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chapter seven

Seymour Martin Lipset: Modernisation, Social Structure and Political Culture as Factors in Democratic Thought

Ursula Hoffmann-Lange

INTRODUCTION

Seymour Martin Lipset was doubtlessly one of the foremost social scientists of the 20th Century, 'who has shaped, arguably more than any other contemporary social scientist, the study of the conditions, values, and institutions of democracy in the United States and throughout the world' (Marks 1995: 765). His contributions to political science and sociology are outstanding. He is the only person to have served as both president of the American Sociological Association (1992–93) and the American Political Science Association (1979–80). He was also president or vice president of numerous other American and international professional associations, e.g. the International Society of Political Psychology, the World Association for Public Opinion Research, and the Society for Comparative Research. His professional activities attest to the broad spectrum of Lipset's academic interest, spanning areas from comparative politics to social stratification. Lipset received numerous honours, e.g. fellowships at prestigious academic institutions such as the Center for Advanced Study at Stanford, prizes from professional associations, and no less than seven honorary PhDs.

Lipset was born in New York City on 18 March 1922. He studied at the City College of New York where he completed his BA in 1943. He received a Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1949. He held chairs and other academic appointments at several prestigious universities and research schools: at the University of California at Berkeley (1948–50 and 1956-66), Columbia University (1950–56), Harvard University (1965–75), Stanford University (1975–90) and finally George Mason University (1990–2004). He remained active both as a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford and as Professor at George Mason University until 2001 when he suffered a stroke. He died on 31 December 2006. Upon his death, his eminence as a social scientist was acknowledged in countless obituaries

published by newspapers (e.g. *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Guardian*), academic journals (e.g. *the Journal of Democracy*, 2007) and the institutions at which he had worked and taught (e.g. *Hoover Digest*), praising his contribution to the social sciences and his exceptional personality as an academic mentor for generations of graduate students, many of whom themselves later became noted scholars.

His dissertation on 'Agrarian Socialism' (1950) won Lipset early and wide acclaim in the profession, and some of his subsequent publications became classic texts that are still in print. *Political Man* (1960) is probably Lipset's most widely known political science text. It has been translated into 20 other languages and has sold more than 400,000 copies (Diamond 2007). Among the 24 books that he authored or co-authored are seminal works such as *Union Democracy* (1953, with Martin Trow and James S. Coleman), *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (1959, with Reinhard Bendix), *The First New Nation* (1963, 1979), *The Politics of Unreason* (1970, with Earl Raab), *Continental Divide* (1990), and *American Exceptionalism* (1996a). His last book, *It Didn't Happen Here; Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (with Gary Marks), was published in 2000.

Two of the 28 books he edited or co-edited have become classics too: *Class, Status and Power* (1953, with Reinhard Bendix), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (1967, with Stein Rokkan), as have the four volumes of the *Encyclopedia of Democracy* (1995). In addition to his books, more than 500 articles attest to his enormous productivity.

During his years at Columbia and Berkeley, Lipset became acquainted with other young scholars who themselves later became noted social scientists, among them two with whom he continued a life-long collaboration: Juan Linz and Reinhard Bendix. With Reinhard Bendix, his colleague at Berkeley, he co-authored important contributions to the theory of social stratification and mobility, and with Juan Linz he co-edited several volumes on politics and democracy in developing countries. He also worked with other preeminent scholars such as James Coleman, Larry Diamond, David Riesman, Stein Rokkan, Neil Smelser and Martin Trow. All of these scholars defy a simple classification as either sociologists or political scientists. Instead, they have emphasised the interrelations between social structure, political institutions and culture. It is therefore not surprising that Lipset played an important role in two organisations that have been instrumental to the development of political sociology. The first is the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University (now the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy, ISERP), founded by Paul Lazarsfeld in 1941[1]. The other is the joint Research Committee on Political Sociology of IPSA and ISA, co-founded and chaired by Lipset from 1960 to 1970.

Lipset's academic merits have been widely acknowledged (e.g. Marks 1995). On the occasion of Lipset's 70th birthday, Gary Marks and Larry Diamond edited a *Festschrift* honouring Lipset's work, which appeared as a special issue of the *American Behavioral Scientist* in 1992.

Not all of Lipset's work has been purely academic, though. In fact, as a young

man he joined the Trotskyist movement and, even after leaving the radical left, he continued to support liberal causes. He was an active member of the Anti-Defamation League, chaired the National Commission of B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation (1980–83), was Vice Chair of the Center for Peace in the Middle East (1981–1991) and Chair of The United Jewish Appeal (1985–1987). In fact, in his autobiographical sketch (Lipset 1996b) he notes that it was his political activism that made him give up his original intention to become a dentist and to begin studying sociology instead.

Lipset made important contributions to many fields of social science, yet at the same time his work has one single focus: the preconditions, stability and performance of democracy (cf. Marks and Diamond 1992). His preoccupation with the factors that contribute to democratisation and democratic stability began when Lipset was a student and continued to dominate his work for the rest of his life. He realised early on that studying democracy requires a broad comparative perspective. Therefore, he used relevant materials on most world regions, i.e., North America, Latin America, Europe, East Asia, as well as developing countries. However, he not only studied many countries, but also took into account a broad variety of social and political factors that affect the working of democracy:

- socio-economic development
- social stratification and social mobility
- political culture
- intermediary organisations
- social movements
- intellectuals and academics
- political parties
- electoral competition and voting
- political leadership

Lipset's thinking about democracy was deeply influenced by European social scientists. Paul Lazarsfeld was his teacher and doctoral mentor at Columbia University, and much of Lipset's work is grounded in ideas developed by Max Weber, Alexis de Tocqueville, Robert Michels, Joseph Schumpeter, Karl Marx and Aristotle. As a committed young socialist, he started out investigating factors that were conducive to the success of the socialist movement. However, since he was equally committed to democratic principles, he soon realised the fundamental conflict between these two ideals. While working on his dissertation on the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), a Marxist socialist movement that came to power in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan in the 1930s, he concluded that the discrepancy between the socialist programme and the pragmatic policies pursued by the CCF was the inevitable result of democratic politics, which require political parties to appeal to a broad constituency and to work out compromises with economically powerful groups (Schwartz 1998).

Lipset's methodological approach may be characterised as empirically informed

social theory. Throughout his long career, he made ample use of empirical data. However, he was never an empirical researcher in the sense of devoting most of his time to data collection and data analysis, at least not after leaving Columbia University in 1956. His empirical books were all written with co-authors who, it seems, took responsibility for the data part of these projects. Lipset himself used empirical data primarily as supporting evidence for his theoretical arguments.

Since it is virtually impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of the broad range of topics covered by Lipset's work, the following account is necessarily selective and subjective. Nevertheless, it illustrates the broad scope of his scholarly interests and highlights some of the important theoretical insights he contributed to the advancement of the social sciences in the second half of the 20th century.

REQUISITES OF DEMOCRACY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, EFFECTIVENESS, AND LEGITIMACY

Socio-Economic Development and Democracy

In his seminal article on 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy' which was first published in the *American Science Review* in 1959 and reprinted in *Political Man*, Lipset put forward the idea of a direct relationship between socio-economic development and democracy. To demonstrate the validity of his assumption, he studied the effects of several indicators:

- standard of living: per capita income, access to medical care, motorisation
- access to communication media: telephones, radios, newspaper circulation
- industrialisation: workforce in agriculture, energy consumption
- education: literacy and level of formal education
- urbanisation

Lipset compared stable democracies to unstable democracies and dictatorships in two groups of countries, the first group being Europe and the English-speaking world, the second Latin America. He demonstrated substantial differences between democratic and non-democratic countries in both regions with respect to the above indicators. In trying to account for the statistical relationship he had found, Lipset argued that it was not wealth as such, but rather two factors that are closely associated with economic development, i.e. the more equitable distribution of the national income in developed societies and the higher level of formal education. Both of them foster values of political moderation and tolerance.

The expectation that socio-economic modernisation would more or less automatically lead to democratisation was later thrown into doubt by other authors who pointed out that the relationship between economic development and democracy is not as close as Lipset had assumed. Japan and Germany before

1945 were powerful counter-examples, as well as the communist countries of central eastern Europe which enjoyed fairly high levels of socio-economic development and yet remained firmly under the grip of a totalitarian regime (e.g. Lepsius 1969). In *The Third Wave*, summarising the empirical findings of the last decades, Samuel Huntington stated that many different variables had been shown to influence democratisation (1991: 37). He therefore concluded that no single factor is sufficient to explain the development of democracy and that the 'causes of democratisation differ substantially from one place to another and from one time to another' (1991: 38). According to Huntington, socio-economic development was a decisive factor only in the first wave of democratisation. For the second wave, political and military factors (occupation by the Western Allies and decolonisation) were more important, while for the third wave, starting in 1975, 'declining legitimacy and the performance dilemma' were decisive (1991: 46ff.). Huntington concludes: 'Economic factors have significant impact on democratisation but they are not determinative. An overall correlation exists between the level of economic development and democracy yet no level or pattern of economic development is in itself either necessary or sufficient to bring about democratisation' (1991: 59).

The views of Huntington and Lipset are not incompatible, though. It is obvious that statistical explanations are probabilistic rather than deterministic, and Huntington's analysis of the relationship between economic development and democratisation confirms rather than disclaims Lipset because Huntington's data show that the bulk of the democratisations of the third wave occurred at an intermediate level of socio-economic development. However, Lipset's assumption of a simple relationship between the two factors requires some qualification. Huntington's detailed analysis suggests that socio-economic development should primarily be considered as a facilitating factor while other factors play a role as well (1991: 62).

In his 1992 article for Lipset's *Festschrift*, Larry Diamond states that Lipset's assertion of a direct relationship between economic development and democracy has been subjected to extensive empirical examination, both quantitative and qualitative, and that these studies have generally supported the existence of a strong causal relationship, even though that relationship is not as linear as Lipset implied and has also varied across periods. Moreover, although the evidence confirms that GNP remains the single most important predictor of democracy, Diamond argues that the Human Development Index (HDI), which primarily relies on educational level and life expectancy, has higher explanatory power. Diamond therefore recommends a modest reformulation of Lipset's thesis in the following way: 'The more well-to-do the people of a country, on average, the more likely they will favor, achieve, and maintain a democratic system for their country' (1992: 468). Lipset would probably not mind this reformulation because it is perfectly compatible with his way of reasoning. In fact, he himself emphasised the existence of a close link between education and democratic political culture.

The evolutionary theory of democracy developed by Tatu Vanhanen (1997 and 2003) has likewise built on Lipset's prior work. He assumed that it is the

decentralisation of power resources rather than economic development that is the main causal factor facilitating the development of democracy. While the two are empirically closely associated, Vanhanen argues that the decentralisation of power resources is the more fundamental factor:

> When the level of economic development rises, various economic resources usually become more widely distributed and the number of economic interest groups increases. Thus the underlying factor behind the positive correlation between the level of economic development and democracy is in the distribution of power resources. Economic development is only a special case of the underlying causal factor (resource distribution). (1997: 25)

It is worth noting that Vanhanen's *Index of Power Resources* includes many variables Lipset had already included in his 1959 essay, i.e., urbanisation, industrialisation, literacy, and the percentage of citizens with university education. Empirically, Vanhanen goes further than Lipset, though, by measuring the distribution of power resources directly with three indices: occupational diversification, knowledge distribution and the distribution of economic power resources. Thus, Vanhanen has actually used most of Lipset's requisites of democracy in his study. His index can therefore be considered as a straightforward operationalisation of what Lipset had in mind.[2]

MARKET ECONOMY

Lipset always argued that a market economy is an important precondition of democracy. 'The fewer economic resources the state can directly control, the greater the possibilities for a free polity' (1994: 3). If the economy is controlled by political elites, political power becomes the only source of status and wealth which in turn will foster political corruption. Moreover, Lipset also emphasised that the existence of a free market economy was a relevant factor for the early institutionalisation of democracy in the United States:

> In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century world, democratisation had its best chance for success in the United States. There the links between the polity and the economy were much more limited and truncated than anywhere else, thus satisfying another major condition for democracy. The elites did not get their economic advantages from a powerful controlling state, but rather from the land and other possessions. (Lipset 1998: 2)

This quotation also demonstrates that Lipset later abandoned the socialist ideals of his youth.

EFFECTIVENESS AND LEGITIMACY

Lipset's analysis of effectiveness and legitimacy as preconditions of democratic stability, analysed in another chapter of *Political Man*, is probably as well-known as his chapter on the social requisites of democracy. At the beginning of this chapter, Lipset defines effectiveness as the ability of the political system to 'satisfy the basic functions of government as most of the population and such powerful groups within it as big business or the armed forces see them' (1960: 77), i.e., the ability of governments to accommodate the demands of different subgroups and strata within the citizenry. Later on in the book, however, Lipset uses a much narrower concept of effectiveness, as the following quotation shows:

> In the modern world, such effectiveness means primarily constant economic development. Those nations which have adapted most successfully to the requirements of an industrial system have the fewest internal political strains, and have either preserved their traditional legitimacy or developed strong new symbols. (1960: 82)

Thus, he redefines effectiveness as primarily involving successful economic policy, and this is also how the concept of effectiveness has been understood ever since.[3]

Lipset's analysis of the relationship between effectiveness and legitimacy has become conventional wisdom in the social sciences. His famous fourfold table identifies four different types of polities (1960: 81):

		Effectiveness	
Legitimacy		+	−
	+	A	B
	-	C	D

Consolidated democracies (A) (United States, Sweden, and Britain) are high on both effectiveness and legitimacy. Polities lacking in both (D) are inherently unstable und prone to breaking down unless upheld by force, such as Communist Hungary or the German Democratic Republic. Austria and Germany during the 1920s are mentioned as examples of relatively effective democracies which lacked legitimacy (C) because their systems of government were not held to be 'legitimate by large and powerful segments of its [their] population' (1960: 81). Societies of type C, however, may eventually develop into consolidated democracies, since 'prolonged effectiveness over a number of generations may give legitimacy to a political system' (1960: 82). Lipset thus assumed that effectiveness may engender legitimacy in the long run, and he hoped that this would be the path followed by new democracies: 'In large measure, the survival of the new political democracies

of Asia and Africa will depend on their ability to meet the needs of their populations over a prolonged period, which will probably mean their ability to cope with industrialisation' (1960: 82ff.).

Type B is particularly interesting because high legitimacy is presumed to function as a safety valve, stabilising democracies even in times of poor economic performance or other crises: 'When the effectiveness of various governments broke down in the 1930s, those societies which were high on the scale of legitimacy remained democratic, while such countries as Germany, Austria, and Spain lost their freedom, and France narrowly escaped a similar fate' (1960: 82). Even though Lipset did not provide any examples of this type, it can be assumed that he had the country examples of type A in mind which had also been deeply affected by the Great Depression without suffering from severe political crises.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Being a social scientist and not an economist, Lipset did not believe that economic factors had a direct effect on the political order. Instead, he emphasised their indirect effects. He considered industrialisation and economic success as only two among several factors to be taken into account in analyses of democratic development and emphasised that the social concomitants of industrialisation are more immediately related to democracy, among them urbanisation, rising levels of education, the rise of a large middle class and a decrease in economic inequality.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

In his writings on social stratification, Lipset argued that the existence of a large middle class, educational opportunities and a high level of social mobility are important preconditions for a democratic polity, an idea he traced back to Aristotle, Montesquieu, Locke, and Hobbes. These attributes of modernisation first materialised in the United States and have contributed to America's role as a leader in modernity until today. At the same time, the development of the United States has also disproved the expectation of Marxist theorists that the United States as the economically most advanced country would lead the rest of the world on its road to socialism. In his 2001 article, 'The Decline of Class Ideologies. The End of Political Exceptionalism?', Lipset claims that,

> the continued inability of socialists to create a viable movement in the United States was a major embarrassment to Marxist theorists, who assumed that the superstructure of a society, which encompasses political behavior, is a function of the underlying economic and technological systems. (2001: 251).

Lipset concluded that only the first part of this prediction turned out to be correct. While social and political developments in the United States have indeed always preceded those in other countries, the assumption that industrialisation would inevitably lead to socialism was far from the mark.

Lipset went on to state that the second part of the Marxist assumption was not only erroneous, but predicted the opposite of what had actually happened. Instead of a continued growth of the working class and a deepening of economic inequalities, the distribution of income and occupational skills has changed from a pyramidal shape (▲) to one that resembles a diamond (♦). This, in turn, has forced the political parties of the left to appeal to the growing middle strata rather than limiting their efforts to the declining numbers of industrial workers (2001: 253). Lipset also linked the decreasing membership figures of labour unions and the declining class consciousness in the socio-economically most advanced societies to these changes in social stratification.

The changing class structure is closely associated with rising levels of social mobility. As traditional class barriers break down, opportunities for social mobility increase. Even the members of the less privileged strata become less class conscious than before and believe in individual rather than collective social advancement. Therefore, leftist parties are increasingly forced to emphasise equal opportunities rather than redistribution:

> In the past, Socialist parties created extensive welfare states that required a steadily increasing proportion of the gross domestic product to go to the government, in some cases reaching over one-half. Today, however, the same parties recognise that they simply cannot compete on the world market unless they reduce government expenditures. Their electoral situation forces them to press for the voter support of the middle-class and affluent skilled workers and high tech employees. (2001: 260)

Thus, the 'Old World Left' is no longer serving as a model for the American Left, but instead 'is now becoming more like the American' (2001: 262).

Lipset further assumed that social mobility is at least indirectly related to democracy, because it implies that meritocratic rather than ascriptive factors become the main determinants of social status. At the same time, equality of opportunity is a central tenet of a democratic political order. Moreover, Lipset argued that the belief in the meritocratic character of society increases the probability that individuals will accept even a high degree of economic inequality. In his introduction to the paperback edition of *The First New Nation* (1979), Lipset cited a study by Robert Hauser which showed that the rates of social mobility have always been much higher in the United States than in other countries, thus confirming the meritocratic character of the United States.

However, Lipset was never an uncritical observer of his own country. Until the 1970s, he repeatedly criticised the fact that certain segments of the American population were deprived of equal life chances and that 'the promise of equality

remains a mockery for many mature blacks and women, as well as for members of some ethnic minorities, particularly American Indians and persons of Spanish origin' (1979: *xxix*). In later publications, however, he acknowledged considerable improvements in the situation of African Americans since the 1960s. At the same time, he also argued against the introduction of quotas for hiring minorities as a means of achieving equality of opportunity because he thought that quotas were not only incompatible with the emphasis on individual responsibility, which is deeply engrained in American culture, but were in fact counter-productive:

> Yet, the repeated emphasis on how little progress has been made serves to sustain the argument that purposeful social action designed to benefit blacks simply does not work, that there are factors inherent in the black situation which prevent them from getting ahead. Not only most whites, but many blacks have absorbed such negative self-images. Americans believe that what determines success or failure is hard work, regardless of whether a person is black or white. Hence if blacks fail, it follows that it is largely their own fault. (1996a: 132)

Instead, Lipset recommended measures which he considered to be more in line with American political culture than affirmative action programmes:

> To rebuild the national consensus on civil rights and racial justice, affirmative action should be refocused, not discarded. It is clear, for example, that quotas of special preferences will not help the poorly educated and unskilled to secure good jobs. [...] To succeed in postindustrial society requires good education. Extending and vastly improving education in the ghettos, from very early Head Start Programs, to financial incentives for students, teachers, and successful schools, to expanding apprentice programs that combine classroom instruction and on-the-job training, are the directions to be followed for children and school-age youth. (1996a: 149)

These quotes also confirm that Lipset had two different reasons for analysing the situation of African Americans in the United States, a practical and a scholarly one. It was already mentioned that as a young man he was a committed human rights activist. Even later, he continued publicly to denounce perceived violations of civil liberties. As a scholar, he was interested in studying the effects of policies designed to improve the living conditions of underprivileged groups. He compared, for instance, the different conceptual approaches to removing social barriers for underprivileged segments of the population in the United States and continental Europe. While the American culture emphasises equal rights and educational opportunities, the European culture has for long been preoccupied with relieving poverty. Lipset claimed that this cultural difference explains the fundamentally different approaches to welfare policies in the United States and Europe and is also the reason why American welfare expenditures are much lower and poverty levels

much higher than in other highly industrialised countries (1996a: 72ff.).

Lipset explicitly distinguished three aspects of economic inequality: access to education and consumer goods, distribution of wealth and distribution of income. He acknowledged that access to education and to consumer goods has improved in the United States, thus providing more opportunities for the social and political participation of the lower classes. At the same time, 'the variations in *income* in the United States are among the highest in the world' (1979: 326). Lipset considered large inequalities in income as justifiable on meritocratic grounds, while he believed that gross inequality in access to educational opportunities inhibits democratic development. With respect to the distribution of wealth, he stated that democratic societies are characterised by a more equitable distribution than non-democratic societies. However, he did not attempt to specify just how much economic inequality a democracy can sustain.

EDUCATION

For Lipset, the education system was important for two reasons: because of its contribution to economic success, and because it provides the most important basis for the application of meritocratic criteria for the attainment of social status in society. He emphasised that the United States has always spent a higher percentage of its GDP on education than other developed nations, 'while Europe has devoted more resources to welfare' (1996a: 117). Moreover, Lipset argued that the United States has always been far ahead of other nations in terms of literacy and in the percentage of young people attending institutions of higher education. He considered such higher investments in the education system as a means to make up for lower welfare expenditures, and claimed, at least implicitly, that the former will eventually contribute more to the general welfare of the country than the latter. Moreover, access to educational opportunities was for him a major precondition for high levels of social mobility since education is closely associated with social status.

CROSS-CUTTING CLEAVAGES

In their introduction to the *Festschrift* for Lipset, Gary Marks and Larry Diamond emphasise that the notion of cross-cutting cleavages, reducing the intensity of political conflict is one of Lipset's 'enduring contributions to our understanding of democratic stability' (1992: 355). In *Political Man*, Lipset developed this argument in the context of a broader theory of political development, stating that the differences in the political development of Western nations depended, to a significant degree, on the historical sequence in which these nations had to cope with three fundamental issues:

- the place of religion within the nation

- the admission of the lower strata to full political and economic citizenship and the right of collective bargaining
- the continued struggle over the distribution of wealth.

Were these issues dealt with one by one, with each more or less solved before the next arose, or did the problems accumulate, so that traditional sources of cleavage mixed with newer ones? Resolving tensions one at a time contributes to a stable political system; carrying over issues from one historical period to another makes for a political atmosphere characterised by bitterness and frustration rather than tolerance and compromise. (1960: 83)

Lipset argued that the moderating effect of cross-cutting cleavages is also confirmed by behavioral studies showing that individuals or groups who are isolated from people with other points of view are more prone to back extremist movements, e.g. workers in isolated industries and farmers. He specifically referred to electoral studies that had provided evidence that individuals under cross-pressure are less likely to vote and to develop political commitments. Lipset acknowledged that the assumption of a moderating effect of cross-pressure had been developed by others, giving credit to Georg Simmel's analysis of intersecting social circles, to the electoral studies of Paul Lazarsfeld (cf. Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1944; Berelson *et al.* 1954) and to pluralist theoreticians such as David Truman and Robert Dahl. Nevertheless, given the enormous impact of *Political Man* as a political science text, it is fair to say that Lipset popularised the idea that cross-cutting cleavages contribute to promoting democratic stability:

> Multiple and politically inconsistent affiliations, loyalties, and stimuli reduce the emotion and aggressiveness involved in political choice [...]. The available evidence suggests that the chances for stable democracy are enhanced to the extent that groups and individuals have a number of cross-cutting, politically relevant affiliations. To the degree that a significant proportion of the population is pulled among conflicting forces, its members have an interest in reducing the intensity of political conflict (1960: 88ff.).

THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

Lipset was not the first scholar to emphasise the relevance of intermediary organisations to democracy. Nevertheless, *Union Democracy* (1956) was certainly the first detailed study of the internal structure of a labour union. This seminal study was carried out at the Bureau of Applied Social Research in collaboration with Martin Trow and James Coleman. Lipset's decision to study the International Typographical Union (ITU) was because of its peculiar structure. The ITU differed from other labour unions by its fairly high level of rank-and-file involvement in union affairs that was in turn facilitated by a wealth of opportunities for informal

communication among its members. It maintained social clubs, sport clubs, veterans' groups etc. Last, but not least, the ITU was set apart by the existence of an internal two-party system, i.e., two well-established, though not formally recognised factions competing regularly in intra-organisational elections. The decision to study the ITU also had an autobiographical reason, as Lipset explained in his memoirs, since his father was a member of the ITU. So Lipset had learned about this peculiar labour union already as a child (cf. Lipset 1996b).

Union Democracy is at once a case study and much more than just that. It can be considered as a major contribution to democratic theory with respect to two fundamental aspects, the role of voluntary associations and the question of intra-organisational democracy.

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS AND DEMOCRACY

With regard to the first aspect, *Union Democracy* explicitly builds on the theory of pluralist democracy and its complement, the theory of mass society. Later studies of voluntary associations focussed on other aspects instead, e.g. corporatism or the integration of associations into networks of political power. It was only in the 1990s that academic interest in the role of voluntary associations, as an essential element for democratic polities, was revived, mainly as a consequence of two independent political developments: the breakdown of state socialism in Eastern Europe, and the dwindling membership figures of traditional voluntary associations in post-industrial democracies. Since the 1990s, numerous publications on the relevance of civil society have appeared. While not explicitly referring to *Union Democracy*, two of Robert Putnam's recent books have emphasised the importance of voluntary associations, i.e., *social capital*, for the viability of democracy (1993 and 2000).

Given the renewed interest in the role of voluntary associations, it is worthwhile re-reading *Union Democracy*, as one will be surprised how many of the arguments regarding the beneficial effects of a functioning civil society can already be found there. *Union Democracy* emphasises that voluntary associations serve two important functions:

- 'external power functions': they foster the development of political opposition within the larger community by serving as arenas for generating new ideas, as communication networks, as a basis for the training of future leaders, and as a basis of opposition to the central authority;
- 'internal functions': they generate political involvement among their members. (1956: 89ff.)

Voluntary associations therefore contribute to the integration of their members into the wider community. The authors of *Union Democracy* distinguished three different types of societies with respect to political mobilisation:

A. *Nonexistence of secondary organizations*, or a *mass society*, helps

maintain a *conservative oligarchy*, such as is found in South American dictatorships, in Europe before the nineteenth century, or in the average stable trade union

B. *Existence of secondary organisations*
   1. *controlled* by the government helps maintain *revolutionary totalitarianism*, intent on making changes within the society which it governs, as in Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia
   2. *independent* of the government helps maintain *democracy*, such as is found within the ITU or in the United States or most European democracies. (1956: 89)

The second type of society was characteristic of central-eastern European countries before 1990. The existing *mass organisations* with more or less compulsory membership primarily served the purpose of mass mobilisation under tight control of the state. Since they did not enjoy much autonomy, they were unable to serve as a basis for independent citizen activity and for the political mobilisation of opposition. The United States, on the other hand, has always belonged to the third type of country. Already in the first half of the 19th century, Tocqueville emphasised the role of the rich associational life in the United States as a distinguishing characteristic of American Society. This is also the reason why Robert Putnam, in *Bowling Alone* (2000), has expressed concern about the potentially devastating effects of the decline in *social capital* for the future of American democracy.

INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Union Democracy also analysed the causes of the formation and continued stability of intra-organisational democracy in the ITU. The authors explicitly referred to Michels' *iron law of oligarchy* and tried to identify the reasons why the ITU was not dominated by an oligarchic leadership that was so characteristic of most other mass organisations. They identified a number of causes, some of them due to the peculiar working conditions of printers at the time, some of a more general nature. In particular, the following specific conditions of the occupational community of printers were discussed in the book:

- printers enjoyed a high prestige among blue-collar workers, and high prestige in turn provides a motivation to socialise with colleagues;
- the printing industry's system of hiring additional workers on an ad hoc basis among those who were present at the beginning of shifts, forced printers who were looking for a job to show up and spend time at the local union premises;
- the frequency of night work fostered the development of informal social relations among the workers. (1956: 158)

Moreover, the ITU had also developed a democratic organisational culture. The

existence of a two-party system was widely accepted within the ITU, even though it was not officially acknowledged in the union statutes. At the same time, there was agreement among the members that the two-party system did not weaken the effective representation of the printers' interests vis-à-vis employers.

Another important factor was the creation of the ITU from below, i.e., the central organisation was only founded after strong local and regional branches had already been in existence. At the same time, however, the authors emphasised that the development of democracy in the ITU was by no means an inevitable result of structural factors:

> Democracy in the ITU was thus no necessary consequence of a particular set of static factors, but rather was favoured from the beginning by numerous factors and even more strongly favoured as time went on and numerous events added to the systems's stability. (1956: 441)

The authors therefore concluded that structural factors only determine, the probabilities that given historical events can result in an enduring institutional pattern such as a two-party system. Social structure thus constitutes a *potential* for democracy, a potential which, however, may be realised only under certain historical circumstances. (1956: 447ff.)

Ultimately, *Union Democracy* confirmed three basic tenets of democratic theory. First, that the development of democracy is always the result of a combination of favourable structural conditions and facilitating situational factors. Second, that once established, democracy is likely to become self-perpetuating. Last, but not least, that the institutionalisation of party competition is a decisive factor in the continued functioning of (intra-organisational) democracy.

More than fifty years after it was first published, *Union Democracy* remains a classic text worth reading.[4] It is at the same time a detailed case study based on empirical data, and a theoretical study. Even following decades of empirical social research, the availability today of more refined research instruments and much more convenient techniques for data analysis, the book can be considered as an exemplary academic study, combining a historical analysis of the ITU, a structural analysis of the working conditions of the printing craft, and an analysis of two surveys of printers and local union officials. The book abounds with tables and graphs documenting the empirical evidence, and includes a detailed methodological appendix, describing sampling procedures and index construction. Even though the ITU has long ceased to exist, the insights gained by the study are of lasting theoretical importance.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Since Lipset considered electoral competition as a central characteristic of democracy, he also wrote extensively on political parties. In *The First New Nation*, he

analysed how the fundamental precondition for a competitive party system, the acceptance of organised opposition, developed in the United States. As in other new democracies that came into existence through a revolutionary process, the American founding fathers were united by their desire for independence from (British) colonial rule. Soon after achieving independence, however, unity gave way to the development of conflicts over how the country should be governed. Such a development is not uncommon, as Joseph Ellis notes in his book, *Founding Brothers*:

> With the American Revolution, as with all revolutions, different factions came together in common cause to overthrow the reigning regime, then discovered in the aftermath of their triumph that they had fundamentally different and politically incompatible notions of what they intended. (Ellis 2002: 15)

Lipset analysed the early appearance of organised political parties in the United States and identified the unwillingness of the Federalists to accept their role as opposition party in the emerging two-party system as the main reason for their demise.

Besides emphasising the fundamental importance of party competition, Lipset also studied the relevance of political cleavages. In collaboration with Stein Rokkan he analysed the cleavage structures that became decisive for the formation of western European party systems. They co-edited the volume *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (1967), and their comprehensive co-authored introductory chapter to that volume has become a classic text on European party systems. Even today, political scientists working on political parties continue to refer to that chapter. However, while it can be assumed that Lipset was genuinely interested in the questions analysed in that volume, he was not a Europeanist, and it is probably fair to conclude that the basic ideas developed in the introductory chapter were those of Rokkan rather than Lipset. Yet, Lipset's academic reputation probably contributed a great deal to its success in the United States.

POLITICAL CULTURE

Political culture features prominently in Lipset's work. In *Political Man*, Lipset devoted several chapters to questions of democratic legitimacy, working-class authoritarianism, support for fascist movements, and voting behaviour. Moreover, Lipset's books on the United States and American Exceptionalism were primarily devoted to analysing the peculiarities of American political culture, i.e. religious traditions, individualism, and support for equality of opportunity. It seems remarkable, therefore, that although *Political Man* was published three years before *The Civic Culture* (Almond and Verba 1963), Almond and Verba developed their ideas without reference to Lipset's work. In the index of *The Civic Culture*, Lipset is only mentioned twice. Thus, despite the fact that these authors studied similar research questions, they largely ignored each other's work.

THE ROLE OF SECULAR RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES

In his writings on *American Exceptionalism*, Lipset repeatedly emphasised the peculiarities of American religiosity. First and foremost he mentioned the contrast between the enormous importance Americans have always attributed to religion and the religious pluralism of American society. He argued that it was precisely the co-existence of numerous religious communities which led to the decision to include the principle of a strict separation of state and church in the American constitution. Religion was thereby explicitly defined as a private matter, thus precluding any interference of the government in religious activities. At the same time, it also required tolerance vis-à-vis other religions (1979: 155).[5]

Lipset claimed that the separation of church and state reinforces democratic practices in three ways. First, American churches have always been purely voluntary organisations which in turn requires churches to cater to the demands of their local supporters:

> The withdrawal of government support from religion made American Protestantism unique in the Christian world. The United States became the first nation in which religious groups were viewed as purely voluntary associations. To exist, American churches had to compete in the marketplace for support. (1979: 160)

Secondly, the Protestant sects prevalent in the United States were mostly congregationalist and practiced self-government: 'Congregationalism, with its stress on self-government within the church, contributed to secular self-government in the form of the New England town meeting' (1979: 160). Congregationalist ministers were therefore more supportive of the American revolution than the established churches (Episcopalian and Catholic) which tended to side with the Tories.

A third characteristic of American religiosity is the emphasis on individual morality:

> American Protestantism, with its emphasis on the personal achievement of grace, reinforced the stress on personal achievement which was dominant in the secular value system. Both sets of values stressed individual responsibility, both rejected hereditary status. (1979: 162)

Religious doctrines therefore reinforced the *anti-aristocratic tendencies* in American society, and the emphasis on the personal attainment of grace has been 'the religious parallel to the secular emphasis on equality of opportunity' (1979: 163).

However, Lipset also argued that American religion has problematic implications for American foreign policy. It implies something Lipset called *utopian moralism*,

which stands in stark contrast to the tolerance that is otherwise characteristic of the American political culture (1990: 76ff.):

> The need to assuage the sense of personal responsibility has meant that Americans have been particularly wont to support movements for the elimination of evil by violent means if necessary. (1979: 163)

Lipset argued that it fosters a propensity for moralistic crusades and an inclination to denounce the other side as being an agent of Satan:

> Americans have been unique in their emphasis on non-recognition of 'evil' foreign regimes. The principle is related to the insistence that wars must end with the unconditional surrender of the Satanic enemy. The United States rarely sees itself merely defending national interests. Foreign conflicts invariably involve a battle of good versus evil. (1990: 78ff.)

Lipset thought that this millennialism inherent in the American *civic religion* helps explain a pervasive feature of American foreign policy that has always been difficult to understand for Europeans who tend to view foreign policy as something to be handled pragmatically.

INDIVIDUALISM, EGALITARIANISM, ACHIEVEMENT, AND MERITOCRATIC VALUES

Throughout his writings on American political culture, Lipset emphasised that individualism is the most distinctive value of American political culture. Lipset devoted most of his book, *Continental Divide,* to analysing the differences between a revolutionary nation based on individualistic values (USA) and a counter-revolutionary nation that has never overcome a preoccupation with deference towards traditional authorities and collectivism (Canada). The book analyses the implications of this basic difference for a broad variety of social and political phenomena, e.g. constitutional provisions, the judicial system, the economy, the treatment of minorities, social policies, welfare policies, etc.

In his analysis of American exceptionalism, Lipset repeatedly stated that the 'emphasis on competitive individualism' has been responsible for the enormous economic success of the United States (1996a: 58):

> The United States, almost from its start, has had an expanding economic system. The nineteenth-century American economy, as compared to the European ones, was characterised by more market freedom, more individual landownership, and a higher wage income structure – all sustained by the national classical liberal ideology. From the Revolution on, it was the laissez-faire country par excellence. Unlike the situation in many European

> countries, in which economic materialism was viewed by the traditional aristocracy and the church as conducive to vulgar behavior and immorality, in the United States hard work and economic ambition were perceived as the proper activity of a moral person. (1996a: 54)

Egalitarianism and achievement are two other American values responsible for the uniqueness of the United States. Egalitarianism is mainly understood as equality before the law, egalitarian social relations and equality of opportunity. Lipset concurred with Tocqueville's observation that 'regardless of steep inequalities, Americans did not require the lower strata to acknowledge their inferiority' (1990: 24). This implies that status differences do not play much of a role in social interactions. Moreover, the emphasis on egalitarian social relations also explains the lack of deference towards persons of high status or public authorities (1979: 211). Lipset claimed that it is the combination of individualism, egalitarianism and emphasis on achievement that has contributed to the acceptance of a free market economy and considerable inequality of income in the United States.

Lipset saw the contradictory nature of these two values as constituting the basis of the political conflict between liberals and conservatives who attribute different priorities to them. While liberals stress egalitarianism and the 'social injustice that flows from unfettered individualism', conservatives tend to 'enshrine individual freedom and the social need for mobility and achievement as values "endangered" by the collectivism inherent in liberal nostrums' (1979: *xxxiii*).

In his book on *American Exceptionalism*, Lipset also analysed the downside of the American emphasis on achievement, i.e., higher crime rates and lower government support for the underprivileged. He explained the high crime rate in the United States by referring to Robert Merton, his teacher at Columbia University, who had developed the idea that a discrepancy between valued ends and a lack of legal means to achieve those ends, may result in anomie and deviant behaviour: 'The greater lawlessness and corruption in the United States can also be attributed in part to a stronger emphasis on achievement' (1990: 94).[6]

POLITICAL MODERATION AND POLITICAL EXTREMISM

Lipset considered political moderation to be a result of the modernisation process and an important factor of democratic stability. He claimed that political moderation and tolerance are fostered by two concomitants of the modernisation process, education and cross-cutting cleavages. In *Political Man,* he provided empirical evidence for the positive effect of education on social and political tolerance (1960: 56 and 109ff.). The close association between education and tolerance has since been confirmed in so many other studies that it can be considered as a kind of social law (e.g. Almond and Verba 1963; Barnes and Kaase 1979; Inglehart 1997).

Another influential chapter of *Political Man* discussed extremist movements.

In '"Fascism" – Left, Right, and Centre' (1960), Lipset advanced a general theory of political extremism, even though the article primarily focused on fascist movements. He began with the assumption that rapid social change contributes to the development of political dissatisfaction and therefore fosters the formation of extremist political movements, which can be seen as 'a response of different strata of the population to the social effects of industrialisation at different stages of its development' (1960 137ff.). 'They appeal to the disgruntled and the psychologically homeless, to the personal failures, the socially isolated, the economically insecure, the uneducated, unsophisticated, and authoritarian persons at every level of society' (1960: 175).

Lipset also argued that members of the old middle class are particularly susceptible to the appeals of right-wing extremist movements because their relative status had declined in the wake of industrialisation and this had fostered feelings of resentment against the modern way of life (1960: 136). Members of the traditional middle class felt threatened by both leftist demands for economic redistribution and their own diminished economic prospects. While Lipset was not the first author to put forward this idea, his essay certainly contributed to its popularisation:

> It is not surprising, therefore, that under certain conditions small businessmen turn to extremist political movements, either fascism or anti-parliamentary populism, which in one way or another express contempt for parliamentary democracy. These movements answer some of the same needs as the more conventional liberal parties; they are an outlet for the stratification strains of the middle class in a mature industrial order. But while liberalism attempts to cope with the problems by legitimate social changes and 'reforms' ('reforms' which would, to be sure, reverse the modernisation process), fascism and populism propose to solve the problems by taking over the state and running it in a way which will restore the old middle classes' economic security and high standing in society, and at the same time reduce the power and status of big capital and big labour. (1960: 137)

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Lipset is much less known for his contribution to the theory of political leadership. However, in his book, *The First New Nation* he skillfully analysed George Washington's role as a charismatic leader who was instrumental and probably indispensable in establishing a national authority in the United States. Starting out from Max Weber's distinction between traditional, rational-legal and charismatic authority, Lipset argued that the political institutions of new nations do not normally enjoy a great deal of legitimacy and that they therefore have to rely on charismatic authority as a source of legitimacy. Charismatic authority has several

features that make it well suited to the needs of new nations: 'It requires neither time nor a rational set of rules, and is highly flexible' (1979: 18). However, charismatic authority is also inherently unstable and has to give way to rational-legal authority if a young nation is to survive.

Lipset argued that George Washington contributed to engendering faith in the viability of the American constitution. He specifically mentioned four aspects of Washington's leadership that were particularly important in this respect:

1. His prestige was so great that he commanded the loyalty of the leaders of the different factions as well as the general populace. Thus, in a political entity marked by much cleavage he, in his own person, provided a basis for unity.
2. He was strongly committed to the principles of constitutional government and exercised a paternal guidance upon those involved in developing the machinery of government.
3. He stayed in power long enough to permit the crystallisation of factions into embryonic parties.
4. He set a precedent as to how the problem of succession should be managed, by voluntarily retiring from office. (1979: 22ff.)

In this analysis of Washington's role in the consolidation of American democracy, Lipset applied Max Weber's rather abstract theory of charismatic leadership to a concrete example and explained why many new nations fail, even if they have a charismatic leader. This is because most of these leaders fulfill only the first of these four functions.

Modern historiography has confirmed Lipset's evaluation of Washington's role and supports his conclusion that the political institutions of the new American nation were initially so feeble that only a charismatic leader could ensure their survival: 'Without a republican king at the start, [...] the new quasi nation called the United States would never have enjoyed the opportunity to achieve its long-run destiny' (Ellis 2002: 155). Moreover, Ellis has also emphasised that Washington's voluntary retirement was 'crucial in establishing the republican principle of rotation in office' (Ellis 2002: 122).

Lipset's analysis of political leadership underscores once more the importance he attributed to historical contingency. He acknowledged that structural and cultural variables are insufficient for explaining political developments, and that the survival of the United States, as the first new nation, was primarily due to a coincidence of favourable structural conditions and the good fortune to have had a group of political leaders who were capable of creating a workable set of republican institutions that were without precedent at the time.[7]

CONCLUSION

Seymour Martin Lipset was certainly one of the most productive and innovative social scientists of the 20th century. It is hardly possible to overrate his contribution to democratic theory. An analysis of his work shows that Lipset considered democracy as the result of a complex constellation of interrelated factors. He emphasised that socio-economic modernisation fosters the development of a broad middle class and cultural diversity which in turn provide the basis for the development of a democratic political culture. Lipset also studied the sociological and cultural developments associated with modernisation in great depth.

Democratisation and the conditions for stable democracy preoccupied Lipset's thinking for many decades. He developed his basic ideas when he was fairly young and continued to refine them over the years, making them ever more succinct. Most of his basic assumptions have been confirmed by later research and with more elaborate data than was available at the time Lipset developed them. Moreover, the assumptions were also supported by political developments he could not have foreseen. The breakdown of communism in central and eastern Europe is a telling example of the inherent instability of regimes that are low in terms of both political legitimacy and effectiveness.

The reason why Lipset did not have to revise his basic assumptions has to do with the fact that most of his work was devoted to advancing an interrelated set of theoretical ideas and illustrating them with a wealth of empirical data. His ingenuity in collecting supporting evidence from many different countries and sources is awesome. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, many of his ideas have become so commonplace that we are hardly aware that Lipset was the first scholar to present them, or at least to phrase them as theoretical propositions in the way that they are still known today.

Notes

1 In his commemoration of Lazarsfeld's 100th birthday, Devitt (2001) hails the ground-breaking studies that came out of the Bureau, which blended several fields of scholarship, such as economics, mathematics, sociology, social psychology, and political science. He specifically mentions *Union Democracy* by Lipset, Trow and Coleman.

2 This is confirmed by Lipset's more recent article 'The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited', in which he states 'that the more the sources of power, status and wealth are concentrated in the state, the harder it is to institutionalise democracy', because a centralisation of resources implies that 'the political struggle tends to approach a zero-sum game' (1993: 4).

3 However, Lipset himself mentions the case of a well-governed colony as an example of high effectiveness, yet low legitimacy. Thus, the original concept was obviously meant to imply a well-functioning public administration as well.

4 Michael Goldfield (1998) also lauds the book's combination of 'meticulous empirical examination of history and data, with an interest in the broadest of social and political questions.'

5 Lipset argued that this even results in greater tolerance toward irreligion, i.e., agnosticism and atheism (1979: 153ff.).

6 Lipset assumed that egalitarianism also contributes to higher crime rates in the United States: 'Generalised deference is not accorded to the state or those at the top in the United States;

therefore, there is a greater propensity to redefine or ignore the rules' (1990: 94).

7 This is again supported by Ellis who emphasises that the historical actors themselves felt uncertain as regards their ability to establish a new system of government (2002: 9). He explicitly mentions a number of liabilities that made the success of the new nation doubtful. The most important of these was certainly that no one had ever established a republican government on the scale of the United States. Moreover, the country had no common history as a nation. At the same time, the intellectual legacy of the revolution stigmatised a concentration of political power, making it difficult to establish a central authority (Ellis 2002: 11).

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