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PSCI 7012

February 8, 2007 - "Alternative Perspectives on Modernization"

J. Samuel Valenzuela and Arturo Valenzuela, "Modernization and Dependency: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Latin American Underdevelopment," *Comparative Politics* 10, 4 (1978): 535-557.

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Purpose: This review essay is a comparison of the modernization and dependency perspectives applied to the study of Latin America (LA).

1.) Modernization Perspective:

Thesis: Societies evolve from tradition to modernity; modernization involves abandoning traditional characteristics, such as simple economic, political, and social structures, for modern ones, which have highly differentiated structures. All societies lie somewhere on this continuum, with the presently "developed" nations at the modern end, and the less-developed nations somewhere in the middle.

Internal Critiques: Societies designated as "traditional" can be very complex and be quite different from one-another; It may be mistaken to assume that societies with little in common with now-developed countries would follow the same evolutionary path; Past events cast doubt on the hypothesis that all societies will converge to "modernity."

Application to LA: The "backwardness" of LA can be attributed to cultural values stemming from colonialism. For instance, several articles have focused on the lack of entrepreneurial activity as a primary source of economic underdevelopment.

Discussion:

- Is it possible for less-developed countries (LDC's) to "be like us," that is, can everyone on the planet potentially share the lifestyle currently enjoyed in the US?
- Does the literature of the 1960s and 1970s surveyed in this article seem objectively written? Are American scholars justified in making normative conclusions about LA development, or about the developing world in general?

2.) Dependency Perspective:

Thesis: A country's, or region's, historical position in the global political-economic system is crucial to understanding their development. The world can be conceived in terms of the "center" and "periphery" – the welfare of the center depends on an exploitative relationship with the periphery. This interdependent relationship determines the evolution of opposite but complementary political and economic institutions.

Contrasts with Modernization Perspective: The dependency perspective rejects the modernization perspective's focus on the nation-state as the unit of analysis, and instead looks at the global interconnections between systems; The benefit of some sectors of the population via its relation with the center can encourage underdevelopment, in contrast to what modernization theory suggests; the dependency perspective is more concerned with establishing historical phases than constructing theory and, thus, is not easily generalized.

Discussion:

- How can rationality be a fundamental assumption for both of these apparently contradictory perspectives?
- Does the dependency perspective make more intuitive sense in light of historical experience? Is the Marxist allegory still relevant in the "age of globalization?"
- Suppose that you are a *dependencista*: since import-substitution industrialization failed to create sustainable growth, what other development strategies might you suggest – is socialism "the only historically viable alternative" or is there a dependent development strategy that could be beneficial for center *and* periphery?

Guillermo O'Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics* (Berkeley, Institute of International Studies, 1979), pp. 1-111.

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Thesis: Modernization theory purports that the final developmental stage for countries is characterized by "political democracy," however, the empirical evidence for such claims is faulty, primarily because static analysis of aggregate data provides little information about the underlying dynamic processes.

In contrast to this theory, embodied by Lipset's "optimistic equation,"

MORE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT =  
MORE LIKELIHOOD OF POLITICAL DEMOCRACY

the real effect of modernization can be summed up by the "equation,"

MORE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT =  
MORE POLITICAL PLURALIZATION ≠  
MORE LIKELIHOOD OF POLITICAL DEMOCRACY

that is, socio-economic development leads to political pluralization, which has several potential outcomes; in the case of LA, most likely political authoritarianism.

Argument:

(Chapter One)

The author indicates that empirical support for the “optimistic equation” above depends on national averages, which are not very telling in the case of LA because of inter-country variation in the proportion of indigenous or rural population, for example. O’Donnell suggests that in order to assess the impact of socio-economic phenomena on political structures, it would be better to do a cross-country comparison of modern areas (over 300,000 residents).

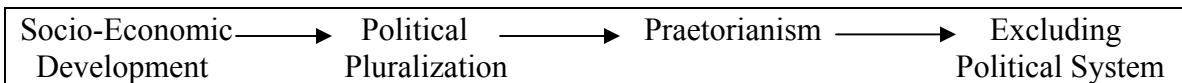
In order to determine if there are visible patterns across LA countries, he considers some indicators of industrialization, roles, political activation, communications, and innovation and concludes that “there are significant differences in the degree of modernization of their [LA countries] national ‘centers’.” By ranking the countries and matching them with the general type of political system, he concludes that *the most and least modernized countries tend to have non-democratic political systems, while the countries with intermediate levels of modernization tend to be democratic.*

Comment:

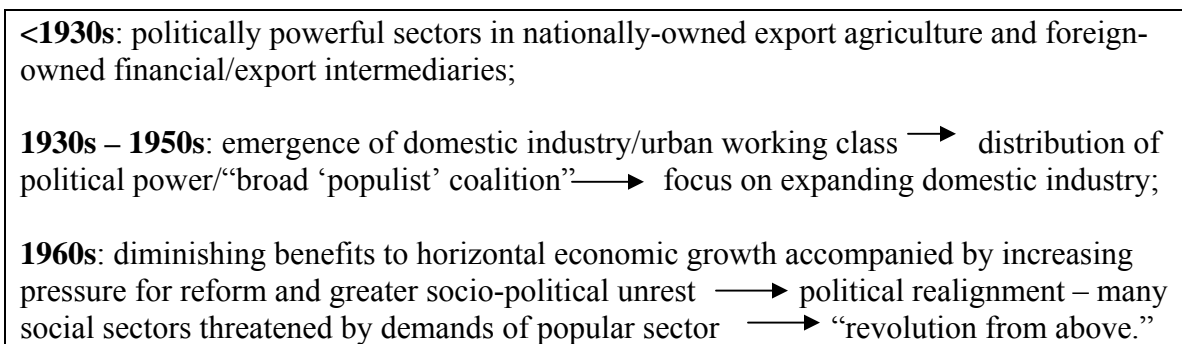
- If the author used per-capita (urban only) instead of aggregate figures, his rankings would change substantially (and hence the claim he makes about the relation between the “degree of modernization” and the “type of political system” would not be very credible).

(Chapter Two)

The author claims that the only way to ‘reveal the interactions of the political and socio-economic dimensions’ in South America is by using a longitudinal perspective. In order to improve upon the classifications proposed in chapter one, he adds the distinction between “exclusive” and “inclusive” polities, amending the earlier model as follows:



Argentina and Brazil, the two countries that modernized furthest, are considered in-depth as examples of “excluding” political systems that went through these phases. Here is a chronological scheme of their political-economic development from the 1930s –1960s:



Main Proposition: The “exclusive political systems” that emerged in Argentina and Brazil in the 1960s were characterized by the political isolation and direct coercion of the popular sector – an outcome that was “influenced by the degree of [high] modernization and the type of [mass] praetorianism,” (summary on p. 75).

The incumbency of technocratic roles is another factor exacerbating the “problematic space” characterized by a lack of collaboration between social sectors.

“How to Establish a Bureaucratic-Authoritarian Government for Dummies:”

1. “First, political parties and elections would be eliminated, and with them the political personnel who were particularly sensitive to the demands of the popular sector.”
2. “Second, the ‘domestication’ of the labor unions ... would be attempted by cooptation of the leaders and by coercion.”
3. “Third, an attempt would be made to bureaucratically ‘encapsulate’ most social sectors, in order to maximize control over them.”

Note: results may vary; the degree of coercion necessary will depend on your country; if results last for too long, consult with the (remaining) popular sector.

Discussion:

- Must mass-praetorianism, stemming from a “demands-performance gap,” necessarily lead to a coercive response from other social sectors?
- What would O’Donnell think about the dependency perspective?
- Is Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism a stage on the continuum from traditional society (colonial feudalism) to modern society (political democracy) for South American countries?
- How does what we know about the trajectory of LA countries in the 30 years since this book was written substantiate/discredit O’Donnell’s main proposition?