

*The state of democracy in advanced industrialised societies – a sociological approach*

Jesper Lysgaard

*Jesper Lysgard is an Undergraduate Student at the Institute of Political Sciences, University of Aarhus, Denmark.*

ABSTRACT: Throughout the last two centuries and especially since the Second World War, no theme has more preoccupied the fields of political science and political sociology than nature, conditions and possibilities of democracy. Since the onset of the third wave of global democratic expansion (Huntington, 1991), considerably more countries have democratic forms of governance than ever before – 89 in 2003 by the count of Freedom House. On the other hand, the performance of many long standing democracies, such as the United States, is proving less than satisfactory to their publics, resulting in a demand of reform and declining vote turnout.

Does democracy work? Commonly it is assumed that democracy in advanced societies is working well. This article will dispute this argument and discuss the state of democracy in advanced industrialised societies. Democracy will not be assumed as a static concept, but as continuously shaped in the interaction between the state, market and civil society. This is especially the case in advanced industrialised countries, on which this article will focus.

The aim of this article is to discuss the state of democracy in advanced industrialised countries. The positive effect of economic growth on the level of democracy was already noted in 1959 by Lipset. Much research within the modernization school has been focusing on the determinants of democracy from the viewpoint of less democratic countries to achieve higher levels of democracy.

Now what this line of research has lacked to address is how the high level of economic development in advanced and democratic countries such as the USA, UK affects society in general and thereby the characteristics of democracy. Firstly, the article will outline and consider the social requisites of democracy noted by S. Martin. Lipset. Secondly the article will take a sociological approach to investigate the impact of economic development on the character of democracy in advanced industrialised societies. Inspired by Jürgen Habermas' system life-world approach and the concept of discourse ethics it will be argued that high levels of economic development possibly have some negative side effects on the characteristics and substance of democracy in advanced industrialised countries. Thirdly, the article will draw on empirical data for a range of OECD countries to show a significant decline in voter turnout in the period 1945-2003.

*Introduction: Democracy - rule by the people*

Democracy as a political form of governance means rule by the people. The two parts of the definition "people" and "rule" has historically been interpreted differently. From ancient Greece and to present times some parts of the population have been excluded from voting. First in the 20. century the people has been conceived

as all (broadly speaking) adult citizens. The concept of rule has also been contested through history. Until the end of the 18. century democracy was associated with direct participation of the people. However, with the development of the modern nation state this form of direct participation was seen as unsustainable. The democratisation of the large nation states took place through the development

of representative liberal democracy, in which the people votes to elect members of a representation organ to represent them and their respective points of view (Svensson, 1997). On this basis the article will assume that voter turnout can be seen as the link between civil society and the citizens on the one hand and the state on the other hand. Thus, voter turnout is seen as a proxy for the participation, commitment and involvement of the individual citizen in the democratic process.

The relationship between citizen and state has been one of the main issues in the social sciences since the origin of the nation state. In the 18. Century Rousseau spoke of the sovereignty of the people, in which the people are to govern themselves through the political system (Rousseau, 1987; 106-107). Turning to the classics, Max Weber had doubt about the durability of this sovereignty, as he instead stressed the possibility of a dominating bureaucracy (Weber, 2002:145). Furthermore, Weber stressed that as capitalism develops it turns into an immense economic system, which controls the way of life of the individual whether it is wanted or not. Thereby capitalism transforms into the famous notion of an irrational "iron cage" (Weber, 1989: 181). Thus, Weber implies some of the possible negative side effects of economic development on society, which is to be explored in more detail by a Habermasian approach.

*Economic development and democracy - The Lipset hypothesis:*

The social requisites of democracy has been analysed by Lipset over a period of more than two decades (see Lipset, 1959, 1994). Lipset's general argument is simply that democracy is related to the state of economic development. The more well to do a nation is, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy. The idea of prosperity's positive effect on democracy Lipset, however, traced back to Aristotle: "From Aristotle down to the present, men have argued that only in a wealthy

society in which relatively few citizens lived in real poverty could a situation exist in which the mass of the population could intelligently participate in politics and could develop the self-restraint necessary to avoid succumbing to the appeals of irresponsible demagogues" (Lipset, 1959:75).

The explanation for the positive effect of economic development on the likelihood of a country establishing and maintaining democracy emphasises political culture and social structure. As to political culture, economic development is closely associated with increases in the general level of education, which promotes political attitudes conducive to democracy, such as tolerance of opposition and interpersonal trust. (Lipset, 1959:79,84). As to social structure, economic development alters the social stratification system from a pyramid shape to a diamond shape, in which the majority of the population is middle class and relatively well off and enjoys economic security instead of the majority being lower-class and poor. This transformation moderates the intensity of the class-struggle by reducing the proportion of the population that is susceptible to anti-democratic parties and ideologies and by increasing the proportion of the population that supports moderate pro-democratic parties (Lipset, 1959:83).

In addition to the positive effect of economic development affecting political culture and social structure Lipset stresses three spheres of society as social requisites of democracy; the state, the market, and civil society (Lipset, 1994:7-15).

*The state - bureaucracy and judicial system:*

Lipset stresses the development of an efficient and effective bureaucracy as a condition for a modern democratic state (Lipset, 1959:84). The stability of a democratic system is seen as being dependent on the effectiveness and the legitimacy of the political system. Effectiveness is the actual performance of a politi-

cal system, the extent to which it satisfies the basic functions of government as defined by the expectations of most members of a society. Legitimacy is the capacity of a political system to create and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most proper ones for the society. Both legitimacy and effectiveness is supported by an efficient bureaucracy and decision making system (Lipset, 1959: 86). An efficient bureaucracy furthermore stabilises and effectuates the diversion of public funds, welfare means, state employment and contracting. Finally, order and predictability are important for the economy, polity and society. If power is arbitrary, personal and unpredictable, the citizenry will not know how to behave, as it will fear that any given action could produce an unforeseen risk. Firstly, the rule of law means that people and institutions will be treated equally by the institutions administering the law (the courts, the police and the civil service). Secondly, that people and institutions can predict with reasonable certainty the consequences of their actions, at least as far as the state is concerned (Lipset, 1994: 15).

*The market:*

Lipset notes that a range of empirical studies have continued to find significant correlations between socio-economic variables such as GDP/GNI, educational attainments and level of health care and political outcomes such as free polities and human rights i.e. democracy (Lipset, 1994:16). This has led to the observation of the relationship between market economy and democracy. However, since it is possible for a country to exhibit market economy and an autocratic form of rule, it has been stressed that capitalism is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for democracy (Diamond, 1993; Waisman, 1992: 140-142).

*Civil society:*

Democracy requires a supportive culture, the acceptance by the citizenry and politi-

cal elite of principles underlying freedom of speech, media, assembly, religion, of the rights of opposition parties, of the rule of law, of human rights and the like (Lipset, 1994:3). Political stability in democratic systems cannot rely on force. In contrast to autocracies, democratic systems rely on and seek popular support and constantly compete for such backing. Democracy enables the citizenry to see the polity as including all societal elements, not only those being in power. In this way the electorate becomes part of the legitimating structure. Rather than the government, it is the people who holds the ultimate authority. This indicates that a robust and pluralistic civil society checks and balances the power of the state. A vital part in encouraging a stable democracy is a strong civil society, which can function as a political base and source of support for the political parties. Civil society can be defined as a myriad of mediating institutions including groups, media and networks that operate independently between individuals and the state (Lipset, 1994:12-15).

Summarizing Lipset's argument it is not economic development per se and certainly not economic growth that is the most important developmental factor in promoting democracy. Rather, it is the dense cluster of social changes and improvements, broadly distributed among the population, which can be summarized in the term socioeconomic development (Diamond, 1992:125-126).

*A remark on the shape of the relationship between economic development and democracy:*

Social scientists have been setting forward a number of theories on factors contributing to high levels of democracy. Factors such as economic development, religion, income inequality and colonial heritage have all been found as significant explanatory variables of the level democracy.

However, economic development is found to be the single most important explanatory variable of the level of democracy. A common view since Lipset in 1959 noted the positive correlation between indicators of economic development and high levels of democracy have been that prosperity stimulates democracy and that the Lipset-hypothesis is a strong empirical regularity (Barro, 1999; Diamond, 1992; Lipset, Seong and Torres 1993).

Lipset's notion of a direct relationship between economic development and democracy has been subjected to extensive empirical examination, both quantitative and qualitative. It appears that the relationship is not as linear as Lipset initially proposed. However, across a wide range of studies with great variety of samples, time periods and statistical methods the level of economic development continues to be the single most powerful predictor of democracy. Moreover, there is much historical evidence to support Lipset's hypothesis about the causal dynamics involved; that development promotes democracy by generating more democratic values and attitudes, a less polarized class structure, a larger middle class and a more vigorous and autonomous civil society (Diamond, 1992:6). It is worth stressing that Lipset's analysis as other theories in the "liberal" school assumes linearity, ignoring the possible negative impact on democracy that processes of changing from one developmental level to another might have. It establishes only a correlation and a causal trend, but not causality as such. Yet it does assume and infer that democracy is the consequence of the various developmental factors (Diamond, 1992:94).

For the purpose of this article it will be sufficient to assume that the form of the association between economic development and democracy is positively monotonic, but nonlinear. This indicates that as countries move beyond a certain level of economic development, their levels of

democracy would remain high and relatively stable (Muller, 1995:966). While accepting Lipset's general hypothesis, however, the argument of this article is that it would be erroneous to assume that once a certain high level of economic development and thereby a high level of democracy is reached, this will mean that the concept and characteristics of democracy stops evolving. Accepting the argument that the *level* of democracy in prosperous countries will remain high and relatively stable is, however, not the same as to question the characteristics of democratic society. Following Weber and Habermas the article will now discuss the continuing impact of economic development on society and democracy in long established democracies and industrialised societies.

#### *Communication and democracy:*

In order to rule the people must be able to communicate with each other, with the politicians representing them and with the bureaucracy serving them. This leads to the importance of the use of language in the democratic process and in society in general.

In order to discuss Lipset's social requisites, such as a market economy, an effective bureaucracy and judicial system and not least a vibrant civil society in established democracies the article will draw on the sociological approach set forward by Habermas. This approach is focusing more on the use of language than on actions or behaviour of the individual. This leads to the notion of the need to coordinate action socially by communication. Social action is perceived as either strategic or communicative (Habermas, 1984:285). For the purpose of this article it will suffice to ascribe two functions to the use of language; a regulative and an imperative function. In the regulative use of language participants raise normative validity claims and relate their utterance to something in a common social world in such a way that he or she intends to estab-

lish an interpersonal relationship recognised as legitimate. A validity claim may be criticised or defended argumentatively. The hearer, if not to switch over from communicative to strategic action, can oppose this claim to rightness only via criticism by offering reasons. To raise a validity claim is to assume the obligation of providing reasons for the claim. The communicatively acting speaker offers to redeem the validity claim if convincing reasons are put forward (Habermas, 1984: 302). This ensures that communicative action is co-ordinated by mutual acceptance or debate over acceptance. (Habermas, 1984: 303). In the imperative use of language participants relate utterances to the objective world, whereby the speaker raises a claim to power towards the addressee in order to get him to act in such a way as intended (Habermas, 1984:278). Communicative action differs from strategic action precisely in the condition of acceptability (Habermas, 1984: 297).

*The system life-world approach:*

From a habermasian point of view the advanced industrialised society is considered differentiated in two parts: the functionally organised system and the communicatively organised life-world. The system is divided into two subsystems, the economic system and the state (consisting of the administrative (bureaucracy) and political system. In advanced capitalist societies the capitalist economic system and the bureaucratic state are subsystems differentiated out from the components of the life world. (Habermas, 1989: 318). In the system actions are guided by strategic rationality implying that actions are taken from egoistic and goal rational considerations about which means best obtain a given goal using imperative speech acts (Andersen, 2000: 331-332). The life-world, as opposed to the system, is a sphere in which people are together and communicating linguistically without a given goal to be achieved. In the life-world actions are guided by a communi-

cative rationality, implying seeking consensus build on social norms and respect for the individual person by the use of regulative speech acts (Andersen, 2000: 332-333).

*The state, the market and the judicial system:*

The steering medium of the state (the political and administrative system) is power while the steering medium of the market is money. In interactions regulated by money actors are motivated by the satisfaction of needs or profitability not the recognition of criticisable claims to validity (Baxter, 1987:59). Both steering media is used to maintain the relationship and interactions between citizen and the state/market. Within the state actions are co-ordinated through the hierarchy of the bureaucracy in accordance with the purpose rational demand. Power as a medium is relatively independent of consensus and norms (Andersen, 2000: 331ff). Instead power as steering medium is characterised by effectiveness and efficiency of goal-attainment. The possessor of power can use sanctions to influence the other towards obedience. This implies that the handling of the citizen by the administration is taking place more commonly through forms, papers, considerations, reports etc. than through linguistic communication. When the state (the speaker) is holding power over the citizen (the hearer) – the latter is motivated to accept the speech act offer not by belief in the legitimacy or rightness of the speech act, but by the fear of punishment or the desire for rewards (Habermas, 1984: 301). Thereby the state mainly enforces its will by positive or negative sanctions and do not raise a claim to the normative rightness or underlying norms in the issuing of a command. The utterance does not depend on a normative background, stating under which conditions the act could be acceptable. (Habermas, 1984: 304). However, Habermas is aware that the state inevitably have to use power ”The social

state programmes demands a rather big amount of power to be elevated to law and to be financed by the state budget and implemented in the life-world of the citizens, who enjoys the benefits of these programmes (Habermas, 2001:201). From a habermasian standpoint power is not to be abolished, but instead power should merely build on dialogue within the limits of the law and not on control and sanctions.

The differentiation of the modern society is not primarily negative from a habermasian perspective. The dealignment of the system and the life-world is foremost considered a necessity to ensure that the two systems are able to operate with basis in their respective rationalities. Democracy cannot control the society as a whole because the modern society is too complex. Therefore it is not beneficial by any means to abolish the market or the administrative system. This is due to the capability of the administrative system to ensure a certain degree of social justice and fair distribution of income and individual freedom, while the market is characterised by large efficiency gains compared to other organisational forms of the economy, as it is able to maximise the aggregate wealth of society (Eriksen, 2003:271-272). In addition, basic macro economic theory appreciates the fact that the market cannot function properly without the state as market economies rely upon a sound and stable set of institutions involving property rights, commercial and contract laws, courts, police etc. without which few would be willing to save, invest and trade. Education, health service and infrastructure such as roads, ports, airports and public transport also contribute to economic development (Nellis & Parker, 2004:253).

Seen from the habermasian perspective the judicial system is to function as the medium for communicative power. In this way it will facilitate the transformation of the free communication in the public

sphere between citizens and the state into an administrative steering media in the shape of power, which the administration can use in its relations and interactions with the citizens. The judicial system is to intermediate between the factual and the valid. In order to operate functionally the judicial system has to appear as an objective reality, which functionally regulates the behaviour of society and at the same time exhibit intersubjectual legitimacy. In this way the citizen will perceive the law as meaningful and understandable and as having influence on the shape of the laws while at the same time being subdued to the law as its subject (Andersen, 2000:337-339).

Comparing Lipset's social requisites and Habermas' theory it becomes clear that both stress the importance of the same factors. Firstly, a well functioning market economy which generates sufficient national income. Secondly, an efficient bureaucracy to distribute this income and implement policy decisions. Thirdly, an effective judicial system as to secure a just treatment and a set of rules to regulate the market and society. Now, as opposed to Lipset it is clear that the theory of Habermas points in a more normative and procedural direction. The view of the judicial system not only as a regulator and safe guard, but in addition as a mediator between the citizen and the state is distinct in Habermas' theory. Furthermore Habermas' approach stresses that the state and thereby the administration uses and has to use power in its interaction with the citizen while the market uses money. However, it also points to the more negative and subtle side of the steering media of power and money

*The life-world, the public sphere and civil society:*

The life-world is composed of three components. Firstly culture, which is the cultural tradition shaping actors interpretative schemes and value standards. Secondly society, understood as the institu-

tional order of society and thirdly personality, which are the competences that make an individual capable of communicating and put him in a position to take part in the processes of reaching understanding and thereby to assert his identity (Habermas, 1989:138). Communicative action takes place within the social context of the life-world, which constitutes taken for granted background assumptions and naively mastered capacities. The life-world becomes a horizon and background for social action. People pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions and institutional norms ensuring a stable form of life-world (Habermas, 1984: 286,336-337).

The interaction between citizen and state is taking place in the public sphere (Habermas, 1989: 319; Kaspersen, 2000: 329). The key point concerning the public sphere is that no specific form of power or control is installed. Instead there are a replacement of power and control with common sense. This implies that the connection between citizen and the state are taking place in a sphere being state free, secular and rational and thereby divided from both the state and the economic system. In this sphere the most rational argument will prevail (Haahr, 2000:4-5; Eriksen, 2003:264). However, it is not given that the interaction between state and citizen are taking place under these circumstances. From a habermasian point of view the citizen is seen as part of the life-world and the state as part of the system. The interaction between the two is ideally constituted via dialogue in the public sphere, but as often via power, which is the steering media of the state.

The purpose of the interaction between the state and citizen is in the ideal situation to create consensus and mutual understanding. In order to initiate this ideal relation Habermas advances a discourse ethic as basis for a social order in which

institutions and norms build on communicative rationality, even though citizens and the state initially are bound by opposite rationality (Andersen, 2000:334-336). Habermas discourse ethic is formulated as "a norm can only be legitimate if it finds consent and support by all involved and affected participants in a discourse" (Habermas, 1983:75). It must be assured that all affected parts have access to take part in the discussion and thereby put forward their arguments in a discussion characterised by dialogue and not by force, power or control. If this procedure is to be followed the relationship between citizen and state is consistent with the domination-free dialogue (Andersen, 2000:330). And it is ensured that democratic political institutions and thereby policy emerges more from debate than from fiat (Baxter, 1987:51).

Citizens exchange taxes (money) for organisational performances and mass loyalty for political decisions. All these relations are regulated by the medium of money or power (Habermas, 1989: 320). Value commitments cannot be transferred to the political/administrative system via the medium of power, if the relation between citizens and the state is not taking place within the public sphere under the ideal conditions. The judicial system only in the ideal situation of the domination-free dialogue secures that steering media of power and money are anchored in the life world, in reality this is not always the case.

Both Habermas and Lipset points to the centrality of a civil society and its function as an intermediating layer between state and the people. Lipset assigns high importance to the political parties and other organisations of civil society and their vital role as independent mediators. Habermas' approach stressing the normative and procedural functions of the public sphere shows how the interaction between the state and people might be obtained under ideal conditions. However, it also

indicates that this ideal situation is not always a fact in reality primarily due to the fact that the state and citizens operate under different rationality.

*The risk of colonisation of the life-world and its consequences:*

The colonisation of the communicatively structured life-world by the economic and administrative system is conceived as progressive monetarisation and bureaucratisation of a society's communicative infrastructure. The steering media of money and power is replacing ordinary language in its function of co-ordinating social action. This represents an uncoupling of interaction from life-world contexts in general diminishing the mechanism of linguistic understanding and consensus (Habermas, 1989: 281). The discourse ethic, which can lead to the domination-free dialogue, is only to be appreciated as an ideal for the relationship and interaction between state and citizen. Though the possibility for consensus and understanding is present it is far from sure that it will be obtained in reality. From the habermasian perspective it is stressed that modern society has a build in risk which is especially the case of the economic system which is characterised by a number of defaults. This leads the administrative system to compensate for market failures, such as monopolies, negative externalities (ex. pollution), unemployment and inflation.

Due to market failure symptoms as unemployment, psychological illnesses as stress, depression etc. the state is forced to increase its goal rational management capacity at the expense of the communicative rationality of the life-world. Increasing use of social benefits and other welfare programmes in turn diminish the quality of the life of the citizens via decreasing self-esteem, dignity and there by causing personal crisis and weakening belief in political institutions. Thereby the life-world of the citizen is colonised by the system (Habermas, 1989: 318ff; An-

dersen, 2000:337). In addition the pressure of the market economy on profits, increasing work load etc. means a further increase in the monetarisation of the work place relationship between employees and the relations between firms on the expense of a social and communicative relationship.

The state seeks to reach the life-world of the citizen and to uplift market failure problems, but by a medium opposed to the rationality of the citizen. The result is a false domination-free dialogue, in which the state via power and money as steering media tries to reach the life-world of the citizen, which to succeed will demand the use of consensus orientated communication. Thereby a conflict emerges between the two opposite forms of rationality. According to Habermas: "Power as a medium is not capable of producing life forms" (Habermas, 2001:202).

The purpose of the life-world is to secure social integration, which main function is the co-ordination of action through legitimately recognised interpersonal relations and the securing of the identity of groups to a degree sufficient for everyday life. The fulfilment of this function is evaluated according to the solidarity among members of a society. The failure of social integration due to the colonisation of the life-world by the system leads, within culture to a threat of identity, within society to anomie and within personality to alienation. In such crisis social solidarity becomes scarce. Failure of cultural reproduction is manifested in loss of meaning, leading to a legitimation crisis in society and an orientation crisis in personality (Habermas, 1989: 140-141). Legitimation crisis in society will diminish the legitimacy of the political/administrative system and ultimately endanger the political order (Baxter, 1987: 72).

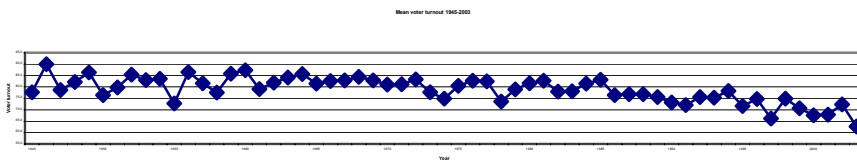
*Empirical findings:*

From the discussion of the colonisation of the life-world by the system it is seen that

the possible consequences might be a decreasing solidarity, lack of identity and weakening belief in political institutions. Thus, from the theory of Habermas it could be expected that this would manifest in a decreasing voter turnout and party membership in highly democratised and industrialised countries. In order to test these propositions data on voter turnout for 17 OECD countries (those countries scoring highest on the Freedom House democracy index 2004) from the period 1945-2003 and party membership in the period 1980-2000 will be analysed. Looking at wealthy advanced and industrialized countries, such as the group of OECD countries you will find that they are characterized by the social requisites set forward by Lipset's analysis; Economic development, general distributed prosperity, high educational attainment, and thereby a democratic political culture and civil society. This is supported by data in table 1 showing that GNI per capita and net primary school enrolment rates for the considered OECD countries are well above the average of the world. To discuss the state of democracy the article will draw on data on voter turnout and party membership for these 17 OECD countries, which at the same time achieve the highest democracy rating in the Freedom House survey of 2004 (see Annex

Tabel 1) The Freedom House rating of one indicates high levels of political rights and civil liberties. Under Freedom House's criteria of democracy elections are held freely, fairly and competitively and opposition parties and civil society play an important role in checks and balances (Feng, 2003: 44). However, to obtain a normal distribution in the data set and statistically test the trend in voter turnout in the period 1945-2003 OECD countries with some form of compulsory voting are excluded from the analysis (Australia, Belgium, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg) assuming that voter turnout in these countries does not show the real tendency because of the compulsory element. Voter turnout data has been collected for every election (parliamentary and presidential) in each of the 17 countries in the period of 1945-2003. The data set is based on observation of voter turnout by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2004). The total number of observations in the data set is 319, which is the basis for the calculation of the mean voter turnout for the countries in general on a year by year basis. Voter turnout is measured as the number of votes divided by the number of names on the voters' register, expressed as a percentage..

Figure 1: Mean voter turnout for the period 1945-2003 in 17 OECD countries



Source IDEA

Looking initially at figure 1, it appears that there is a declining tendency of voter turnout out in the period 1945-2003 for the observed countries in general. From a maximum in 1946 of 90,0% to a minimum in 2003 of 62,7%.

In order to examine the significance of this trend more carefully the time span period of 1945-2003 is divided into three periods; 1945-64, 1965-84 and 1985-2003. To test if the difference and thereby the decline in mean voter turnout between

the periods is statistically significant there is used a T-test of the difference between the means. It is assumed that the data set exhibits a normal distribution and that the

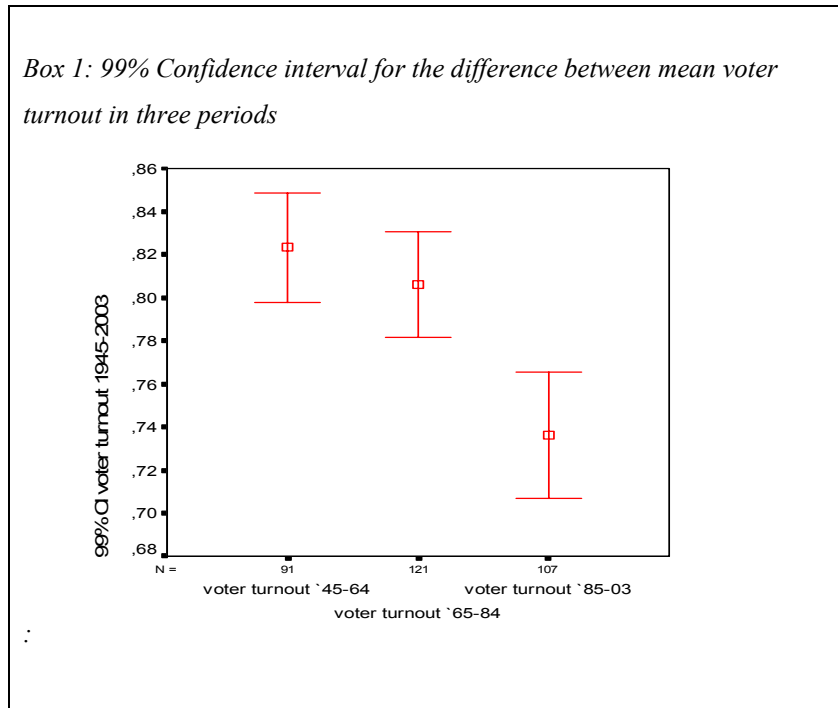
variance between the periods is equal. The result of the T-test is seen from table 1 and graphically from box 1:

*Table 2: T-Test of the difference between mean voter turnout in the three periods:*

Period:	Mean voter turnout	Std. error of mean	99% Confidence interval of the mean diff.	
1945-1964	82,3%	0,97%	79,8%	84,9%
1965-1984	80,6%	0,94%	78,2%	83,1%
1985-2003	73,6%	1,1%	70,7%	76,6%

From table 2 and box 1 it can be concluded that the difference in mean voter turnout is significant between the two periods, 1965-1984 and 1985-2003 on a 0,01 confidence level. However, it is not possible to claim a statistically significant difference in voter turnout between the

can also be expected to be associated with a decline in the party membership rates. If this is the case it will imply a threat to the position and functions of the political parties, which Lipset's asserts as the main intermediating organisation of civil society. However, the data on party member-



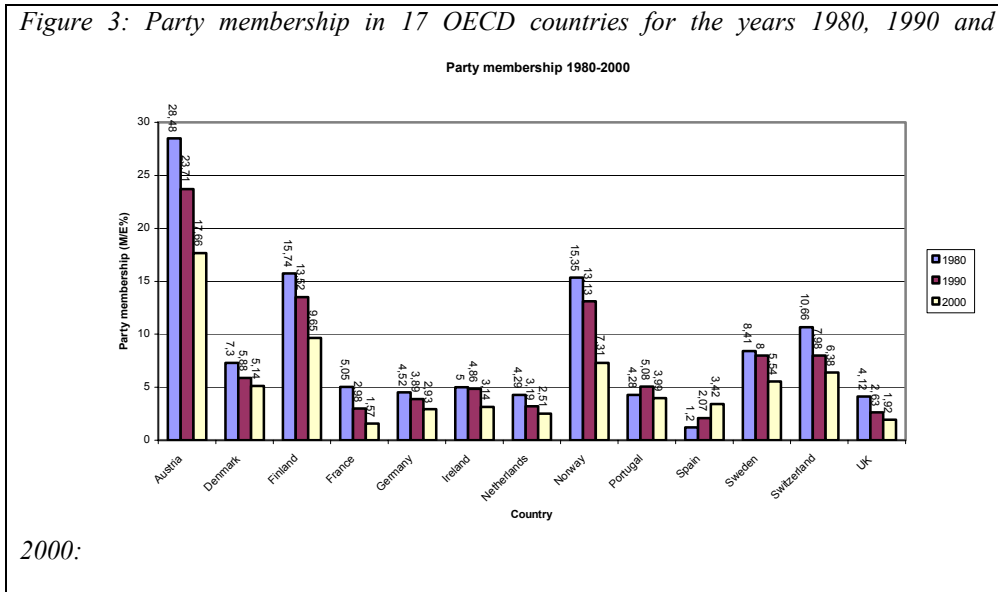
two first periods A weakening of the solidarity between citizens in society and a decline in the trust of political institutions

ship across countries is limited, and does not suffice to conduct a statistically significant

t test, due to lack of observations available. Party membership data for USA, Canada, New Zealand and Iceland is not available<sup>1</sup>.

in 1980 between 28-15% declining to 17-7% in 2000. The remaining countries show party membership of 10-5% in 1980 declining to 5-2% in 2000. Now what is

Figure 3: Party membership in 17 OECD countries for the years 1980, 1990 and



2000:

However, data collected by Mair & van Biezen (2001) may cast a light on the tendencies of party membership in the considered OECD countries. These data are presented in figure 3.

Figure 3 shows the general party membership among citizens measured as membership as percentage of the electorate. Party membership among the considered countries varies with Austria, Finland and Norway exhibiting the highest party membership among the countries considered. Their level of party membership was

common for all the considered countries is a clear declining tendency in the percentage of the electorate, who is a member of a political party. However, in Spain there is observed an increase in membership throughout the period 1980-2000, though still at a very low level of membership rate.

Evaluating these empirical results against the expected proposition, of declining voter turnout and party membership due to lack of solidarity in society, a lack of identity and weakening belief in political institutions, it is in accordance with the theoretical expectations build on the Habermas approach, as it might be argued that the proposed negative sides of continuous market and state expansion have effect with a time lag of economic development and democratic experience. Thus the consequences are starting to appear in the period after 1985 although almost all of the considered countries have experienced economic development and stable democracy since 1945. The problem of

<sup>1</sup> Party membership is not a meaningful concept in the US. The closest approximation to party membership is partisan registration. Not all states have partisan registration, however, and many allow registration on the day of election (Katz & Mayer, 1992: 888). In Iceland too party membership only implies party identification and not an organisational connection (Kristjansson, 2004: 165). Data for Canada and New Zealand is not available. However, Cross and Young (2004) find that few Canadians belong to political parties and those who do belong are not representative of voters generally.

declining voter turnout is that the government elected to rule is backed by a less and less part of the population as the voter turnout declines and thereby creates a reduction in the civil society base. Therefore it calls legitimacy into question and/or suggesting a lack of representation of certain groups in society (Patterson, 2002; Waatenberg 2002). Political parties appear to be suffering from the impact of the decreasing solidarity of society and the individualisation of social and political preferences, as well as from a more general unwillingness to rely on existing institutional structures to represent and articulate what appear to be increasingly particularised demands (Mair & van Biezen, 2001).

*Conclusion and perspectives:*

Lipset and Habermas' theories are compatible as to the importance of the social requisites of democracy; socioeconomic development, which in terms leads to higher educational levels, fosters democratic norms and trust, an efficient bureaucracy, market economy and judicial system. And not least an independent and vibrant civil society to intermediate between citizen and state. However, Habermas' theory goes a step further as to considering the possible effects of further market and state expansion on the characteristics of democracy in advanced industrialised societies. Certain social requisites exist which are conducive to the development and sustainability of the level of democracy. However these factors affect the characteristics and substance of democracy in other more subtle ways once democracy is stabilised implying that the concept of democracy does not simply stand still in the flux of societal forces.

The main finding of the article is that when democracy has been established and

stabilised on a high level, then further additional economic development implying further expansion of the market economy, the state and the judicial system will lead to an increased risk of system-colonisation of the life-world, which in turn seem to cause a decline in solidarity, identity and trust in political institutions manifested in declining voter turnout and party membership rates. The article finds a significantly declining long term trend for voter turnout in advanced industrialized societies.

Despite negative side effects such as declining voter turnout it is argued that the market economy and the modern bureaucracy have a range of positive social effects such as redistribution of income, welfare payments to those who are not capable or unfortunate and the provision of law and order to the benefit of citizens and the market economy. The critical approach of this article is not to be seen as a criticism of capitalism or the market. Both provide an indispensable basis for a prosperous and democratic society. What this article attempts, is to draw attention to the more subtle and negative consequences on civil society, which can be seen in countries commonly assumed to be well functioning democracies. It draws attention to the fact that democracy is not a static concept in terms of being unchanged in substance once it is stabilised on a high level as measured by the Freedom House survey. This implies that there possibly exists a measurement problem of the quality of democracy at high levels. The Freedom House scale does a fine job in measuring the quantity of democracy in the world, but it is not sufficient if the aim is to evaluate the substance of the established democratic societies.

References:

- Andersen, Heine & Kaspersen, Lars Bo, *Classical and modern social theory*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers
- Barro, Robert J. (1999), *Determinants of democracy*, Research memorandum 9706, Erasmus University Rotterdam
- Baxter, Hugh (1987), *System and Life-world in Habermas's Theory of communicative action*, Theory and society, vol. 16, 39-86
- Cross, William and Young, Lisa (2004), *The contours of Political Party membership in Canada*, Party Politics, Vol. 10, No. 4, p. 427-444
- Diamond, Larry & Marks, Gerry (ed.) (1992), *Reexamining democracy*, Sage Publishers
- Eriksen, Erik Oddvar og Weigaard, Jarle (2003), *Kommunikativt demokrati – Jürgen Habermas' teori om politik og samfund*, Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag
- Feng, Yi. (2003), *Democracy, Governance, and economic performance*, Cambridge: MIT Press
- Haahr, Jens Henrik (2000), *Offentligheden: fornuftskilde eller magtarena?*, Aarhus: Danmarks Journalisthøjskole
- Habermas, Jürgen (1983), *Moralbewusstsein und kommunikatives Handeln*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp
- Habermas, Jürgen (1984), *The theory of Communicative Action – Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Habermas, Jürgen (1989), *The theory of Communicative Action – Volume Two: Life-world and system: A critique of functionalist reason*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Habermas, Jürgen (2001), *Politisk filosofi – udvalgte tekster*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal
- Harste, Gorm (2002), *Habermas*, Aarhus: Forlaget Modtryk
- Huntington, Samuel P. (1991), *The third Wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*, University of Oklahoma Press
- Katz, Richard & Mair, Peter (1992), *Party Organisations – A Data handbook*, Sage Publications
- Kristjansson, Svanur (2004), *Iceland: Searching for Democracy along three Dimensions of Citizen Control*, Scandinavian Political Studies, Vol. 27, no. 2,
- Lipset, S. Martin (1959), *Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy*, The American political science review, vol. 53, 69-105

Lipset, Seong and Torres (1993), *A comparative Analysis of the Social requisites of Democracy*, International social science journal 45: 155-175

Lipset, S. Martin (1994), *The social requisites of democracy revisited:1993 Presidential Address*, American sociological review, vol 59, 1-22

Mair, Peter & van Biezen, Ingrid (2001), *Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies 1980–2000*, Party Politics, vol. 7, no. 1, p. 5-21

Muller, Edward (1995), *Economic determinants of democracy*, American sociological review, vol. 60, 966-982

Nellis, Joseph & Parker, David (2004), *Principles of macro economics*, Prentice Hall

Rousseau, Jean- Jacques (1987), *Samfundspagten*, Copenhagen: Forlaget RHODOS

Svensson, Palle (1997): Demokrati, in *Leksikon I Statskundskab*, (ed..Pedersen, Goldmann & Oesterud), Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag

Weber, Max (2002), *Makt og byråkrati*, Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS

Weber, Max (1989), *The protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Hyman

**Internet references:**

Freedom House: [www.freedomhouse.com](http://www.freedomhouse.com)

IDEA – International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

Unicef: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

World Bank: [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

**ANNEX**

Table 1: GNI per capita and primary school enrolment	
Country	
GNI per capita (US\$, 2003)	
Net primary school enrolment (%) (1996-2003)	
Freedom House rating (2004 survey)	
Austria	26.720
	91
	1
Canada	23.930
	100
	1
Denmark	33.750
	99
	1
Finland	27.020
	100
	1
France	24.770
	100
	1
Germany	25.250
	83
	1
Iceland	30.810
	100
	1
Ireland	26.960
	94
	1
Netherlands	26.310
	99
	1
New Zealand	15.870
	98
	1
Norway	43.350
	100
	1

Portugal	12.130
	100
	1
Spain	16.990
	100
	1
Sweden	28.840
	100
	1
Switzerland	39.880
	99
	1
UK	28.350
	100
	1
USA	37.610
	93
	1
World	5.500
	88
	-
<b>Source: World Bank (World development indicators 2004), UNICEF and Freedom House</b>	