

# IS THERE A FOURTH WAVE OF DEMOCRACY OR NOT? AN EVALUATION OF THE LATEST THEORIES

Associate Professor PhD. **Cristian C. POPESCU**

Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Al. I. Cuza University of Iasi, Romania

[popescu@uaic.ro](mailto:popescu@uaic.ro)

## **Abstract:**

*There is some ambiguity in approaching the concept of democracy wave, especially when we talk about the period of the third wave and the beginning of a possible fourth one. We will try to underline the main views related to the extent of the third wave of democracy and the possibility of the occurrence of a fourth one which, although it does not comply with the classical theory of the waves, must be evaluated separately because of some special features, distinct from those of democracies included in the previous wave. We consider it is necessary to refer to the fourth wave, as represented by the countries from the Central and Eastern Europe that have followed a common line of action during the transition and which, with inherent peculiarities, have established some very important goals: building democracy, restoration the freedom of the citizens, the adoption of a market economy and the integration into the European and global structures. As we have shown, there are enough arguments to hold up this view. There are also some counter-arguments, which could challenge the assumption that the fourth wave was triggered by the transitions of the Warsaw Pact countries. The main problem is that there wasn't clearly defined an opposite wave able to show a regression in the democratization of the third wave.*

**Key words:** waves of democracy, East European Country, communism, development, transition

**JEL classification:** N44, P30, P51, F50

## **INTRODUCTION**

Democracy, as a political system, seems to be a feature of the modern world(1). The modern world, in its turn, seems not to be able to work without democracy. Yet, the modern man should recognize and know that the early forms of democracy belong to the ancient world, that the Athenian State was a party that obeyed the democratic rules. It is true that they were somehow different than today's rules and, therefore, perhaps more difficult to understand in connection with the extension of the citizens' rights and freedoms. Solon's laws, described by Aristotle in his Athenian State, clearly delimited the democratic rights and duties of the Athenian people and promised, at the same time, prosperity and political harmony, even without the will of those forced to obey the majority. As a side note, it is interesting that, through those laws, Solon forced the Athenians to exercise their democratic rights, with severe punishment otherwise, which could lead to loss of freedom. Difficult to understand, isn't it, especially when we like so much to be free. As Friedman said, "nobody can force you to be free. This is your job." (Friedman, 1995:92).

The Athenian democracy died together with the Athenian State and the mankind has passed through humiliating periods of regression with the respect of the individuals' freedoms, organizational forms and thus prosperity. Because, as it is often stated, there is a close link between democracy and prosperity(2).

Founding the democracy is related to the revolutions that have changed Europe's political and social life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, especially, to the French Revolution. However, the new concept of democracy seems modified, adapted to a spectacular demographic revolution, to the needs of a bigger and complex state and to significant transformations in the human rights and freedoms.

There were many models that have tried to measure the state of democracy(3), to rank the states by the level of democracy or include them in some groups or stages of democratization. The problem of democratic consolidation(4), of the identification of some common and specific elements for groups of countries, although it is not an easy one due to the multiple possibilities of commensuration, generated some remarkable thesis that come both from political and military

sciences and from economics(5) and sociology(6). One of the most interesting theories is that of the waves of democracy.

### **AN ANALYSIS OF THE 'WAVE OF DEMOCRACY CONCEPT'**

The concept of "wave of democratization" automatically requires an assessment of the democratic state in which the analyzed subject is found, respectively the world economy or a region of the globe. The major changes in the level of democracy are related to the concept of wave, introduced in the general debate of ideas by the former U.S. Secretary of State and Harvard professor, Samuel Huntington, in his *The Third Wave*, published in 1991. Because of the author's authority in this subject and of the excellent analysis made in the paper, the term 'wave of democracy' has rapidly spread out, generating, later, large debates and some controversies. In fact, Huntington felt the need that, through this new theory, to refute an opinion released by its famous professional rival, but otherwise friend, Francis Fukuyama, who, two years before, in 1989, had published a very interesting essay "The End of History?", whose central idea was that socio-cultural evolution of mankind ended with the collapse of the last totalitarian regimes and that the mankind was witnessing the permanent establishment of the final form of government, the democracy. Such a thesis was somehow irritating for a Secretary of State, advocate of the political realism, who had an important word to say in the evolution of U.S. foreign policy during the last 30 years and who analyzed, in all its publishing, the changes and the democratic crises that have accompanied the evolution in the second half of the twentieth century. Huntington's view was that the global politics is continuously changing and it is fragmented by historical periods, characterized by certain dominant trends and also by isolated phenomena that could represent the seeds of a change. The conflict cannot disappear as long as there are nations which have to share limited resources, but it can develop new forms. If, by the first half of the twentieth century, it was motivated by the territorial claims, after the Second World War it appeared a new type of conflict, an ideological one, equal or even more dangerous due to the dimensions of the forces involved. After this stage, in fact quite short on a historical scale, the conflict quickly took another form, cultural-religious one. This idea was loved by Huntington and, in 1993, he published it in an article in *Foreign Affairs*, called *The Clash of Civilizations*. Later, in 1996, he developed the idea in a book at least as famous as the Fukuyama's, called *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

So, it was impossible to think at an evolution that was politically, socially and economically stopped. Mankind has many resources to fight for and searches are generating contrary developments that are succeeding in a certain sense, after the principle of the wave, with an upward phase of training and with a reversible one, a wave that goes to the opposite side or even tears, totally or partly cracks what it has brought in previous phase.

In Huntington's view, the wave of democracy defines a series of transitions from nondemocratic to some democratic regimes, which are taking place in a certain period of time and which are significantly more numerous than the trends in the opposite direction (Huntington, 1991). Therefore, a democratic wave is not homogeneous, meaning that together with democratization and liberalization may coexist some opposite phenomena, of transition to authoritarianism or dictatorship. Overall, however, the result must be positive, because transitions to democracy prevail. A wave of this type involves partial or total democratization, accompanied by liberalization, strengthening of the fundamental rights, by economic and social reforms.

The concept of wave leads to the idea of something perennial, in continuous motion in both ways. As Charles Kurzman noted, waves are characterized by their imminent extinction (Kurzman, 1998). To really count, they must have a phase of recovery, reflux or failure. Otherwise, we do not talk about waves of democracy. The conclusion of such a statement is misleading for the advocates of democracy: the democracy is cyclical! (Kurzman, 1998) Of course, we are not talking about an analysis of a sole state, but one at the global level. There may be countries where the democracy is established, if not permanently, then for a period long enough not to be considered an exception (USA, UK, France, Nordic states etc.). But, overall and on average, there are enough cases that may

generate the opinion that, as there are waves of democratization, there are also waves of authoritarianism or dictatorship.

As shown in the table below, such situations can be identified at the end of the 20's until the end of the second World War when, one by one, in the large European countries, such as Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany, or smaller states such as Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Romania, Czech Republic etc. there were establishing military or authoritarian regimes. They were followed by other areas: Latin America with Uruguay and Argentina, Asia with Japan, then China and other smaller states. A second wave of reflux occurs between 1958 and 1973, characterized by dramatic changes in Latin America, Asia or the Mediterranean zone.

**Table 1. Democratization in the modern world**

Year	Democratic states	Non-democratic states	Total States	Percentage – democratic states
1922	29	35	64	45,3
1942	12	49	61	19,7
1962	36	75	111	32,4
1973	30	92	122	24,6
1990	59	71	130	45,4

Source: S. Huntington, *The third wave: democratization in the late twentieth century*, 1993

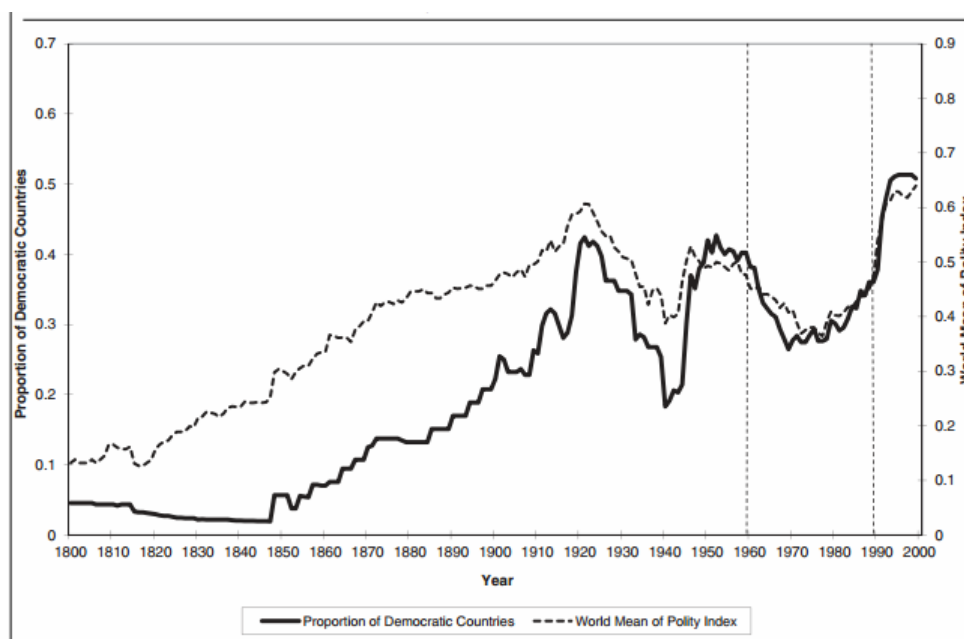
The succession of these waves is not fully defined in time, existing periods in which they overlap in the final stage, an opposite wave being born, for example, in the context of diminishing the power and dimension of the previous wave. But, the condition of the emergence of the opposite wave is, *sine qua non*, the existence of a support wave, with certain unitary features, to which a significant number of states from one or more regions belong.

According to a number of authors (Huntington 1991, Markoff 1996, Kurzman 1998, Diamond 1997, Boix 2011), there are three such waves in the modern world. Although there are slight variations in the interval ends, according to the most accepted view (Huntington), they are between 1828-1926, 1943-1962, 1974-1990. Subsequently, Huntington modifies the year 1990, leaving the right interval open, suggesting that the third wave is still continuing today, as long as there is no opposite wave. Boix (2011), whose work is the latest, believes that 2000 may close the wave in the right end, without being concerned, however, to provide explanations for this option.

### LIMITATIONS OF HUNTINGTON'S APPROACH

There may be issued some critics on how Huntington has chosen the intervals and the method of quantifying the level of democracy. In political theories there are two basic ways to estimate the level of democracy. One takes the absolute value of the democracies, as number of countries, or, in a dichotomous approach, in relative value, as a percentage of countries or percentage of population from the total number. The second method is used by Freedom House and estimates the democracy as a continuous variable, classifying the countries on a scale, according to their scores. Because Huntington uses the first method, the one that identifies the countries with democratic systems and quantifies them in absolute and relative terms, some questions arise due to the evolution of the number of states (Kurzman 1998). For example, between 1962 and 1973 only six states lose their democratic status and, yet, the period is included in the second opposite wave, and that because due to the emergence of 11 new countries, the number of those nondemocratic rises from 75 to 92. However, as the new states did not step back from democracy towards totalitarianism or authoritarianism, it cannot be discussed about leaving democracy, but about a non-assuming phenomenon. Yet, to come in defense of Huntington, we bring as argument Boix's research output, from the figure 1.1, in which can be clearly observed that, in the disputed period, the democracy made a significant step back, even though the general trend of the graph is positive.

However, none of the authors mentioned so far notices a fourth wave of democracy. As long as, after 1973, there were not identified major movements in the opposite direction, according to the traditional theory of the waves, we cannot speak about the next wave. According to Huntington's estimations (1991:16), between 1983 and 1990, there was no transition to democracy and there were three cases when it was abandoned. As the number of the abandonments is too small and lacks geographical concentration, according to the same theory they cannot be included in an opposite wave.



**Figure 1. The evolution of the democracies between 1800 and 2000**

Source: Boix, mentioned paper, p.810

Despite all these, the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s marks a fundamental change on the global democracy map. It was the moment that seemed to symbolize the end of a period of tremendous aggression of democracy and freedom and a new beginning, not only for the countries that were abandoning the totalitarian regimes, but for all mankind. The most severe enemy of the free and civilized world was crumbling under its own weight, without negative influence or consumption from the Western resources. This was the most expected, wanted, watched and celebrated moment throughout the modern history. Neither the birth and the death of the democracies from Latin America or South Europe, nor the Asian conflicts had such a strong emotional impact. And then the legitimate question is if these changes can be attached to those previously mentioned, for the sake of compliance with a methodology and with a definition, or should be separately analyzed and considered to be a new wave of democratization?

### THE FOURTH WAVE?

The characteristics of the transition to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe are so different from everything that happened before that there is no question of identifying some common elements with the situation from the countries affected by the third wave. The amplitude of the phenomenon had not only a political dimension, but it included all the areas of the human action and of the social life. Furthermore, the evolution within the group was very different, so it requires contextual analysis. These aspects were reported by several authors, such as the professor McFaull of the University Stanford, which had complete information about the CEE, both as a political expert and as a theorist and, more recently, as a diplomat, U.S. Ambassador to Moscow. McFaull considers it is absolutely necessary that the transition of the ex-communist countries to be marked by an independent analysis of other types of transition. The same opinion seems to have the

professor Tom Gallagher (Gallagher, 2006), a fine analyst of the Balkans and a critic of the marginalization of this region in the European and global politics. For Gallagher, the transition to democracy of this region is also much different from what happened before, due not only to the Balkans specific but also to the many facets that it must achieve. The fourth wave, which affected the Central and Eastern Europe, is also debated by Roland Axtmann (1996:116), who is focusing on the liberalization process and on the correlation with the increase in the life level. Axtmann, trying to argue the presence of a fourth wave, refers to Fukuyama's theory (1989), according to which the end of the twentieth century brings a stagnation in the evolution of the history; this suggests the end of a long phase of democratization and liberalization in the Western world. It was the time for something new to appear, something like the transitions from Central and Eastern Europe. From a political perspective, with emphasis on the democratic values and the diversity of approaches for their implementation, we find a comprehensive analysis at Doorenspleet Renske (2005). Unlike Axtmann, Doorenspleet makes an evaluation of the various theories of democratization, following then the conditions of its occurrence in the period 1989-2000 in CEE. Doorenspleet is not necessarily preoccupied by the technical problem of the waves' delimitation. He adopts as a working hypothesis the reality of the fourth wave and he is interested in discovering the characteristics of the societies that can be included here.

Yet, not all theories locate the fourth wave in the European transition countries. Starting from Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations during the XXI<sup>st</sup> century, profesor Larry Diamond from Stanford University includes in the fourth wave a set of states from North Africa, Arabian Peninsula and Asia, such as Iraq, Syria, Libya, North Korea, China, etc. The recent evolution from North Africa approves him in anticipating the occurrence of the change. However, it is not clear yet where this change goes to. According to his statements, it would be unwise to believe that any challenge to autocratic regimes also means a desire to assume the democracy. Especially in the Muslim world, the democracy in its modern form seems an unnatural way of government. Therefore, the riots from Egypt, Syria and other neighboring countries may lead towards the establishment of other forms of political or religious autocracy. Huntington (1993) was right when he said that this move towards democracy is not a straight line. She has gaps and only the world leaders' ability and willingness can push the things further.

According also to the Diamond's studies, between 1991 and 1995 we can speak of a relative decline in the state of global freedom. The number of the states that do not receive from the Freedom House (calculation was made based on scores given in this publication) the status of societies without freedom increases from 42 to 53, on the background of an absolute stagnation in the number of states with the status of free societies. This indicator could mark, for those who desperately want to follow the methodology of identifying the waves, there is an opposite wave.

**Table 2. The state of freedom in the independent states between 1972-1995**

The state of freedom	1972	1980	1985	1991	1995
Free	42(29%)	52(31,9%)	56(33,5%)	76(41,5%)	76(39,7%)
Partial free	6(24,8%)	52(31,9%)	56(33,5)	65(35,5%)	62(32,5)
Without freedom	67(46,2)	59(36,2%)	55(32,9%)	42(22,9%)	53(27,7%)
Total (100%)	145	163	167	183	191

Source: Larry Diamond, cited paper, 1997, p. 25

But whether or not an opposite wave existed, there are some elements that make us believe that the assumption of the fourth wave existence in McFaul's version is viable:

- The existence of a group of countries large enough to form a wave;
- The existence of some features specific for the group and distinct from other possible groups (combinations of super centralized economies, the absence of democracy and fundamental freedoms, excessive ideology, low living standard, self-isolation and militarization);
- The existence of some common causes that led to the overthrow of the old regimes (poverty, oppression, severely limitation of the freedoms);

- To acquire some common ideals that led to the transition (freedom, democracy, integration, free market).

## CONCLUSIONS

We consider it is necessary to refer to the fourth wave, as represented by the countries from the Central and Eastern Europe that have followed a common line of action during the transition and which, with inherent peculiarities, have established some very important goals: building democracy, restoration the freedom of the citizens, the adoption of a market economy and the integration into the European and global structures.

As we have shown, there are enough arguments to hold up this view. There are also some counter-arguments, which could challenge the assumption that the fourth wave was triggered by the transitions of the Warsaw Pact countries. The main problem is that there wasn't clearly defined an opposite wave able to show a regression in the democratization of the third wave. Although we have noted some signs of a step back in democracy between 1991-1995 (the percentage of the non-democratic regimes without freedom increasing from 22.9% to 27.7%), they are due, rather, to the establishment of new states that have adopted from the very beginning undemocratic regimes than to the abandon of the democracy for some countries with established democratic values.

However, since there are so many different features specific for a large group of countries that are not in the case of the states that have defined the third wave of democratization, we can draw two apparently different conclusions:

- There were, inside of the third wave, distinct phases and groups individualized by specific features and causes that created the sensation of time and geographical sequences;
- There was a wave, distinctive from the third wave that, to keep Huntington's metaphor, overlapped the previous wave, without giving it the pause to withdraw itself fast enough to create a phenomenon of reflux.

We have subscribed, through our demonstration, to the second possible conclusion. Our view is strengthened by the fact that, with the new movement for change in North-Eastern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, there are again rumors about the fourth or fifth wave of democracy, without existing an opposite wave of delimitation. It seems that while the history is not over, as Fukuyama suggested, the global trend of humanity is, at least for now, towards democracy and the danger of a significant step back is not a real threat, at least as long as the global order is not changing its configuration at the pick.

## ENDNOTES

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