

Democratic Transition: A Socio-Political Review

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Abstract

The study analyzed the democratic transition from a socio-political review. This study was organized into four modules in addition to the introduction, the study purpose and scope, its methodology, and finally, the study conclusion and recommendations. The first component explores the theoretical concept of democracy, and its sub-scales: democratic system, and constitutional arrangements, and the right of citizens to hold the authority (the government) accountable. The second focused on the democratic transformation, and its indicators. The third included the concept of political reform, and the relationship between the political development; political modernization and the political reform. The fourth included the elements of democracy focusing on: the power circulation system, civil society, the multiparty system, the equality before the law and the rule of the law, the separation of powers, and the system of rights and freedoms. The study concluded that democracy is a system of societal tolerance, it is the acceptance of equality and parity by all in a dialectic between multiple elements and factors that influence each other to produce a societal system based on the rule of law and the preservation of rights, and public and individual freedoms.

Keywords: Democratic transition, political power, elections, civil society, political reform.

1. Introduction

The use of the word 'democracy' goes back to the Greek origin linguistically and in practice. As for the word, it is a combination of two Greek words, 'rule of the people' (Dahl, 2022). It was used to denote the Athenian system in which elections were held for a period to choose the rulers of Athens.

Democracy is based on a system of devolution of power, which includes elections, political participation, a system of individual and collective rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom to protest, the right and freedom of belonging, the right to housing, free life and privacy...etc., a system of pluralism, dealing with the majority and the political and societal minority, a system of equality before the law, the rule of law for all regardless of social status or political position, a system of separation of powers to limit the dominance of the

executive authority, and to prevent the establishment of authoritarianism, and individualism in the government (Ahmad, 2022).

Democracy is a way by which political power is disposed of in society. It is supposed to have something that distinguishes it from other ways of disposing of political power, the most important of which is the consideration of the individuals who make up the political community as free and equal individuals. Equality means that all citizens have the right to participate in power, whether through elections, or by submitting proposals and putting issues on the political agenda, or in terms of equal treatment before the Law, or in terms of enjoying the protection of the law. As for freedom, it means that the political system does not limit the freedom of thought, expression and action in the political field (Bahloul, 2000).

The present study attempts to analyze the democratic transition from a socio-political review, with its different dimensions and factors, using the content analysis, which is appropriate to the exploratory nature of the research.

2. The Pillars Of The Democratic System

No matter the type of the democratic system, whether it is parliamentary, presidential, or a mix of both, it is based on three pillars when implementing the sub-systems of democracy with its components and values. These pillars are:

2.1 Elections

Elections and the freedom to participate in elections as candidacy or to vote is one of the basic and political rights constitutionally guaranteed to all citizens in democratic countries.

Elections are the first and most important pillars of the democratic system. They are based on the implementation of the system of rotation of power on the one hand, and the system of pluralism on the other hand. Every authority must be based on elections, and elections must be renewed with regular and close time differences, so that the rulers do not feel that they are independent from the ruled, and in order to keep their representation continuous before the ruled (Devergieh, 1980, Ahmad, 2022).

Elections are the basis of implementing democracy, provided that they are periodic with specific, regular and close time intervals, in order to ensure the renewal of the legitimacy of the rulers, and to hold them publicly accountable if they fall short, or commit mistakes during their rule. In such case, the electoral vote falls, and their programs – which the people no longer want – also fall with them.

According to Devergieh (1980) elections have two components, that are:

2.1.1 Sorting the people’s representatives, and giving them legitimacy to rule.

2.1.2 Holding the ones who failed from previous rulings accountable.

Popular representation through elections allows citizens to appoint rulers and not to keep them in power when their term expires.

To ensure the democratic approach, elections are held within a pluralistic system, especially political pluralism, which means the presence of different parties in the electoral process. Democracy cannot be representative unless it is pluralistic; the successful candidates take over the legislative authority, and the majority also holds the executive authority.

2.2 Constitutional Arrangements

The second pillar of the democratic system is constitutional arrangements for the democratic guarantee of freedoms and the three powers that make up the entire political system, which are: the executive authority, the legislative authority, and the judicial authority.

The executive authority always tries to dominate the course of things; sometimes it tries to take the role of legislation, and sometimes it takes over the tasks of the judiciary system in one way or another. To limit the dominance of the executive authority, the separation of powers is based on clear constitutional texts; this is to ensure the continuity of democracy, as each authority limits the influence of the other. The principle of separation of powers leads to monitoring each governmental body by the other. Authority limits authority, as we find that the legislative authority monitors the government (the executive authority), holds it accountable, approves the scales for it or rejects them, gives it confidence or withholds it, approves projects, plans and agreements; everything that the legislature does not approve cannot be pursued by the executive power (Ahmad, 2022, 2024).

2.3 The Right Of Citizens To Hold The Authority (The Government) Accountable

The third pillar of the democratic system is the right of citizens to subject the political authority to pressure and to hold it accountable, so that the people know the actions of the political authority. In other words, they are not carried out secretly, taking into account the principle of transparency required in democratic practice.

This gives the citizens the right to be informed of matters, to press for change, and to hold the authorities accountable, taking into consideration the rule of law and the system of rights and freedoms, which are among the systems of the democratic approach, especially that the main characteristic of democratic systems is the responsibility of rulers for their actions before citizens.

The pressured opinion is expressed through media, or direct public pressure, via gatherings, demonstrations, seminars and conferences. These and other means must be available to people without restrictions, so that the democratic system ensures that accountability is established transparently, and people know what is going on.

Public pressure that expresses the people's opinions is called public opinion, which expresses itself through multiple means. These same means are considered among the influencers that influence the public opinion, and among the factors of its formation. The press is a means of expressing public opinion, and influencing and directing it, in addition to other media tools (El-Gamal, 1990).

The system's transparency, and its constitutional reliance on accountability refers to the right of citizens to change when the election date comes. Negligents are held accountable through the election fund. The democratic political system is only complete when it legally and actually allows the exercise of legitimate pressure on political decision-makers. In the end, the political decision comes as a result of a complex process of interaction between multiple parties, the most important of which is the popular and partisan pressure forces, which always put the government in a position of accountability and before the necessity of bringing about change and construction for the public interest (Al-Jarbawi, 1999).

It is evident that accountability, in turn, enhances and develops the consolidation of democracy, resulting in the achievement of transparency, and the prevention of corruption, which leads to the deterioration of the society's conditions at various levels, especially the spread and increase of poverty, and the decline of the economy. Failure to achieve the principle of accountability perpetuates abuse towards citizens, as if the weak groups have to bear alone to pay the bill for corruption and deviations.

3. Democratic Transformation

Democratic transformation, or shifting from authoritarian regimes to democratic regimes, is one of the literatures that has been widely used in political circles. Interpretations about it varied in terms of the degree of its occurrence and the conditions for its establishment.

This concept refers to the transformation and transition from an authoritarian system to a democratic system; which is a very complex process that refers to the transformation of structures, goals, and processes that affect the distribution and exercise of power (Hilal, 2003).

Others defined democracy as the process in which methods and rules for resolving conflicts are formulated in peaceful ways, leading to a democratic constitutional situation, holding just and free elections, and expanding the scope of political participation as a criterion and an indicator for the growth of the political system, its democracy (Ahmad, 2022).

There is a difficulty in dealing with the concept of democratic transformation. That is because it begins with the demise of authoritarian regimes, the emergence of modern democracies, and after that, the consolidation of these modern democratic regimes.

Huntington Samuel divides the stage of democratic transformation into three main stages (Sayed, 2007):

3.1 The first stage is the transition stage: When the elites in power decide to transition towards democracy.

3.2 The second stage is the replacement phase: When the authoritarian regime collapses or is overthrown by opposition groups.

3.3 The third stage is the transition stage, in which the process of democratic transformation and the consolidation of new democratic systems and values occurs.

Others divide the democratic transformation process into several stages that are represented by the collapse and disintegration of the authoritarian regime, liberal transformation, the transition towards democracy, and the consolidation of democracy.

4. Indicators Of Democratic Transition

The concept of democratic transition can be measured through many indicators. These include the erosion of the control of authoritarian regimes, the prevailing political culture in society, the degree of economic growth, political participation, the peaceful transfer of power, the holding of free and just elections within the framework of political pluralism, separation of powers, freedom of opinion and expression in addition to freedom of the press, and the strength of civil society, which embodies a pivotal role in supporting democratic systems through the development of democratic culture.

Democratic transition is the transitional stage between a non-democratic system and a democratic system. The political system that is undergoing a democratic transition is going through a transitional phase from a non-democratic political system in the direction of a democratic system, starting a democratic transition. This signifies the beginning of smashing the old authoritarian regime and building a new one. This transformation occurs due to the failure of the old regime to create new policies, which generates great pressures on this system that pushes in the direction of democratic transformation (Ahmad, 2022).

It is clear from the foregoing that the concept of democratic transformation is the transition of society from one situation to another. Such transition is characterized by the principle of peaceful transfer of power, through the right of the majority formed through elections, pluralistic party competition, and the consolidation of the rule of law within the framework of respect for human rights and personal freedoms.

5. The Concept Of Political Reform

The concept of political reform varies from one society to another, and from one period of time to another within a society. Additionally, the areas of political reform vary according to the

multiplicity of areas of the political system. We can refer here to a number of topics such as political development, political modernization, political change, leadership reform and political culture, changing the pattern of distribution of political power in society, changing policies, and reforming political institutions.

Political reform is defined as “all [the] direct and indirect steps [such that] the burden to implement them falls on the shoulders of governments, civil society, and private sector institutions, in order to move Arab societies and countries forward, without delay and hesitation, and tangibly in the path of building democratic systems” (Alexandria Conference, 2004).

Political reform is viewed on the basis that it is a change, or a modification for the better, that is, a radical or partial process of modification and development in the form of government, or social relations within the state and the framework of the existing political system, with the available means, and based on the concept of gradualism. Put differently, it is developing the efficiency and effectiveness of the political system in its surrounding internally and externally. It must be subjective from the inside and not imposed from the outside, with a holistic nature, carrying with it the character of continuity and realistically based on the reality of the state and the nature of the existing imbalances to be reformed (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2011; Ahmad, 2022).

Evidently, the concept of political reform is important for any existing political system that wants to continue and survive, that is, to develop the efficiency and effectiveness of the political system in its surrounding environment internally and regionally, and for society and the political system by the available means (Ahmad, 2022).

The concept of political reform overlaps with concepts that preceded it and was used, such as political development and political modernization. Therefore, there is a need to address some concepts in close relation with political reform.

5.1 The Relationship Between Political Development And Political Reform

Political development is one of the modern concepts. It is the development of the masses' abilities to clearly understand their problems, and their ability to mobilize all available capabilities to

confront these problems in a practical and realistic manner. It is a process that includes building institutions, broadening the base of political participation, and rationalizing the assumption of power, with the aim of achieving a measure of political stability, or organizing political life, following up on the performance of political functions within the framework of the state, and developing political systems and political practice to become more democratic. Political development also means increased participation in the political process.

Therefore, it can be said that political reunification is the basis for achieving economic, social and cultural development, because its goal is for citizens to know their constitutional rights and duties, and to participate positively in political life.

Robert Berghinham gave the concept of political development five connotations (Hamdoush, 2009):

- 5.1.1 Legal significance that is concerned with the constitutional construction of the state (after a democratic one).
- 5.1.2 Economic significance: Achieving economic growth and a just distribution of the revolution.
- 5.1.3 Administrative significance: The necessity of a rational, effective and efficient management.
- 5.1.4 Political significance: Participation in political life.
- 5.1.5 Cultural significance: Related to modernization as a result of a specific political culture.

As for Lucien Pye, he defined political development as the necessary condition to achieve economic development, governmental change, build the nation state, achieve political participation, and build democracy (Hamdoush, 2009).

As for Ahmed Wahban, he defines it as “a multi-purpose political process aimed at consolidating the idea of citizenship”, achieving integration and stability within society, and increasing participation rates for the masses in political life (Wahban, 1999).

Political development clearly develops the capabilities of the political system to address the problems and tensions that occur in society; thus, development is a national necessity in order to achieve the progress of society, and ensure adaptation in the face of the continuous changes that society is going through, that is, the ability of the political system to regulate the behavior of individuals and groups within society.

5.2 The Link Between Concept Of Political Modernization And Political Reform

Modernization embodies an important role in the political development process. The concept of modernization is also linked to development, as modernization involves changing the system of basic values in society, that is, a change in the individuals' attitudes and their social, political and economic behavior in order to make a change.

Most writers disagree about the meanings of modernization, development, and change. The attention is usually on major political, economic, and social transformations. Modernization includes changes that affect values in society, and individuals and groups within a society gradually accept such changes (Ahmad, 2022).

Daniel Learner defines modernization as an organized process that includes integrated changes in the demographic, economic, political, and cultural sectors of society. Modernization literally means "something taking place somewhere else that was accepted in the past as a way of doing things". The main point of the concept of modernization, is that it is the process of moving towards modern ideal relations, and into ideal types of social, political and economic arrangements (Ahmad, 2022).

Political modernization was used in four different ways, that are:

- 5.2.1 Geographical, which refers to developed countries.
- 5.2.2 Linguistic, which links political development to the broad process of modernization; thus, political development is defined as political modernization synonymously.
- 5.2.3 Goal-oriented: Political development moves towards achieving the desired goals that the political regime sees, and among these goals are democracy, stability, legitimacy, political participation, mobilization, equality, security, welfare, justice and freedom.
- 5.2.4 Functional. The movement of the political system in a direction similar to the political process in the western industrial society, such as the presence of political parties and other societal organizations, as a functional necessity in society. The presence and development of these parties is an important necessity for the development of political development (Ahmad, 2022).

Consequently, the process of political reform is a process of planned social change that is achieved through a series of stages and procedures, and does not take place once. Any societal process that

belongs to the entire political community in the state belongs to the rulers and the ruled. It is also linked to values and institutions to bring about a change that has a specific strategic vision, whose goal is to transform the totalitarian nature of political systems into democratic ones.

6. Elements Of Democracy

Democracy is based on several main components, which can be considered as partial components that together constitute democracy as a political and social approach. These components are necessary for the establishment of a true democratic system. They include:

6.1 The Power Circulation System

This is a system that includes political participation with all its components. Political participation means the right of the citizen to play a certain role in the political decision-making process. In its narrowest sense, it indicates the right of that citizen to monitor these decisions through monitoring and evaluation after their issuance by the ruler. Political participation takes place through elections that provide an opportunity for such circulation, as elections are a means to achieve the transfer of power as a sub-system of the constituent systems of democracy. It is these elections that produce the rule of the people for effective political participation: “The rule of the people at its various levels is essentially based on the prosecution, that is, the citizens’ choice of representatives to represent them for a specific period of time in administration and governance. Choosing in this context is political in nature, and presupposes a multiplicity of opportunities before those who exercise this choice, i.e., the multiplicity of political trends from which they choose” (Ahmad, 2022).

Political participation presupposes the existence of political parties that are engaged in a competitive democratic experiment to take over power, or to be in the opposition, if they are not among the majority forces that take over the reins of power. Democracy first and foremost means the possibility of legitimate and peaceful transfer of power. There is no sense in pluralism without the availability of mechanisms to manage the affairs of society. The direction that holds the majority has the power to implement a program that has gained support and public attitudes. Thus, providing mechanisms for the peaceful transfer of power without coups or liquidations (Abdallah, 1997).

In order to achieve the peaceful and proper transfer of power, and ensure that the elections are held on time, in a free and just manner, an effective civil society is assumed as a pressure force on the political frameworks to stabilize the democratic situation and to keep the political community within the democratic approach.

6.2 Civil Society

The concept of civil society has gained great popularity as an important factor to democratic transformation, and among the theories that have been circulating since the early seventies are those that propose that democracy flourishes in countries that enjoy an active civil society.

There is a problem with this issue that is two-fold: “The first is of a definitional nature, meaning that democracy is defined by the existence of an active civil society, or that civil society is defined as being part of democracy, the second is the ideological dimension that has come to characterize the term civil society” (Diamond, 2007).

Civil society is an important tool for the occurrence of democratic change, as it is what pushes the state towards democracy. Examples of this include Poland and Czechoslovakia (Slovakia and the Czech Republic nowadays), where “the intense mobilization of civil society was a major source of pressure towards the occurrence of democratic change.” One of the most important functions of civil society as a tool to achieve democracy is its ability to monitor the authority, encourage political participation, and work to develop democratic advantages, such as tolerance, moderation and respect for opposing viewpoints, in addition to creating non-political channels for publicizing and representing interests. Moreover, civil society works to generate a series of interests that intersect with political conflict, and thus work to mitigate its impact. Furthermore, civil society prepares political leaders and monitors the democratization process. It also contributes to the dissemination of information and new ideas that can work on economic development. Finally, the presence of a civil society within the state ensures the citizen's respect for the state and a positive interaction with it, and vice versa (Diamond, 2007; Ahmad, 2022).

The establishment of democracy and the provision of conditions for its success as well as the continuation of its work stems from the nature of civil society; hence, civil society becomes the

basis of the infrastructure for achieving democracy. Accordingly, democracy cannot be achieved without the presence of civil society institutions. The importance of civil society lies in strengthening the principle of voluntary and collective participation, the ability to express opinion and the others opinion, political participation in decision-making, periodic elections and achieving their integrity. Civil society also embodies a role in building democracy at the cultural, tactical and educational level.

6.3 The Multiparty System

Multiparty is the distribution of power in society, and the lack of one party's dominance of power. Multi-partyism is against the idea of monopolizing power. Political parties are among the most prominent contemporary political institutions that affect the course of political events in society, and the results that these events have on its structure and its rise.

It includes pluralism in all its parts: political, religious, social, and even ethnic and national. Political pluralism is represented by the multiplicity of political parties and the rotation of power between them, and the possibility of peaceful change. This type of political pluralism is based mainly on the existence of different parties, rejecting the idea of one-party rule, as it is not possible to imagine modern democracy without parties. Party pluralism is one of the pillars of democracy and political action (Ghalioun, 1993).

As for religious pluralism, it is the right of every religious group to practice its religious rites and spread it without restrictions or persecution.

Social pluralism provides equal opportunities for all in society, and allows for the establishment of different groups, such as frameworks that groups individuals according to their desires to belong, and to their privacy. It also accepts individuals for who they are by respecting their privacy and different ideas, without allowing for the possibility of disagreement. The values and systems of societal relations accept the individual for what he/she is with tolerance and without fanaticism, ensuring gender equality, and the provision of equal opportunities to all (Ghalioun,1993; Ahmad, 2022).

Ethnic and national pluralism is based on recognizing the right to exist for national or ethnic groups that differ from the majority and the minority politically and socially. The minority adheres to the decision of the majority politically with its right to oppose, and the majority respects the existence of the social minority. Despite the duty of the minority to abide by the majority's opinion, which it may not approve of, the minority still retains all rights under the principle of freedom and equality (Bahloul, 2000).

Political parties were often formed as a result of the crisis of political participation, i.e., the demand of the rising social and political forces in society to involve them in governance, because social and economic transformations have upended existing political ties and organizations. The collapse of the feudal system in the West was accompanied by the demand of the rising middle class at the time to represent it politically in the government. Moreover, industrialization not only changed society economically, but also made the working-class demand that it, in turn, play an important role in deciding the country's policy (Al-Aswad, 1990).

The multiparty system clearly contributed to defending the social and economic interests of the different classes in society. To ensure the success of the multiparty system, citizens must understand its reality and objectives. The party system is nothing but a means to serve the country and citizens. All political parties must accept the principle of peaceful coexistence between them when implementing the democratic system, and adhere to the principle of freedom of opinion and thought. It is not allowed to establish parties that reject this, because preserving democracy and securing its future requires preventing the establishment of parties of a dictatorial or authoritarian nature.

6.4 Equality Before The Law And The Rule Of Law

Equality before the law indicates that all people are socially equal regardless of their social status or political position, and that the law protects this equality. Everyone is subject to the law, and equality before the law presupposes the rule of law and respect by all. What is meant by the rule of law is the subordination of the state, with all its structures and individuals, to binding rules. It is respected by the ruler and the ruled alike. The scope of its implementation includes all the governing authorities in the state. All public authorities are subject to the law and abide by its limits (Turan, 2001).

The rule of law requires effective accountability in political frameworks, as is the case in individual matters in which the judiciary decides. Here, it must be noted that the citizen's sense of safety, and providing him with security, is one of the most important foundations of the rule of law, and this is available only if the system allows the independence of the judiciary system and implementing its decisions.

6.5 The Separation Of Powers

The separation of powers is a way to preserve democracy, and a framework to ensure the continuation of democracy. We consider the separation of powers from the constituent systems of democracy since it prevents the concentration of powers in the hands of the ruler. "The separation of powers is one of the pillars of democratic action in any existing political system" (Nassar, 2006), because it is the basis that limits the hegemony of the executive authority, and prevents the establishment of authoritarianism and individualism in governance.

The separation of powers is based on clear constitutional foundations that can be changed according to the need for development, without considering constitutional provisions as sacred taboos that cannot be overlooked. Therefore, constitutional provisions must be completely separated from the religious situation and the principle of sanctity. In other words, the constitutional foundations are not sacred, and therefore the concept of sanctity cannot be included in its provisions. The existence of a constitution with democratic provisions allows the separation of powers without the domination of one authority over the other, and it is one of the conditions required for the establishment of the democratic system (Ahmad, 2022).

The principle of separation of powers is one of the very important principles in democratic political systems. One authority does not have dominance over the other authorities, which leads to the tyranny of this authority over other authorities.

6.6 The System Of Rights And Freedoms

This system includes freedom of expression regardless of its conflict with the prevailing opinion, or from different social and collective opinions, freedom of assembly, freedom to participate in

public political life through parties or independently, freedom of protest, the right and freedom of belonging, individual rights to housing, free life and privacy, and other rights and freedoms (Turan, 2001).

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty” (United nations, 1948). In addition to the foregoing, there will be no discrimination based on the political, legal, or international status of a country or area to which an individual belongs, whether that country or area is independent, trustee or non-self-governing, or if its sovereignty is subject to any limitation.

The individual is the basic element in the state and society. He/she has the right to life and security, the right to equality, the right to freedom, the right to dignity and ownership, and it is the duty of the state to protect and provide these rights.

7. Conclusion And Recommendations

Democracy is a system of societal tolerance, it is the acceptance of equality and parity by all in a dialectic between multiple elements and factors that influence each other to produce a societal system based on the rule of law and the preservation of rights, and public and individual freedoms.

However, democratic transition is the transitional stage between a non-democratic system and a democratic system. Democratic transformation is the transition of society from one situation to another. Such transition is characterized by the principle of peaceful transfer of power, through the right of the majority formed through elections, pluralistic party competition, and the consolidation of the rule of law within the framework of respect for human rights and personal freedoms.

Evidently, political reform is important for any existing political system that wants to continue and survive, that is, to develop the efficiency and effectiveness of the political system in its surrounding

environment internally and regionally, and for society and the political system by the available means. Therefore, the study recommends, further researches are essential to expand understanding of democratic transition and its measurable impact on individuals and societies using both of the quantitative and qualitative research design.

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