

**Coppedge, Michael John (Notre Dame, Indiana, USA)
1999**

Patterns of Diffusion in the Third Wave of Democracy

Until very recently comparativists were confident that economic development helps cause countries to become more democratic (Lipset 1959; Jackman 1973; Bollen and Jackman 1985; Brunk, Caldeira, and Lewis-Beck 1987; Gonick and Rosh 1988; Diamond 1992; Rueschemeyer 1991; Hadenius 1992; Helliwell 1994; Muller 1995a & 1995b; Coppedge 1997). This belief was recently discredited by Przeworski and Limongi (1997) and Przeworski, Limongi, Alvarez, and Cheibub (1996), who produced extensive evidence that economic development certainly helps democracies remain democratic, but does not explain why they became democratic to begin with.

This finding brings empirical research back to the question that transitions theorists asked 15 years ago: what causes the dynamics of democratization, as opposed to the stability of democratic regimes? Most of the theory and empirical research that has issued from that line of questioning has been focused on strategic actors interacting on timescales of months, weeks, or days, and therefore cannot be tested using the existing large comparative datasets in which the units of analysis are countries observed, at best, once a year (Coppedge 1999). However, some of the transitions literature also suggests one structural hypothesis that can be tested: the idea that democracy diffuses. The claim is that democratization is partly driven by forces originating outside a country's borders, rather than being a self-contained domestic process. This is an old idea, originally attributed to Kant, but sustained more recently by Rustow (1970), Whitehead (1986), and Huntington (1991), and other scholars cited below. "Diffusion" is a catch-all term for a great variety of distinct processes. Some efforts have been made to define the term more precisely and to test for it in various ways, but more theoretical and empirical work remains to be done.

Here we report preliminary results of our tests for a few of the many possible patterns of diffusion using global data from the Third Wave and after (1973-1996). We find strong support for a pattern of diffusion in which countries tend to become more like their immediate geographic neighbors over time. We do not find that countries with large populations, economies, or land areas or high standards of living have more influence over their neighbors than others; rather, countries seem to have approximately equal weight. We also find that economic development plays a rather paradoxical role in democratization. On the one hand, the wealthier a country is, the less likely it is to change its level of democracy in any direction. But on the other hand, if a country is poor, or if other conditions combine to force a wealthy country to change, then the wealthier a country is, the larger and more positive its change tends to be. In order to model this process, we propose a new stage in the process of

democratization. Scholars now conventionally distinguish between the stages of "transition" and "consolidation." Some go further and discuss a stage of breakdown of the authoritarian regime, democratic deepening, and other possible stages. We propose that it is necessary to theorize about a stage of "selection," or becoming primed for change, that takes place before any transition and is independent of the direction of any subsequent change. We argue that this prior process should be taken into account in order to understand the process of transition.