could not be used to empower a democratic politics at the grass roots.

Insufficient international political will: other studies blamed international actors for failing to devote sufficient resources and attention to achieving momentum in specific countries.

Inadequate or different political culture: culturally specific variants of democracy, e.g. delegative democracy (O'Donnell 1995) and Asian-style democracy (Neher 1993) were regarded as reflecting the lack of a democratic political culture to complement democratic institutions. Culturally mandated responsiveness to personal charisma prompts Latin electorates to vote for strongmen, in O'Donnell's formulation, while respect for hierarchy and the prioritisation of community stability over individual opportunity result in patriarchal party systems that limit certain freedoms in Asia, according to Neher.

Inadequate sense of political community: Luckham et al. (2003) argue that "the crucial issue in the longer term" is how these non-state forces or "publics" can be forged into the "single political community based on broad consent and inclusive notions of common citizenship" required for democratic governance. In couching the argument in these terms, they suggest that the crucial problem is division within society, due either to ethnic ties or to local political orientations; this causes alienation from formal, national democratic institutions, which are not regarded as particularly relevant to everyday life.

Inadequate type of democracy promoted: Gills and Rocamora (1997) argue that the minimalist conception of democracy widely promoted in the South, based upon Robert Dahl's 1971 formulation, should be regarded as "low-intensity democracy"—a "formal" democracy of institutions tailored to the needs of global capital and detached from a social justice agenda that would make it appealing in the eyes of the poor. This type of democracy serves to pre-empt and obstruct, rather than facilitate, local demands for broader social reform, and leads to alienation on the part of the public, whose expectations of a better life in conditions of democracy are betrayed. In their view, democracy promotion represents a capture of the "global gold standard" of democracy by the forces of hegemony (see also Robinson 1996; Abrahamsen 2000; Mkandwire 1999).

Insufficient attention to the interaction of state and society: Kohli (1997), however, posits an alternative scenario in "follower democracies", suggesting that weak and imported democratic institutions may be overwhelmed by social forces based upon different notions of community such as patron-clientism, kinship, tribal affiliation or ethnic identity. Indeed, the promotion of democracy encourages elites to use such notions of community as a means of political mobilisation—this can lead to collision of mobilised identities, undermining of traditional authority structures and erosion of community norms, all of which are disruptive to social order. The response of a variety of groups to this, in a contest where imported political models and indigenous cultural conditions are interacting and adapting to each other, unsurprisingly promotes political turbulence.

This position is echoed in critiques of the democratic peace thesis. In this area too, the immediate post-Cold War orthodoxy was challenged by the end of the 1990s. A comparative literature has emerged linking political transition, including transition towards democracy, to higher levels of violence than are found in either consolidated democracies or consolidated autocracies (Huntington 1991; Bratton and van de Walle 1996). Studies of post-conflict reconstruction have suggested that the introduction of competitive party politics in a situation where neither civil society nor state institutions are sufficiently robust to safeguard against new outbreaks of violence can permit violent groups to grab the initiative (Huntington 1996; Paris 2003; Ottaway 2003). The disastrous effects of elections during the peace processes in Angola and Rwanda, where more people died after the peace accords were signed than before, offset the successful use of elections to legitimise new constitutional regimes in places like Mozambique. Even in the places where elections were used successfully to mobilise legitimacy, they were viewed as achieving far less in the way of facilitating political participation, promoting respect for human rights and limiting the actions of the state in matters such as corruption; all these issues were regarded as leaving in place the conditions for renewed violent conflict in the future.

Applying the Concept of 'Hybridity' to Understand Democratic Development in Cambodia
Cambodia's experience in recent years appears to reflect several features of a hybrid democracy. For example, Cambodia's political governance system maintains certain forms of liberal democracy in terms of formal procedures and institutions, but state-society relations are not informed by the core values of democracy. Key institutions are also not yet capable of defending democratic politics, effective service delivery or key natural resources. A system operating through personalised chains of patronage is emerging, intertwined with a quasi-legitimate, rent-seeking political economy, transposed onto a new context of free market mass

politics (Hughes 2003; Un 2005). Consequently, the state-society relationship can be corrupted, exploited or even non-existent in some situations. Official attitudes toward citizens and citizens' attitudes toward officials vary accordingly.

In terms of policy research, this suggests a need for a framework in which not just the nature of Cambodian democratic institutions and their effects on politics at the bottom, but also the nature of politics at the bottom and its effects on those institutions need to be examined and analysed. The interaction between democratic and non-democratic (but not necessarily undemocratic) structures of power and existing practices of political engagement at the grass roots constitute complex state-society relations. In a hybrid system, moreover, in order to analyse such relations, a core research activity should be to identify, unpack, understand and analyse the dynamics and implications of the coexistence of, and relations between, formal and informal institutions, democratic and non-/anti-democratic processes, rationally and culturally informed arrangements and political and technical perspectives. This framework for understanding state-society relations points out three related areas for objective research in Cambodia.

Institutional development
This involves a focus on the institutional composition of the state. The inner workings of the state, distributions of power and the functioning of different sets of actors within would be targeted for study. A special focus would be placed on the implementation and contexts of Cambodia's major institutional reforms in D&D including the electoral system, service delivery and public finance. Approaching these issues in a hybrid system, the research would first identify and explain the interactions between democratic and non-democratic, formal and informal, technical and political and rational and cultural aspects of politics and administration. It would then seek to evaluate the effects of D&D reform in terms of promoting the state's capacity to make and enforce rules, extract and redistribute resources, and conceptualise and defend the "public good".

State-society relations and their intermediaries
The state's ability to exercise its core functions is determined not only by institutional arrangements but also by the state's relationship with society. In Cambodia, a large body of literature shows the gap between rulers and ruled as the main historical shortcoming in producing a state-society relationship that facilitates the core functions of the state and produces positive policy outcomes (Chandler 1998; Mabbet and Chandler 1996; Peang-Meth 1991). Research into this area focuses primarily on the ways in which state actors understand their role, how they attempt to overcome problems of the relatively low level of state penetration due to the appointment of intermediaries and how this affects their formulation and execution of policy (formal and informal). This entails

a focus on transparency, accountability, representation of the public and responsiveness, as well as deeper consideration of the relationship of these characteristics to formal regulations and procedures, the informal patterns of interaction between state, society and their intermediaries and the cultural values and norms that govern and determine these.

Civic engagement

Civic engagement is defined as the sphere in which individuals, families, communities and non-state actors interact with one another and with representatives of the state. Once again, this is a sphere which is governed by formal regulations and procedures (e.g. elections), informal relationships and cultural values and norms. It is understood here as the study of a bottom-up process focused on values and attitudes governing political strategies used by civil society to engage the state. Specific research topics might include the issues of perceived meanings of citizenship in Cambodia, the roles of civil society in bridging the gap between the state, and the impacts of low civic engagement in Cambodia on the ability of the state to perform its functions.

Conclusion

The above framework suggests a new research agenda for "hybrid regimes" that focuses not only on the institutional high politics of democratic governance, but also upon the interaction between state and social forces at central and local level, and on whether and how local social change is prompted by, and in turn produces, democratic politics. Within this framework, a research agenda that examine the varied ways that individuals make choices and participate in both formal and informal types of engagement with the state must examine not only the formal rules and procedures, but also the norms and values that constitute the unwritten rules of politics and which contribute to explaining not just what choices individuals made and how they exercised them, but why they hold the preferences they do, and how state influence and community culture shape those preferences.

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