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POLI 003

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30 January 2020

Transitions from Below

A country's transition to democracy may be influenced by the following factors: social determinants where culture of a country may determine its compatibility with democracy, economic determinants where economic development produces cultural changes that are favorable for democracy to exist, external influences which refers international factors that influence democracy, transitions from below refers to citizens mobilizing to change their government that is a socio-cultural change, and or transitions from above which refers to elites pressuring authoritarian incumbents to democratize. In our analysis we assume a country is a democracy if it meets the following necessary but not sufficient conditions: regular elections, alternation of power, and separations of power.

In analyzing the differences between Chile and Iran we find that a transition from below results in different outcomes because each country has different geography, cultural and historical background. Iran is largely influenced by theocracy and although it possesses a presidential democracy it has never met the necessary conditions to be considered a democracy. Historically Chile has had a democracy, before Pinochet Salvador Allende was the democratically elected leader. After the toppling of Mohammad Mosaddeq who was prime minister of Iran in the 1950s Iran's prospects of becoming a democracy were destroyed because

authoritarian power increased substantially (Roham, Gasiorowski , 2020). A transition from below was successful in Chile because of the culture and because the institutions in place.

Chile's transition to democracy was largely influenced by a transition from below, a transition from below refers to citizen movements, in the case of Chile students, trade unions, and the catholic church mobilized together to protect human rights (freedomhouse.org). Under the government of Pinochet the democratic institutions were overpowered but continue to exist. The neoliberal experiment in the 1980s resulted in the privatization of education and public services which lead to social mobilization of women, students, and *pobladores* (Rodriguez, 2020). The Chilean people mobilized in support for Plebiscite which ended the reign of Augusto Pinochet, this was a victory that would have not been possible without the support of the Chilean citizens. Pinochet respected because he was pressured by the elites and external forces.

A transition from below has failed in Iran because of the influence religion has on the country. Islam is the official religion of Iran therefore abiding the principles of Islam are very important to the citizens which may come at the cost of human rights. An example of a transition from below in Iran is the *One Million Signature* campaign which aimed to end gender discrimination which started in 2006 but faced its demise around 2009. The was unsuccessful campaign due to being inherently in opposition to the principles of Islam. Institutions did not exist to protect this campaign for example the government had full control of the press. Unlike in Chile while under Pinochet the constitution of Iran which is primarily based on religious text does protect the rights of women, freedom of religion, or freedom of speech. The *One Million Signature* campaign was unsuccessful because a transition from below must lead to a transition from above. For example the political elites of Iran did not feel pressure to reform the systems

because the movement had no interest in mobilizing politicians or lobbying for legislative change. (Barlow 2018)

In conclusion a transition from below may not be sufficient if there are no institutions in place or a culture compatible with democracy. In our comparison of Iran and Chile we find that Iran failed to transition to democracy due to the elites not being pressured to reform the system due to religious principles on the other hand in Chile had the institutions for a democracy and that is why the 1988 Chilean National plebiscite was possible and led by mobilization of students, women, and the catholic church. Socio-cultural changes can be very successful if and only if certain conditions are met such as democracy being compatible with culture, the existence of institutions, and elites finding democracy to be in their best interests.

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