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RESEARCH PAPER

Role of the 'Popular Will' in the Emergence of the 'Democratic Norms' and 'Socioeconomic Performance' as Major Sources of State Legitimacy

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
	Scholars and policymakers linked to global democracy project assume that 'popular will' and 'democratic norms' are complementary to each other. Based on this assumption, they claim that if impediments to popular will are removed, people will automatically adopt democratic norms. In this paper, we challenge this assumption and argue that there could be situations when public opinion might be in favor of non-democratic norms as well. We do acknowledge that significance of popular will in global political culture led to democracy as the key source of legitimacy. However, at the same time, demands to satisfy public opinion forced state leaders to provide public goods. Hence, instrumental legitimacy arising out of 'socioeconomic performance' provided base of support to non-democratic leaders. Consequently, it is recommended that to win over public opinion democratic norms must compete with other non-democratic sources of legitimacy, and that free public opinion will not automatically lead to democracy.

Introduction

In the wake of the changing social and political realities around the world certain modes of legitimacy get preference over other modes of legitimacy and guide state leaders to maximize legitimacy of their states, regimes and preferred policies. In order to explain the process of legitimation, it is inevitable to identify different sources of legitimacy that could be at the disposal of the state leaders to gain legitimacy of their states and regimes. As far as structural sources of legitimacy are concerned, democracies have generally boasted their structures and procedures that give preference to individual freedoms and allow popular participation in politics. Non-democratic regimes, on the other hand, generally highlight policy performance, especially socioeconomic policy performance in the case of Communist and other non-democratic countries.

In this paper, explore how and why democracy and socioeconomic performance became dominant sources of legitimacy in the present world. It is argued that as 'popular will' gained universal acceptance in the justification of the political power, it put pressure on the leaders to cater to public opinion and public rationality, initially by ensuring public participation through democracy, and then by redistributive justice through socioeconomic policies. Especially, democracy as an (objective) normative criteria gained prominence due to two main reasons. One, as legitimacy got institutionalized in the major powers of the system, it

became dominant source of legitimacy in international political culture. Secondly, as process of legitimacy requires rhetoric and persuasion, democracy provided better opportunities for deliberation. Especially, rhetoric has gained more significance in the present times as communicative theories and discourse analysis have gained more prominence in social sciences. The process of legitimation, that involves rhetoric and persuasion, has itself been identified by many scholars as a major source of legitimacy.

Democracy is no doubt paramount in the present international system, and for the most part democracy and popular will are complementary to each other. Owing to this situation, most of the scholars of legitimacy and democracy use concepts of 'democracy' and 'popular will' interchangeably. This paper, however, attempts to dispel this assertion. It is argued that non-democratic sources can also be used to gain popular approval. For example, state leaders can provide public goods in the form of socioeconomic benefits to win over public opinion and, consequently, gain legitimacy. Consequently, they can gain legitimacy. Such legitimacy is labelled by some scholars as instrumental legitimacy. Initially, such legitimacy was claimed by non-democratic regimes, especially Communist and Socialist regimes. Later on, it became prominent in democratic state as well, which is evidenced by the emergence of the democratic welfare state.

Legitimacy: Different Aspects

Legitimacy in the context of a political entity is a concept that seeks to connect political actors to social actors and in doing so determines the nature of authority relationship between the two. It is an ongoing process and has implications for identities and interests of all the actors involved. Reus-Smit (2007) explains, "legitimacy is a social concept in the deepest sense… Political actors are constantly seeking legitimacy for themselves or their preferred institutions and in doing so they engage in practices of legitimation. Because legitimation is a normative process, it is characterized by actors seeking to justify their identities, interests, practices, or institutional designs" (Reus-Smit, 2007, p. 159). The process involves normative element, because when political actors seek legitimacy, they need to come up with some normative criteria that will become basis or standard against which legitimacy will be achieved and judged. Among the scholarly community, there has been a division of labor between those who give primacy to normative aspects and those who prefer social aspects of legitimacy. Bjola (2008), for example, mentions that "scholars of legitimacy subscribe to either a Weberian or a Kantian type of reasoning according to which legitimacy should be studied either in analytical or normative terms, that is, as either a description or a prescription of social reality" (Bjola, 2008, p. 629). Macdonald (2008), in this respect, explains practical implications of such distinction. According to him, "my conception of political legitimacy is normative rather than empirical, in that I treat the concept of legitimacy as an attribute derived from the application of critical evaluative standards rather than from an assessment of people's existing evaluative beliefs" (Macdonald, 2008, p. 546). Here, it can be argued that the latter concept confirms more to the popular will as it gives primacy to the people, while the former, with its focus on normative standards (which could be external to people's existing beliefs), can potentially be against popular will as even non-democratic leaders and regimes can come up with certain moral standards and then educate, force or manipulate people to confirm to those standards.

Could there be any possibility that leaders would be justified in shaping or changing popular will through different strategies? There is one possibility that could be justified under certain circumstances. That is, if norms themselves are democratic. However, the question still remains that 'can we force people of a political entity to confirm to democratic norms if their existing values and beliefs are in favor of non-democratic norms?' This is the major question that scholars and policymakers linked to democracy project face around the world. It is generally assumed by most of the legitimacy scholars (as well as scholars of democracy) that popular will and democratic norms are complementary to each other. However, in cases where

these two will come into clash with each other, scholars of legitimacy would favor popular will, while scholars of democracy would give preference to the democratic norms and would try to find different ways to change people's values and beliefs to confirm to democratic norms. Democracy scholars would justify these attempts by pointing out that, compared to non-democratic regimes, democracies provide better communicative procedures by which public can participate in the deliberative process to change their values and beliefs. For example, in the context of the European Union (EU), Collignon (2007) highlights a model that justifies EU as 'a rights-based political union' in which "preferences are changed and altered as a consequence of communication and deliberation… Democracy as a deliberative procedure for reaching acceptable collective decisions is therefore a source of legitimacy" (Collignon, 2007, p. 176). Regardless of this argument, the debate on this issue continues both in scholarly as well as political circles. This paper contributes to this debate. Key argument of this paper is that the above-mentioned confusion is created because democracy scholars equate democracy with 'popular will' and use them interchangeably. This paper seeks to separate these two concepts. It is argued that it is the 'popular will,' with focus on subjective aspect of legitimacy, that has gained universal acceptance. On the other hand, democracy is more of a normative concept in the context of objective criterion of legitimacy. For the most part, popular will and democracy are complementary to each other, but possibilities remain that non-democratic norms can also be used to gain popular approval. In the later part of the paper, it will be argued that democracy, as an objective criterion, did get universal acceptance, but non-democratic (objective) criteria of legitimacy keep challenging democracy and provide alternative sources of legitimacy.

Emergence of the Popular Will as a Major Influence on State Legitimacy

In terms of state legitimacy, we can distinguish between two major historical epochs. First, monarchical times, when leaders' dynastic ties were considered to be the major legitimizing device; and second, contemporary times when public has more say in the choice and retention of leaders. In an era of monarchs, legitimacy was based on "the 'legality' of the family relationship between the ruler and the previous ruler" (Fraser, 1974, p. 118). By the end of the 19th century, legitimacy based on monarchical rule gave way to legitimacy based upon popular will, which meant that public rationality started playing an important role in political sphere. Bukovansky (2002) affirms that "international political culture today converges on the idea of 'the people' as the ultimate source of political authority." According to her, not only democracies, but "Communist and even some authoritarian regimes have also claimed to derive their authority from the people" (Bukovansky, 2002, pp. 8-9). Similarly, by studying Christianity and political power, Turner (1991) argues that the Western world has moved from 'descending theory of legitimacy,' in which power descends from God, to an 'ascending theory of legitimacy,' in which power comes from the people (Turner, 1991, pp. 178-198). In response to this trend, Political Science scholars, focusing on popular will, deal with the legitimacy issues of both democratic and non-democratic countries. These Political Scientists, like sociologists, focus on the subjective aspects of legitimacy and are presently more prominent in the legitimacy scholarship. According to these scholars, key determinants of the subjective aspects of legitimacy include "identifying the empirical consequences that legitimacy has for the character of power relations" (Beetham, 1991, p. 5). Overall, the focus of such scholars is to highlight the link between legitimacy and power (Hurd, 1999). In explaining how legitimacy enhances state power and authority, Matheson (1987) argues that "legitimate authority is a less 'costly' form of authority than either coercive or reward-based authority" (Matheson, 1987, p. 201). The connection between legitimacy, conflict and coercion (or patronage) can be more explicitly exhibited in those instances when it declines. Crisis in legitimacy has potential to lead to social disintegration and resultant conflict. In this regard, Dahl and Lindblom (1992) observe that legitimacy "is not indispensable to all control. Nevertheless, lack of legitimacy imposes heavy costs on the controllers." (Dahl & Lindblom, 1992, p. 115). With its potential to

reduce conflicts in any entity (political or otherwise), legitimacy can lead to overall stability. For example, Suchman (1995) explains that "legitimacy enhances both the stability and the comprehensibility of organizational activities" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Pelc (2010) further substantiate this argument by emphasizing that "a consensus of sorts has developed around the Weberian view of legitimacy that suggests that material power alone is often insufficient to establish a stable order" (Pelc, 2010, p. 67).

It is evident from the above that popular will became dominant in international political culture and subsequently led to the prevalence of the subjective aspects of legitimacy. In the next section, I will explain how democracy, an objective/normative concept, got equated with the popular will.

How and Why Democracy became Synonymous with the 'Popular Will'?

As mentioned earlier, along with subjective aspect of legitimacy, a normative or objective criteria is needed. However, it must be emphasized that there could be many different sources of legitimacy that have potential to become objective/normative criteria. Availability of the multiple sources of legitimacy make it difficult for the leaders to decide which source should be chosen at a given time. Zariski (1986) elaborates on such difficulty. According to him:

It has become evident that legitimacy is not a nominal variable – like the Chinese 'mandate of heaven' – which either exists or does not exist. Instead, it is present to varying degrees in various regimes. Moreover, the supply of legitimacy possessed by any given regime or government tends to fluctuate over time. The fluid and elusive character of legitimacy poses the problem of what yardsticks are to be employed to measure the amount and type of legitimacy a given regime or government has at its disposal (Zariski, 1986, p. 29).

By mentioning the significance of a 'yardstick' by which we can measure any given regime's legitimacy, Zariski (1986) highlights the importance of specifying an ideal type (Zariski, 1986). On this point, Bukovansky (2002) emphasizes the presence of a certain form of legitimacy that is privileged in a system of units with some identical characteristics. She stresses that any system, such as state system, "enshrines certain modes of authority and order, privileging some forms of rule over others." (Bukovansky, 2002, pp. 211-212). In narrowing down the scope of privileged legitimacy, Bukovansky (2002, 212) introduces the concept of a 'hegemonic international culture' as the "one in which a specific mode of legitimating authority is dominant, shared by, and institutionalized within the major powers in the system." By using her criteria, Bukovansky (2002) identifies dynastic monarchy as the 'dominant mode of legitimacy' in the eighteenth century and republicanism in the aftermath of the French and American revolutions. (Bukovansky, 2002, p. 212)

Rapkin and Braaten (2009) further explain the process by which dominant source of legitimacy is institutionalized in the international system. According to them, external aspect of state legitimacy involves "formal diplomatic recognition by other states of a government as the sovereign representative of its people" (Rapkin & Braaten, 2009, p. 117). International legitimacy, in this sense, provides restraints on the behavior of state leaders. Matveeva (1999), for example, mentions that for the leaders in Central Asia "international pressure and a fear of exclusion from the Western sphere of influence make ever more acute the need to be accepted as legitimate" (Matveeva, 1999, p. 23). Similarly, Vu (2010), referring to the Indonesian state formation, argues that "the contest for resources was intertwined with the contest for legitimacy as emerging state elites fought for international recognition and forged a new relationship with social groups" (Vu, 2010, p. 166). Not only international system has impact on domestic politics, domestic politics of states can also have impact on international system. As Hurd (2007) argues, "the politics of legitimation and delegitimation links states with the normative structures of international society. Legitimation is a practice through which states and norms interact. Both are changed as a result" (Hurd, 2007, p. 209).

Even though internal and external aspects of state legitimacy are independently important, for the most part they are interlinked. A state that enjoys legitimate authority in its domestic sphere is also more likely to get recognition and approval by external actors, hence reinforcing its legitimacy and power at both national and international level. Eriksen (2011), in this respect, argues that "since external recognition and formal acceptance of the principle of non-intervention can be taken more or less for granted, failure takes the form of breakdown of domestic sovereignty" (Eriksen, 2011, p. 233). Owing to the significance of the popular will, domestic legitimacy is the core that primarily determines nature and scope of international relations. In this respect, even international legitimacy is conditional upon domestic legitimacy, and in some cases international legitimacy is basically just validation of domestic legitimacy. This outcome is the product of the emergence of an international system in which norms of democracy, as objective criterion, gained prominence due to the space created by the universal acceptance of 'popular will' as a basic principle for the state and regime legitimacy. Here, we must acknowledge that democracy has gained decisive edge. Matheson (1987), for example argues that in the aftermath of the French Revolution "democracy or popular majorities have increasingly become the only basis of legitimate government in a process that has involved the fading of the monarchical government" (Matheson, 1987, p. 203).

In order to highlight the distinction between the concepts of 'popular will' and 'democracy,' in the next section I explain that even though popular will kept its acceptance universally, norms of democracy keep getting challenged by other non-democratic sources of legitimacy.

Non-Democratic Challenges to Democracy

In order to show the significance of the non-democratic sources of legitimacy, we need to explain the process of legitimation by which state leaders can use different sources of legitimacy. In explaining the process of legitimation, main thing that must be acknowledged is that state leadership normally does not use only one source of legitimacy. Leaders, either through their rhetoric or through their policies, invoke different sources of legitimacy. Leaders can use any combination of different sources of legitimacy to justify their rule. For example, Gilley (2008) outlines six major sources of legitimacy used by the Chinese leadership in the post-1989 era. These sources include: "(a) economic growth and development, (b) stability and governance, (c) political and civil rights, (d) international prestige and nationalism, (e) cultural and historical dispositions to trust the national state, and (f) social, cultural, and economic rights" (Gilley, 2008, p. 271). Not only different sources can enhance legitimacy in combination, but one source can reinforce another source. In this respect, Bukovansky (2007) mentions, "the relationship between market capitalism and democracy remains robust in public discourse, and each system is routinely evoked to legitimate the other" (Bukovansky, 2007, p. 187)

To further identify different sources of legitimacy, we can start with Max Weber, who identified three sources of legitimacy, including traditional, rational, and charismatic. Matheson (1987) argues that these three bases in fact comprise "five separate principles of legitimation, namely, convention, sacredness, personal ties, personal qualities and rationality" (Matheson, 1987, p. 199). Other authors have added categories like contract, religion, popular approval, success, and jurisprudence to the above-mentioned basic Weberian categories. Categories like contract were added to Weber's original schema because they became more significant in the post-Weberian eras. For example, White (1986) argues that in the Communist regimes claim to rule particularly depended "upon a source of legitimacy to which Weber gave no direct attention: socioeconomic performance... a role generally assumed by governments to significant degree only sometime after Weber's death" (White, 1986, p. 463). In order to deal with different sources of legitimacy in a more comprehensive manner, David Easton's (1965) identifies ideology, personal qualities of the leaders and structure as the key sources. (Easton, 1965, p. 287).

Ideology can be of many different types, signifying economic, social, or political aspects of an entity. To bypass all conceptual complexity and to come up with a generic term, Gaetano Mosca (1939) would use the label 'political formula,' under which rulers advance "a metaphysical or ideological formula that justifies their possession of power" (Mosca, 1939, p. 70). Among all ideologies, religion has been the most important and long-lasting source of legitimacy. For example, Kittrie (1995) mentions, "among ancient peoples the political formula not only rested upon religion but was wholly identified with it" (Kittrie, 1995, p. 4). Even in the modern times religion remains to be an important legitimizing force. In this respect, Kokosalakis (1985) argues that despite prominence of the modern secular ideologies, a "strong residual element of religion, which clearly exists even in Western societies, can still perform basic legitimizing or oppositional functions within such ideologies" (Kokosalakis, 1985, p. 371). Razi (1990) explains the reasons for the durability of religion as a legitimizing force by pointing out that religion is the major source of "macroloyalty' as it generated 'the widest bonds of commonly held values in the region" (Razi, 1990, p. 75). In explaining overlapping functions of religious and secular ideologies, Jurgensmeyer (1993) establishes that both are 'ideologies of order' (Jurgensmeyer, 1993, pp. 30-31). Since religion and the secular ideologies perform the same functions, Fox (1999) argues that religion and 'secular nationalism,' including ideologies like liberalism, socialism, and fascism, are potential rivals (Fox, 1999, p. 291). Next to religion, Communism as a secular ideology has also provided a viable source of legitimacy to challenge democracy. Communism more specifically claimed to cater to public interest or popular will. Tarifa (1997) explains that major base on which power was attained and held in most of the Communist countries was "a high-minded and idealistic premise of building a more egalitarian, just, prosperous, and better-ordered society" (Tarifa, 1997, p. 448). Meyer (1966) also considered Communist ideology a major "legitimizing device... to convince the people that the entire system of government is legitimate" (Meyer, 1966, p. 279).

Another major non-democratic source of legitimacy refers to personal qualities of the authorities. Regarding personal qualities of authorities, we can make a distinction between charisma and personal qualities of individual leaders like Hitler, Khomeini, Mao Zedong, Gandhi, and the qualities of groups of individuals like members of the Communist party, or members of bureaucracy or military, who possess specialized qualities. The idea that legitimacy could be based upon the expertise of leaders was originally advanced by Saint-Simon. In the modern times it is represented in management and technocratic theories. Under the rubric of these theories, such legitimacy is sought based on the "superior knowledge of the power-holder vis-à-vis that of the power-subjects" (Matheson, 1987, p. 203). Della Fave (1980) explains that such political formula emphasizes "the allegedly superior qualities of its members" (Della Fave, 1980, p. 958). Members of the groups like the military or bureaucracy achieve their legitimacy through their expertise in fields like security or economy. Because such regimes justify their rule through expertise in certain specialized fields, they are more likely to insulate popular role in policy making. Levy (1989), for example, argues that insulation of bureaucratic authoritarian regimes is reinforced by the 'technological orientation' of bureaucracy (both military and civil) (Levy, 1989).

To further extend the argument, Rapkin and Braaten (2009, 125) add the dimension of outcome to the substantive and process-oriented legitimacy. (Rapkin & Braaten, 2009, p. 125) Similarly, Albin (2008) makes a case that not only process, but also the outcome is important in legitimizing a system (Albin, 2008, p. 771). This emphasis on redistributive justice and outcome might have its origin in Socialist or Communist ideologies, but in the contemporary times it has been institutionalized in mature democracies as well under the rubric of welfare state or welfare policies. It can also be argued that the acceptance of the socialist ideas of the redistributive justice in advanced industrial societies is also due to the fact that popular will has gained more significance in all types of regimes.

Socioeconomic performance not only provides legitimacy to new (and to some extent old) democracies, but to non-democratic regimes as well. To some extent, it is even more vital for non-democratic regimes that are generally short on public participation. White (1986), for example, argues that the single most important legitimizing device for the Communist and other authoritarian regimes is their socioeconomic performance. Under the 'social contract' advanced by the Communist regimes, even if citizens are deprived of most of the civil liberties, "Communist regimes do generally provide a high level of social welfare." (White 1986, 463-464). The above discussion suggests that legitimacy can be achieved through non-democratic sources. Among non-democratic sources, socioeconomic performance gained more significance because it was aimed at satisfying public opinion and popular will.

Conclusion

Recent literature on legitimacy identifies two main types of legitimacy. One, based on objective normative aspects of legitimacy that take democratic norms, processes and procedures as critical evaluative standards for authority relationships. Two, based on subjective or social aspects of legitimacy that favor popular will and judge authority relationship by people's existing values and beliefs. In terms of the democratic norms, most of the legitimacy and democracy scholars generally assume that 'democratic norms' and 'popular will' are complementary to each other. However, a possibility remains that this might not be the case in certain circumstances. It is argued that legitimacy scholars would still prefer popular will as it would minimize chances of the crises of legitimacy. Democracy scholars, on the other hand, would justify changing people's values and beliefs, and resultantly their preferences to make them compatible with democratic norms. These scholars would most definitely disapprove of the use of force or bribery to change people's beliefs. Their whole justification for changing people's values and beliefs would depend on rhetoric and persuasion to achieve this objective. Especially, in the present day context when discourse analysis and communication theories have gained prominence in social sciences, democracy scholars would like to emphasize use of deliberative processes, where people are involved in the process to make their values and beliefs compatible to democratic norms. Some scholars in this tradition even identify 'deliberative procedure for acceptable collective decision' as a major source of legitimacy.

Even though democratic norms may not be exclusively vital in the attainment of the internal state legitimacy, they are very significant in terms of the external legitimacy of a state. Democratic norms link states to the normative structures of the international society and provide yardstick by which domestic legitimacy of a state is judged. In this respect, state leaders are under constant socialization pressure exerted by the international system to confirm to the democratic norms. This pressure, consequently, puts restraints on the state leaders. As non-democratic leaders attempt to confirm to democratic norms, they inevitably face resistance from the actors whose identities and interests are linked to the older non-democratic norms and structures. It is argued that such legitimacy contests result into the complex of new and old propositions, rules and norms. In this context, it is recommended to those who are involved in democracy project around the world to take into account local conditions, culture and history of a specific state where democracy is promoted. Proponent of democracy should be mindful that in cases where democratic norms do not confirm to local conditions of a state, non-democratic sources may provide readily available alternatives. For example, challenge to participatory democracy came from Socialist/Communist ideologies, which themselves claim to give preference to popular will, but emphasize redistributive justice, rather than public participation in the political process. Hence, socioeconomic performance became main source of legitimacy for Socialist/Communist states. Overall, socioeconomic performance became so important that it became main tenet of democratic regimes as well. Socioeconomic performance became major source of legitimacy for such regimes, as coercion

became less important policy alternative due to the international norms of human rights and more awareness of domestic publics. It is argued in this paper that overall acceptance of the socioeconomic performance, which is aimed at satisfying general public in both democratic and non-democratic regimes, reflects increased role of popular will in the achievement of a state's legitimacy. In general, democratic norms and socioeconomic performance, both of which are driven by the concerns of popular will, have become key sources of legitimacy in the present world.

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