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Political Education Beyond National Borders

Teaching democracy abroad to promote more peaceful international relations

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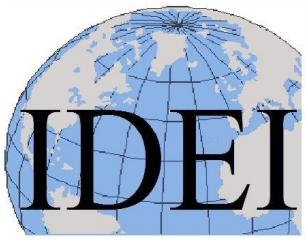

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Promoting democracy through education in the United States and abroad.

Political Education Beyond National Borders

Teaching democracy abroad to promote peaceful international relations

Abstract

Political education beyond national borders may be the tool for future world peace. In a world of increasing interconnectedness, achieving a common set of political beliefs is essential to establishing a foundation for common exchange and dialogue. After establishing the rationale for political education as the development of a more peaceful world through democracy, this paper examines the efforts of the United States and the European Union in political education beyond national borders. Through this examination it assesses their respective practices, challenges and implications for future efforts.

Introduction

The leaders of the United States and the European Union have placed their trust in political education as tool to promote their views of government both within their national boundaries and beyond. Each government is engaged in this exercise for the same reason which is to establishing likeminded citizenries in other nations to promote more peaceful exchange. Yet, the US and EU particular methods and goals differ widely in some instances. Largely this difference exists because of their goals for interaction with other nations and their vision of future international relations. This paper explores these attempts at supra-national political education by examining the rationale behind its use, the effectiveness of the strategies used and the potential for future implementation.

The Interconnected world

The multiple chains of interconnectedness that cover the world continue to strengthen and multiply at a rate and intensity unimagined even a decade ago. Over the course of recorded human history, the ability for peoples and their polities to impact each other has never been greater. However, this interconnectedness brings with it both positive and negative effects on

human existence. Some positives from increased interconnectedness include the general increase in the human condition brought about by the peaceful spread of ideas and resources that accompany the transparency of borders, ease of travel and rapidity of communication. Yet at the same time, the increasingly interconnected world has also experienced a myriad of negative effects many of which have led to less prosperity and peace. Such negative outcomes as global epidemics, degradation of the environment and war have all accompanied the growth of interconnectedness.

That interconnectedness brings both positive and negative effects is not a new idea. Indeed, the conflicting effects of frequent and regular intercourse among differing peoples have long been considered by political theorists. Understanding the effects of an increasingly interconnected world is crucial to solving current international conflicts and achieving a more prosperous future for all. Key to this understanding is recognizing the sufficient and necessary cause of conflict that arises when differing people interact. By examining the major theories of interconnection and conflict we seek the roots of conflict to help us better understand the potential for a more peaceful future.

The classical liberal viewpoint assumes that as different peoples engage in mutually-productive trade they will be less likely to engage in severe conflict. Thinkers as early as Montesquieu have claimed that Athe natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace.@ (quoted in Hirschman, 1977) More contemporary theorists have argued similar patterns at various levels. This same relationship has been argued for dyadic relationships between individual leaders and governments (Hirschman, 1977, Stein, 1993 and Doyle 1997) as well as for political systems (Rosecrance, 1986 and Keohane 1990). Some have even argued that such interactions are not only beneficial to peacefulness but even a necessary condition for the spread and development of

civilization itself. (Diamond, 1999) In this case, instead of simply providing a common initiative for peaceful exchange, Diamond has argued that interconnectedness provides for the dissemination of resources, peoples and ideas necessary for the continual stimulation and growth of societies.

Yet, others have attacked these positions instead seeing interconnectedness as setting the foundation for the emergence of conflict. The most consistent of these oppositions has come from the neo-realists and neo-marxist camps. Neo-realists emphasize the distribution of power in these interconnected relationship are what determine the conflictualness of their exchange. Changing power relations are most often seen as precursors for conflict between interconnected actors by the neo-realists (Gilpin 1981, Levy 1989 and Mearsheimer 1990). Some even argue that the simple increase of interconnectedness by necessity must bring an increase in opportunities for conflict. (Waltz, 1970) On the other hand, it is the imbalance of power and accompanying exploitation of the relationships that are seen as the engine for conflict by the neo-Marxists (Wallerstein 1974 and Chase-Dunn 1989).

While these thinkers have found solid evidence that interconnectedness can have both positive and negative effects on international conflict, neither camp has seemingly discerned that intervening variable that tips the scale towards conflict or not. Such an intervening variable was proposed by Samuel Huntington (1993) in his instant classic, “A Clash of Civilizations”. In this article and subsequent book, Huntington contended that as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the greatest divisions among peoples, and the source of most international conflict, will be based on culture. From his perspective, in a less connected world, these cultures could co-exist in semi-isolation but with increasing interconnectedness the differences in cultures will bring increased conflict when different civilizations (culture writ large) are unable to

accommodate each others world views. He posited that post-cold war conflicts would no longer be based on competing ideologies, given the new dominance of the US, but instead be based on the clash of elements of culture of the five or possibly seven great "civilizations" of the world. Huntington posited these civilizations, cultural areas, as: the Confucian, Japanese, Slavic-Orthodox, Islamic, Western and possibly Latin-American and African. He viewed the increasing rise of modern but not Western civilizations, such as the Islamic and Confucian, as particularly threatening to world peace since their acquisition of wealth and power has not accompanied a similar growth in modernization of their culture. His suggestions for ameliorating these conflicts in the short run were largely a call for Western powers to strengthen their connections with each other and with those of other civilizations who might be co-opted or were at least more similar in perspective. In the long term, he offered the advice that Western powers must reconcile themselves to the rise of different civilizations by maintaining economic and military power necessary for protection of their interests and by developing a greater understanding of these other civilizations to promote better coexistence.

Almost immediately upon its publication, many scholars took exception with Huntington's thesis and picked at the details of his argument. While some argued that his thesis did not hold up to empirical reality (Russett, Oneal and Cox, 2000), others picked away at his conception of monolithic civilizations (Matlock, 1999) and still others claimed that he simply misinterpreted common socio-economic causes of conflict as cultural ones. (Senghaas, 1998) Even with such vociferous and widespread critique the ideas that Huntington illuminated the public's imagination and continue to resonate with many in and outside of the public sphere.[1] From European Community President Jacques Delors explicit endorsement of the thesis, "future

[1] This was especially true shortly after the attacks of 9/11 on the World Trade Center and the resulting "War on Terror". The parallels became so strong that the Council on Foreign Relations released a Terrorism: Q&A to

conflicts will be sparked by cultural factors rather than economics or ideology" to George W. Bush's call for a "crusade" against terrorism, the idea that culture is at the root of interstate conflict has endured.

The reason that the public and so many policymakers have renewed their interest in Huntington's clash is because they seek a way of understanding the conflicts that seem inevitable from the growing closeness of the world community. Daily news broadcasts on television and radio transmit to the public an image of a world aflame in conflict. Most of this conflict appears along the fault lines of Huntington's civilizations and while his recommendations for greater cooperation of the likeminded and understanding of difference of the others is comfortingly benign, it lacks the active element to make it seem a plausible policy. It is this need that propels the US and European Union to seek a proactive answer for the question of international conflict. Surprisingly, that answer they have selected is also one that Huntington himself proposed at an earlier date and now has been supported by a wealth of empirical data during the past decade of international democratization.

In his **Promise of Disharmony**, Huntington argued that democratic societies are bound by their principals to be conflictual. Some conflict should even be viewed as good because it is based on the adaptation of theoretical principals of democracy into practical realities for all people. As long this conflict is about the implementation of democracy and not its principals then he believed democracy as a system would remain uninjured. As a corollary to this argument, Huntington observed that it is the belief in these principals that allows for people from different backgrounds to peaceably coexist with one another. Thus, Huntington argued that people of different nationalities can be forged into a nation-state by having these commonly held beliefs in democracy. In this argument he used the US experience as an example. What makes a

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explain why 9/11 was not an example from Huntington's thesis.

person an “American” is their belief in core principals of US democracy and not their ethnic background. That is why, he says, we have so many ‘hyphen’ Americans: Italian-American, Chinese-American, African-American, etc. Other nation-states do not have this type of citizenship as their core political beliefs are not held as the ultimate demarcation of belonging.

However, while he argued this democratic principal relevance for domestic politics he later rejected it when applied to his international civilizations thesis. He argued such a unifying function was not possible with civilizations for two major reasons. These reasons are that some civilizations (Islam in particular) are hostile to democracy and many have used greater public participation in society to simply overthrow Westernized elites. While Huntington himself rejected the spread of democracy as a solution for interstate conflict, many other found empirical evidence to counter his concerns.

Democracy is the answer

Nations have increasingly been interacting with each other over time. Sometimes this interaction has been peaceful and prosperous and at other times, conflictual and devastating. While scholars posited these differences as a result of economic, cultural or other power related dynamics a groundswell of data arose in favor of one overarching proposition. Ultimately this idea became known as the Democratic Peace Proposition which simply stated asserts: *democratic nations do not go to war with other democratic nations*. In this simple proposition, policy makers found the answer to the problem of interstate conflict in an increasingly interconnected world.

Thinkers as early as Immanuel Kant in the late 1700s and Woodrow Wilson in 1894 have asserted the pacifying effects of democracy. (Russett, 1993) The formal assertions of the

democratic peace proposition were succinctly stated by Bruce Russett as,

> First, democratically organized political systems in general operate under restraints that make them more peaceful in their relations with other democracies. Democracies are not necessarily peaceful, however, in their relations with other kinds of political systems. Second, in the modern international system, democracies are less likely to use lethal violence toward other democracies than toward autocratically governed states or than autocratically governed states are toward each other. Furthermore, there are no clear cut cases of sovereign stable democracies waging war with each other in the modern international system. Third the relationship of relative peace among democracies is importantly a result of some features of democracy, rather than being caused exclusively by economic or geopolitical characteristics related with democracy. (Russett, 1993)

Several studies have tested this proposition in the last few decades and though they used different methods and indicators, they have found overall support for the pacifying effects of democracy. (Babst, 1972; Rummel, 1983; Chan, 1984; Maoz and Abdolali, 1989 and Ray, 1992)

Some of these same scholars also have drawn the connection that understanding the democratic peace is the solution for Huntington's clash thesis. They argue that, "A concern with the clash of civilizations is therefore part of a larger concern with the implications of identity for theories of the democratic peace and of international relations generally." (Russett, Oneal and Cox, 2000) They salve these fears by finding no empirical evidence to support the claim that democracies are more conflict prone, than any other type of government, with those who do not share their cultural or political identity. (Ibid)

By the end of the Cold War, all of the dominant powers were, at least on the surface, democratically governed. If the proposition was true then war against each other was unlikely and only those nations that retained undemocratic governments posed any real threat. Thus, the answer to peaceful interstate relations became obvious and policies for promoting democracy around the world took on a new and more urgent priority. The US and European governments have undertaken multiple democratization projects around the world centered on this belief in the

pacifying effects of democracy. One important tool that they have used in these projects is political education.

Political Education for Democracy

Given that a more peaceful interconnected world was the goal of policymakers and that spreading democracy was the key to this achievement, it remained for policy makers to select the means by which they could achieve their desired result. When faced with a number and variety of undemocratic governments around the world, these leaders could choose among two possible alternatives: military or peaceful regime change. Given the potential costs of the former, both the US and European governments selected the latter as their most used alternative.

To bring about peaceful regime change for democracy is a complex and time-consuming task. Such policies seek to change existing non-democratic mores, attitudes and ultimately governments by convincing the people of a given country of the worth and importance of democratic principals. This effort involved the flow of information and resources through multiple channels. One of the most direct of these channels was the use of political education.

Political Education Beyond National Boundaries: Case of the United States

Political education has taken place in both overt and more subliminal ways. During the Cold War, the US promoted democracy using political education through the activities of the United States Information Agency, United States Information Service and the Voice of America. These efforts were for "helping other peoples see America as it really is" and to "sustain our country's ability to maintain rapport with other peoples — even when it requires us to go over the heads of their governments." These activities were for the purpose of creating an

environment within other countries where the “public respects and takes an interest in the United States” such that “our (US) diplomats find an audience for what they have to say about the pressing issues of foreign affairs.” (USIA, 1999) Much of these activities took place through informational broadcasts, educational exchanges and developmental assistance.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the US has taken an even more active role in political education. Much of this has occurred through the conduct of assistance projects that focus on promoting civil societies and other elements of democratic societies (such as non-governmental organizations, open and effective elections and the free press). They have also sponsored democracy building projects that target educational systems within non-democratic and emerging democracies. These projects use political education as a tool to inject democratic ideology into both the content and organization of education in non-democratic countries. In some cases, this effort has been openly proclaimed such as curriculum development projects for creating democratic or civic education teaching materials for democracy. In other cases, this remains a less overt attempt such as the promotion of projects by the US Agency for International Development that are focused on educational reform to instill learner-centered methods in schools. Since these methods are predicated on democratic principals, some have argued that these are covert attempts to impose democracy under the disguise of educational progress. (Tabulawa, 2003)

While the US has actively sought to promote democracy through political education the goal of such efforts was to bring about democratic transformation of other nations but not to actively politically control these nations. Such efforts are intended to bring about adoption of democratic principals using a bottom-up approach that creates a groundswell of public support for democracy that ultimately leads to populist efforts for regime change. Such ‘velvet’ or

'colored' revolutions are characterized by indigenous movements with US backing. Ultimately, the goal is to use political education as tool for enlarging the number of nations under democratic rule. Whether these nations finally fall under the US's sphere of influence is largely viewed as immaterial as long as they join the league of free nations. Thus the principle difficulty faced by the US in their supra-national political education efforts is the access to and socialization of non-US communities. While still a formidable task, it largely revolves around US resource allocation and patience to form democratic citizens of nations of the world.

The issues faced by the European Union in this same effort are much more daunting. While the government of the European Union has also been involved in such attempts at political education their purpose has varied considerably in the extent to which they rely on political education to promote democracy as well the outcome of such efforts. While the EU and US share some of the same goals, they also differ in their use of political education and their ultimate design.

Political Education Beyond National Boundaries: Case of the European Union

Beginning its existence with the idea of economic integration, the EU has evolved into a more complex and encompassing effort. That effort now extends to economic, social and political unification of 25 independent nations with more scheduled within the coming decade. Central to this unification experiment is the belief that two, seemingly conflicting states can be achieved: integration and independence. The goal of the European Union is to unite European nations through "common institutions to which they delegate some of their sovereignty so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made democratically at the European level." (http://europa.eu.int/abc/index_en.htm)

Thus political education in the EU context is to help establish a degree of uniformity that will provide the foundation for integration. Political education in the EU context necessarily involves not only the promotion of democratic beliefs but also the development of a sense of being a European citizen. To accomplish this objective, the EU has supported a variety of top-down and bottom-up efforts in new and potential member states. The Maastricht Treaty set forth the concept of European Citizenship which is envisioned as a compliment to national citizenship. To promote this the EU has developed the following programs:

- Youth for Europe: exchanges, mobility and initiatives for young people;
- European Voluntary Service: it is planned that 10 000 volunteers per year will take part in a non-profit-making or unpaid activity in another Member State or third country;
- Youth of the World: the programme will be open to cooperation with third countries;
- socio-educational instructors and support systems: training, information, exchange of best practice among instructors;
- support for political cooperation: cooperation on youth policy.

(http://www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l29013.htm)

More directly, the EU expects the Civic Participation Programme to:

"promote the values and objectives of the Union, to bring citizens closer to the EU and to encourage them to engage more frequently with its institutions. The programme is intended for all those involved in civil society and it aims to involve citizens closely in reflection and discussion on the construction of the European Union, to intensify links and exchanges between citizens from the countries participating in the programme, for example through town-twinning, and to encourage initiatives from bodies involved in promoting active and participatory citizenship." (IBID)

However, cross-pressures exist with the EU that provide resistance to this political education goal. Among these are issues of justice, pluralism, identity and socio-economic differences. At the core of these difficulties lies the tension between cultural and political identity. At the same time,the EU seeks to promote cultural identity through its protection of and

support for minorities, it also requires them to surrender these identities when acting as European citizens. Such a complex endeavor is fraught with challenges. These challenges have lead some to declare the idea of European citizenship a "mirage." (Lehning, 1997)

After considering the range of identity issues faced by European citizenship, he argues that this separation of political identity from social and cultural identity is an impossibility and thus renders European citizenship incompatible with liberal democratic citizenship. (Ibid) Liberal democratic citizenship is based upon the simple notion that "the interests of each person are entitled to equal consideration." Such equality is deemed an impossibility given the current trajectory of the EU since while promoting integration is also reaffirming national sovereignty. Even after the pronouncements of Maastricht, the Union has continued to promote economic integration at the cost of European identity. This is particularly felt in the European conception of democracy that insists on minimal levels of social welfare. Whereas US conceptions of democracy emphasize political equality, Europeans have consistently included social and economic welfare as a principal of democratic governance. Guarantees of such economic and social equality are not part of Union membership and have led some to claim that "Maastrict has not meant a metamorphosis of the 'market citizen' into the 'full-fledged' EU citizen." (Streek, 1995)

Just as important, the EU formulation of citizenship "does not attempt to define more modern civil rights and duties. An EC citizen is defined as a national of a member state" (Duff, 1994) This distributive representation of citizens seemingly violates the basis premise of liberal democracy and creates what some are calling a 'democratic deficit.' Because the citizen lacks lacks direct identification with the political system, it follows that they also lack accountability over the exercise of such political authority. Citizens within the EU can only exercise such

authority over their national governments who in turn, delegate some decisions to the Union. The link of legitimacy that flows from a people to the government continues to be broken by the intervention of national sovereignty. This is not simply a theoretical argument but one that EU institutions take seriously as can be seen in the terminology used in public pronouncements. At such times EU officials speak of the 'peoples' of the member states and not the singular people of Europe. (Neunreither, 1994)

The task for political education for the European Union is complex, difficult and perhaps impossible in terms of its ability to transmit democratic beliefs as envisioned by most Europeans. This complexity and difficulty comes from the agenda that the EU has set for its political education system. Instead of simply promoting basic ideals of liberal democracy, political education under the European Union also involves the integration of new nations into a unified system that on one hand aspires to supra-nationhood while at the other reaffirms national and cultural sovereignty. Such a policy for political education differs greatly from that of the United States and its implications for success in accomplishing peaceful interstate relations are the subject of the concluding section of this paper.

Conclusions

From the preceding sections the foundations for political education as a foreign policy objective have been elaborated and the practice by both the US and EU have been considered. From this analysis we find that while the two governments base their policies for supra-national political education on common principals, that their practices and desired results are quite different. In both instances, the governments hope that political education will transform non-democratic nations into democracies. They seek this change in ideology out of the belief that the

principals of the Democratic Peace Proposition will hold; that democracies do not go to war against one another.

However, while both begin with this assumption, their practice diverges quickly based on other factors. While the US uses political education to promote the general elements of liberal democratic theory through popular pressures within nation-states, the EU looks to political education in the same fashion as well as another tool of integration for the enlargement of the Union. Unfortunately, many of the scholars referenced earlier have found this additional requirement to be the undoing of the calls for a European Citizenship with a correspondingly detrimental effect on the practice of its political education. In essence, these scholars believe that the results of political education of the EU to be ineffectual at best and a mirage at worst.

As a result, comparing US and EU approaches to political education in this respect is something of an apples and oranges exercise. While they share some superficial similarities the efforts are quite different. Perhaps the only equitable comparison is the individual approach to the original intent. In other words, to what extend do the political education approaches of each government promote democracy and consequently a more peaceful world?

Unfortunately, the distinction between the two approaches impacts the answer here as well. Since the US policy is largely to support popular uprisings for democracies within nations without challenging indigenous conceptions of culture or self-rule, it is a much simpler task that has yield many successes. The ‘velvet’ and ‘colored’ revolutions can all be pointed out as possible success stories for this approach. In each case, popular pressure overthrew non-democratic government and installed an indigenous conception of democracy in its place. The danger, of course, in such event is the one that Huntington identified. That danger is that the

popular uprising will overthrow a Westernized elite or otherwise install a non-democratic leadership through a democratic process.

The EU approach can also claim some success given the successful enlargement of the Union to 25 nations with formerly non-democratic countries. However, as many scholars have pointed out, the political education aspect of this effort is suspect. Since this integration has taken place mostly on an economic level and not a socio-political one, the real work of political education may still lie in front of the Union. Such political education policies are hampered by the current conceptions of both democracy and the Union itself. Until changes are either made to these factors, political education by the EU in new and non-EU nations will remain superficial. While political education in the EU sets a high standard for itself in terms of not only promoting democracy but also Union citizenship, it falls short of the latter in a way that may be detracting from the former.

In conclusion, the use of political education by both the US and EU is likely to continue over subsequent years with dramatically different results. The US is likely to continue the same course as the past although it has now begun to direct its efforts at the non-democratic nations of the Islamic civilization that Huntington believes will be unreceptive of democracy. Yet, if the US holds to its past commitment to only promoting general democratic principals, allows the development of indigenous conceptions of democracy and restrains from using its formidable power to impose democratic government in a top-down regime change there is every possibility that the basic rationale of human equality and responsiveness of government will win over the hearts and minds of people everywhere. This process can also be furthered by increasing levels of interconnectedness of the world while at the same asserting and respecting the basic principals of democratic self-rule.

On the other hand, the EU seems to be faced with a difficult choice in regards to political education. As the prior sections demonstrate, the current implementation falls far short of forging a democratic-minded citizen of Europe. This failure has recently been highlighted by the rejection of the Constitution for the European Union by the peoples of nations that have traditionally been among the most solid supporters of Union. The idea of EU sovereignty was soundly rejected once the Union actually reached down to the citizen level for ratification of its legitimate existence. While multiple issues surely influenced this vote, the ultimate result that the year of European Citizenship began with more challenges than congratulations.

The ultimate decision facing EU political education is whether to continue with its broad vision of involving democracy and European citizenship or whether to restrict to the lesser position adopted by the US. Since the EU has consistently affirmed itself as more of a economic integration instead of a supra-national polity, it follows that policy of political education in the EU should focus more on the principals of democracy and steer clear of common citizenship. The mixture of democratic ideals with European Citizenship in the current European political environment entails too many inconsistencies to be effective. This does not mean that such an agenda is doomed for all time but it is until more full integration of the Union can occur. Until there is something more akin to a "United States of Europe" the paradoxical relationship of citizens to the EU will remain a barrier to European political education. If this greater unification does happen, then political education in the EU can legitimately undertake the same effort as US domestic political education programs. That program being the development of European citizens for the Union on the basis of true political ideology regardless of national identity. Unfortunately at this time, such an endeavor is contradicted by political realities that weakens EU political education beyond national boundaries.

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