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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It was late June 2005 when my plane swooped down into Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, and I was struck by the sparse landscape, looming power stations (labelled conveniently and in huge numbers as 1, 2 and 3) and ring of ger villages encircling the city. The drive from the airport to the Chinggis Kahn Hotel is short and bumpy, while traffic chaos is typical of any transitional country. Mongolia is a country three times the size of France with a population of under 3 million, the majority of whom live in the capital. Its average per capita income level is \$3,300 USD (indexed in 2010), while its growth rates for the last decade have fluctuated between 6 per cent and 8 per cent per year. It is one of the fastest growing economies in the world mostly due to its rich deposits of natural resources. This is a country that was the land of the conquerors and is now sandwiched between Russia to the North, China to the South, North Korea to the East and the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – to the West.

As I reflected on Mongolia's size, geographical position, relative economic wealth and unbelievable natural beauty, I asked myself, 'How and why did its people in 1991 decide to overthrow the Communist regime and establish a multi-party democracy? And how has it managed to sustain this democracy against all odds?' In the short space of less than two decades, Mongolia overthrew the past regime with comparatively little violence (although key dissenters were killed), established a functioning party system, carried out successive elections in which power has been transferred between different political parties and passed its own 9th Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on democracy, zero tolerance of corruption and human rights that joined the eight other well-known MDGs. Throughout the 20 years of this new democratic period, Mongolia has suffered challenges to its systems and democratic institutions (including some violent contestations over electoral

results and a corruption scandal preceding the 2012 elections), but it has not experienced a reversal, or ‘rollback’ of democracy to the degree that has occurred in other similar new democracies (see Diamond 2008).

In late 2010, I once again found myself descending into a mountainous and sparsely populated country with its own looming power stations that has also been building democratic institutions since the end of the Cold War. The site of my arrival was Santiago de Chile. In contrast to Mongolia, Chile had had a long experience with democracy from the nineteenth century until 1973, when President Salvador Allende was overthrown by the military and the country endured 18 years of dictatorship under General Augusto Pinochet. But Chile underwent a rapid transition to democracy after Pinochet’s 1988 defeat in a plebiscite, rather than a popular uprising that sought to unseat him from power. Like Mongolia, Chile has been able to avoid a return to authoritarianism and an alternation of power between the broad leftist coalition **Concertación** (which won all the post-1989 elections until 2009) to the rightist National Renovation party led by former LAN Chile CEO Sebastian Piñera. In my meeting with former President Patricio Aylwin (or Dom Patricio as his supporters call him), he said ‘it does not matter to me that the right has won in Chile, since it is a great sign of the health of our democracy’. These are very wise words indeed and will be reiterated throughout this book.

Chile has now had five democratically elected governments since Pinochet and has joined the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) along with other wealthy and stable democracies. It rose to international fame with the military coup of 1973, sending dissidents and exiles throughout the world and becoming a pariah state for many years as the international community mobilized around its frequent and serious abuse of human rights. International pressure on the issue of human rights continued after Pinochet’s departure from formal power with his 1998 detention in London based on a request for extradition to Spain from a judge seeking redress for past crimes against humanity. While Pinochet never saw justice, the principle of ‘universal jurisdiction’ (the idea that jurisdiction over crimes extends beyond the boundaries of the prosecuting state) was buttressed as the Law Lords in the United Kingdom agreed that a former head of state was not immune from prosecution for crimes against humanity. The story of Chile is thus one of successful democratic transition and one of advance (albeit incremental) for the human rights movement.

Contrast these pictures with those of Mexico. Again, as we approached Mexico City – a sprawling metropolis of 20 million people – I reflected on the process of democratization in a country that had undergone a prolonged revolution between 1910 and 1917, a period of contestation between the end of the Revolution and the consolidation of authority under the **Partido Revolucionario Institucional** (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI), and one of the most successful periods of authoritarian rule that effectively

ended in 2000 with the election of the main opposition party **Partido Acción Nacional** (National Action Party, PAN) to the Presidency. Mexico is an upper-middle-income country that has developed to the stage that it is now a full member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), a member of the OECD (like Chile) and one of three partners in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) along with the United States and Canada. Over the last decade, it has seen remarkable rates of economic growth, decreasing rates of inflation, greater trade links with other countries, and it is the leading producer of smart phones (especially the Blackberry), television sets and automobile parts.¹

Long before its 'official' transition to democracy in 2000, Mexico has struggled with classic problems of economic development, including successful state-led growth and stagnation between the 1950s and 1970s, economic liberalization and a debt crisis in the 1980s and integration into the world economy in the 1990s. Throughout these decades, political representation was dominated by the PRI as it gradually liberalized its political system, established the **Instituto Federal Electoral** (Federal Electoral Institute, of IFE) and conceded defeat at the Presidential level in 2000 with the election of Vicente Fox from PAN.

These twin processes of economic modernization and political liberalization have been marred by political and social disturbances such as student and teacher mobilizations in the 1970s and 1980s; an armed rebellion in Chiapas in the 1990s that struggled against Mexico's participation in processes of economic globalization; and a highly profitable and increasingly violent drug trade that since 2006 has led to tens of thousands of killings and disappearances.² The federal structure of Mexico with 32 states and more than 3,000 municipalities has provided a set of incentives for corruption and impunity that have had profound human rights implications and undermined democratic development in a country that has competitive elections, well-developed political parties and the alternation of political control of government. Moreover, the process of democratization itself is seen by many as a possible reason for the instability since it has transformed the informal and authoritarian form of rule in ways that have not yet been consolidated and provided opportunities for conflict, violence, corruption and impunity (see, e.g. Snyder 2007; Philip and Berruecos 2012).

This **contrast of contexts** between Mongolia and Chile on the one hand and Mexico on the other provides the starting point for this book. Democracy and human rights have an inherent appeal that has inspired human communities around the world to throw off their authoritarian past and to embrace a set of institutions and values that at their heart place the idea of human dignity and human well-being. The desire for democracy is strong, and it is one that has increased dramatically in the latter half of the twentieth century. Indeed, since 1974, more than 90 countries have embraced democracy in 'waves' that have spread from Southern Europe, to Latin America, to Eastern Europe and to parts of Africa and Asia (Huntington

FIGURE 1.1 *The growth of democracy (number and percentage).*

Source: Polity IV.

1991; Doorenspleet 2005). Figure 1.1 shows the historic trends in the growth of democracy, both in terms of the number and percentage of democracies in the world and the various ‘waves’ that characterize the trends. The period between the middle of the nineteenth century to 1920 saw a large increase in democracy. The interwar period saw a dramatic decrease, with democratic gains in the immediate post-World War II period, but democratic collapse during the 1960s (partly explained by the growth in newly independent countries after decolonization and partly the turn towards authoritarianism in Latin America). But it is clear that from 1974, the world has witnessed an impressive and steady growth of democracy such that by today, roughly 60 per cent of all countries in the world are ruled by democratic governments.

In late 2010 and early 2011, countries across the Middle East and North Africa have shown dramatic popular mobilizations that led to regime change and new elections in Tunisia and Egypt, international intervention and regime change in Libya, challenge and oppression in Yemen and Bahrain and prolonged and violent conflict in Syria. While not a ‘Fifth Wave’ of democracy, there is much expectation among observers and concerned parties in the region as these countries undergo rapid political changes that were unimaginable only a few years ago. The self-immolation of a student in Tunis led to a mass uprising that toppled the Ben Ali regime; a style of social mobilization that spread quickly to Cairo and in time led to the collapse of the Mubarak regime after 30 years in power. Similar to social protest under authoritarianism in other contexts, the popular mobilizations in these

two countries adopted a language of rights that started with an economic critique and expanded to include a demand for the protection of civil and political rights (see Foweraker and Landman 1997; Breuer et al. 2012). Early concessions by the regimes in both Tunisia and Egypt were simply not enough as the protest movements remained steadfast in their determination to rid their countries of unsavoury rulers. Time will tell as to whether these processes will usher in solid and stable democratic regimes, but the appeal of democracy and human rights and the inability of the leaders to bottle up their people are testimony to the ideas put forward in this book.

Alongside the development of democracy, the appeal of human rights formalized and codified legally after the mass atrocities of World War II is one that has become increasingly accepted as a global moral discourse that has intuitive appeal to millions of people around the world. But despite its appeal, there are many and diverse paths to democracy, and despite their acceptance, the ways in which human rights are given expression at the local level vary tremendously. Moreover, and this is the cautionary element of the entire argument presented in this book, the maintenance of democratic institutions and the protection of human rights remain **precarious** even in the best of times. Economic fluctuations, the rise of undemocratic forces in society, ‘uncivil’ movements, terrorism and natural disasters carry with them the serious potential to undermine hard fought freedoms and cherished institutions in the oldest and the newest democracies in the world. But this is not a book about so-called illiberal democracy, where the improvement in rights protection has not kept with the development of democratic institutions (See Zakaria 2003); an idea that seems to focus rather too much on the deficiencies of new democracies and remains unreflective on the many problems in so-called established democracies. It is ultimately a cautiously optimistic book about the triumph of ideals and how these ideals have found expression through the development of international and domestic institutions and have been supported through the vigilance of mass publics inspired by the basic idea that **government ought to be subject to the will of the people**.

Since World War II, when the world emerged from one of the most appalling periods of violence and human suffering, democracy and human rights have become a set of successful political ideas that challenge oppression, celebrate humanity and protect us from the worst forms of our own behaviour; what Susan Mendus (1995) has called ‘bullwarks against the permanent threat of human evil’. Democracy and human rights channel and shape popular preferences into governing programmes, and they construct an enduring architecture for sustainable and long-term self-rule. But despite their appeal and their power, democracy and human rights are precarious and subject to significant challenge on a daily basis by governing elites tempted to undermine rules and institutions for enhanced personal power and by mass publics disenchanted with the partial and incremental satisfaction of popular demands (see Chapter 2).

At a more abstract and theoretical level, the book's argument is founded on assumptions about human nature found in Thomas Hobbes, but seeks to show that the world has sought to construct solutions for everyday governance that are based on institutions found in the work of John Locke and notions of justice found in John Rawls. Hobbes assumes that the 'state of nature' (a mental construct or thought experiment constructed for theoretical purposes) is comprised of rational individuals who pursue their own self-interest through any means, including the use of violence or 'warfare' in the terms he uses in *Leviathan*. Locke, on the other hand, shows how constraints on the rational pursuit of self-interest are possible without the existence of an all-powerful leviathan and that institutions and the rules that govern them can be constructed in ways that prevent otherwise self-interested individuals from engaging in the worst forms of behaviour towards one another. Rawls, however, reminds us that even within (and between) societies with well-developed forms of these institutions, there is still the need to think about how the fruits of development and benefits of society are distributed in ways that benefit the least well off. The establishment and maintenance of democracy combined with the protection of human rights across all their dimensions provide a contemporary solution for realizing these key ideas from Hobbes, Locke and Rawls.

To sustain these claims, this book takes a thematic journey through a complex set of global developments over the last 60 years. Rather than chart the history of democratic and normative achievements, the book examines different sets of 'thematic couplets' that frame our thinking about current and future trends in the world. These couplets include **abundance** and **freedom** (Chapter 2), **democracy** and **human rights** (Chapter 3), **waves** and **setbacks** (Chapter 4), **evidence** and **explanations** (Chapter 5), **agents** and **advocates** (Chapter 6), **truth** and **justice** (Chapter 7), **threats** and **pitfalls** (Chapter 8), **benefits** and **outcomes** (Chapter 9) and **hopes** and **challenges** (Chapter 10). Each couplet addresses a natural set of tensions between themes and the balanced, cautionary approach of this book.

Chapter 2 examines the global expansion of economic wealth and the quest by ordinary people to achieve greater freedom in their own countries, while at the same time arguing that much of the expanse in wealth remained in the global north (although is beginning to be challenged from the BRIC countries) and much freedom has come under threat during the so-called war on terror since 11 September 2001. For the latter half of the twentieth century, development practitioners and policymakers have debated whether economic **abundance** is compatible with political **freedom** or whether the real route to rapid economic development is through authoritarian and non-democratic means. Far from arcane debates or stale academic discussion, this topic is once again at the forefront of discussion with the rise of China as an economic powerhouse which has tremendous economic capacity and very little political freedom. China has overtaken the World Bank as the largest donor to developing countries, is now the

second largest economy in the world and is likely to overtake the United States in the next 10 years. The chapter examines this debate and the current understandings of the relationships between economic development (i.e. abundance) and democracy (i.e. freedom) with fresh eyes as policymakers in the OECD countries look for linkages between their aid policies and political institutions, and the United Nations system looks past 2015 and the new 'sustainable development goals'.

Despite the impression that democracy and human rights are inherently compatible concepts and ideas, Chapter 3 examines the tension between them in order to show that the two are not completely intertwined and can in some ways be contradictory. To do so, the chapter maps out 'thin' and 'thick' definitions of democracy, outlines the main contours of contemporary human rights and what they mean and then shows how the two concepts overlap and explains why such an overlap is important. It argues that any attempt for human rights to 'hegemonize' the concept of democracy is unhelpful for bringing about democratic reform, since the idea of democracy is grounded in **accommodation** and **agreement**, while the idea of human rights has been codified through international law, which carries with it an inherent sense of **judgement** against a well-defined standard. I illustrate these discussions with graphical representations of the main ideas and the connections between them to show that some idea of 'partial overlap' is the most fruitful way to conceive of them.

In the 1990s, Samuel Huntington's notion of 'waves' of democracy was a popular way to describe democratic developments in the world from the nineteenth through to the twentieth century. Chapter 4 uses this idea of **wave** as a foil and device to examine democratization in comparative perspective. It argues that the waves of democracy in the twentieth century were indeed unprecedented as this 'tantalizingly strange' (Dunn 1993) idea has caught the imagination of more and more people around the world. But it also shows that the later waves have been accompanied by an unexpected decline in the protection of human rights within many 'new' (third and fourth waves) democracies (see Smith-Cannoy 2012); a trend that has not been helped by the fact that many historically won rights protections have been compromised in many 'old' (first and second waves) democracies as the threat of terror raised alarm about too much 'openness' and freedom (see Brysk and Shafir 2007). Moreover, the erosion of rights commitments has been accompanied in some cases with democratic **setbacks**, in countries such as Peru, Ecuador, Russia, Fiji, São Tome and Mali.

One function of this book is to describe and categorize the many developments the world has witnessed since World War II, and the other function is to examine how such developments can be **explained** using systematically collected **evidence**. Using the so-called modernization school as a backdrop, 'straw man' and starting point, Chapter 5 reviews the main conceptual and explanatory frameworks used to explain the variation in democracy and human rights across countries and over time. The chapter

discusses the structural (or economic), rational (or self-interested) and cultural (or ideational) explanations for patterns in democratization and the variation in human rights protection. In other words, the chapter examines the degree to which economic development (and the broad sets of social changes that it entails), the interplay of power politics (at the national and international level) and the appeal and construction of ideas explain why democracy comes about, how it can be sustained and why human rights are better protected in some parts of the world than others.

While Chapter 5 looked at the broad explanations for the patterns in democracy and human rights, Chapter 6 focuses on how people and states (also known as **agents**) seek to bring about democracy, build democratic institutions and **advocate** for the promotion and protection of human rights. Such agents include domestic elites in government and opposition, international actors such as the United States and the European Union, as well as the relative power and impact of networks of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) fighting for human rights and justice. These so-called transnational advocacy networks (Risse et al. 1999) connect agents at the domestic level who confront their regimes to international actors that put pressure on those regimes to bring about reform. Over time, it is possible to say that the appeal of democracy and human rights has been 'socially constructed', or built out of a long series of interactions that combine the rational pursuit of material self-interest and the normative values associated with the promotion and protection of human dignity.

The process of democratic transition and the construction of institutions for the guarantee of human rights in many countries carry with them the need to confront the atrocities of the past. Authoritarian governments commit crimes against humanity as part of their overall strategies to maintain stability, security and control over their societies. Their atrocities include the use of arbitrary detention, torture, 'disappearance', exile and assassination. In countries that have emerged from prolonged periods of civil conflict (as in Peru between 1980 and 2000) or foreign occupation (as in East Timor), similar such atrocities have been committed. In over 30 transitional and post-authoritarian countries, there have been formal institutions, commissions or other bodies that have sought to capture the 'truth' about past wrongs as a means to bring about democratic longevity and respect for human rights. Chapter 7 shows that the focus on the past, memory work and truth commissions has sought public recognition of atrocities that were committed and justice and reconciliation for the victims and their families. But the chapter also shows that the verdict after many years of such bodies carrying out their different mandates is that we now have much more truth about what has happened (e.g. under Augusto Pinochet in Chile, under Apartheid in South Africa and during the conflict in Peru) than real justice for the victims. But great lessons have been learnt and the constraints of democracy and human rights continue to be seen as suitable political and legal solutions to move countries forward.

Despite the advance of democracy and human rights charted in the first chapters of the book, there remain significant **threats** and **pitfalls** to their long-term sustainability. Chapter 8 argues that these can be understood in the following four groups: (1) inter-state and intra-state conflict, (2) economic globalization and inequality, (3) global terrorism and its response and (4) environmental degradation and climate change. Democracy and the protection of human rights (as well as the international connections that result) are generally good for reducing international and domestic conflict, but war between and within states can and does break out in ways that can destroy democracy and lead to gross human rights violations. Prolonged and deeply embedded patterns of land and income inequality have a negative relationship with the protection of certain human rights. The threat from terrorism and its response in the twenty-first century continue to undermine the very rights commitments that were the hallmarks of the twentieth century. Finally, the challenge of sustainable development is at the forefront of policymakers' minds as the world finds ways in which to increase economic abundance and raise overall levels of welfare without long-term adverse effects on the environment, while a large proportion of the world continues to be vulnerable to environmental change.

A popular refrain in political discussions is 'so what?' 'What are the benefits and positive outcomes associated with democracy and human rights?' Chapter 9 explores the idea and burning question as to whether democracies and 'rights-protective' regimes, to use a phrase from Jack Donnelly, actually deliver tangible benefits to the people. It examines the benefits that are intrinsic to democracy and the value for individuals living under democratic conditions. It looks at the 'pacific' benefits of democracy at the international and domestic levels of conflict prevention. Drawing primarily on the development literature, the chapter shows that democracies are no worse at pursuing economic development, actually enhance the human-related dimensions of sustainable development and provide a set of institutions that are best equipped to guarantee the protection of human rights.

Chapter 10 concludes with a survey and summary of the main points of the book and maps out the both the **hopes** about and **challenges** for the future, taking into account the demographic shifts in different parts of the world, the continuing problem of religious extremism, discrimination, ethnic and other violence, as well as the many social, political institutions that remain weak in the world. Taken together, I hope the chapters in this book will allow you to think critically about developments in the world with respect to democracy and human rights so that the next time you fly into a capital city and try to get a feel of your surroundings, you will have a deeper understanding of the precariousness of the human conditions but also the remarkable ways in which we have sought to struggle for better systems of governance that at their heart have a genuine concern for human dignity.

SUGGESTED READING

Dahl, Robert (2000) *On Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Diamond, Larry (2009) *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies in the World*. New York: Holt and Rinehart.

Notes

- 1 These and other macro-economic indicators formed part of a keynote presentation by the Minister of Finance of Mexico Ernesto Cordero at the London School of Economics on 21 March 2011.
- 2 Data released by the government and published by the Guardian newspaper in the United Kingdom suggest that the total killed between 2006 and 2010 is more than 31,000, but the figure may be even higher as these killings are only those that can be documented, while many others remain unreported.