KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF *THE CIVIC CULTURE*

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I am honored to be able to open this major conference on survey research and political culture on the fiftieth anniversary of the survey conducted for *The Civic Culture;* a conference attended by many distinguished researchers from around the world. When I was asked to talk about our understanding of political life and political culture from the perspective of *The Civic Culture*, I eagerly accepted the task of looking back to where we were when that study was done and where we have come since then. *The Civic Culture* was published in 1963; the research was done in the later 1950's – half a century ago. Things have changed a lot since then.

The Civic Culture was one of the first systematic cross-national surveys in political science. It used comparative surveys to deal with some basic issues in democratic government, especially on the role of ordinary citizens in such governance. If one wanted to understand citizens, one had to survey them. If one want wanted to understand the similarities and differences in the way in which citizens related to their governments, one needed to do that across nations. These are obvious points, and they are illustrated by the vast amount of research being conducted around the world, and illustrated in this conference. The points are obvious, but no one had done such a study back then. Thus, it is a good moment to look back at the earlier work and to look forward to where it may be going.

For me, personally, it is an ideal moment so to do. It is fifty years since the Civic Culture data was collected. A few years ago I retired from my professorship and from a career in political science and survey research that spanned fifty years. It is a good moment for reflection. And it is also a good time to look forward since I am in that wonderful position described by that illogical and self-contradictory sentence that academic researchers understand: I have some time off to get some work done. The work in which I am

now engaged is in many ways a continuation of the work in the Civic Culture, but also different – just as the world has changed in the past fifty years.

Now for a closer look at the Civic Culture study. First let's look first at the process we used to do what we did. The contrast between what we did then, and what is going on now is striking. Almond and I thought up the study more or less on our own. Perhaps, more accurately, he thought up the study and I joined in as his research assistant. He was one of the leading and most innovative political scientists of the era, and I was a graduate student struggling to finish my dissertation (on a very different topic). To place the study in my personal history, I might add that I took the position as a research assistant because my wife (who is here today) was pregnant and could no longer support me by teaching school. I had to earn some money. (Her parents thought it was about time I did so). Actually my daughter (not the daughter we were expecting then, but my second one who came along after the data were collected but before the book was published) is also here today as is my grandson.

A conference such as this one would have been unthinkable then. There were few cross-national studies and there certainly was no community of scholars doing them.

The Civic Culture study had several features unusual for its time.

- It was systematically comparative in framework. Comparative politics was largely a field in which individual countries were studied in a configurative manner, with little systemtic comparison. There were comparisons of some institutional structures or of constitutions (comparative politics was heavily involved with comparative constitutional forms) but systematic, data-based, comparisons were rare.
- Its method was a set of comparative surveys in a set of nations. There were, as I have said, few at that time. There is a connection between the survey method and a systematic approach to comparison. Survey studies, if they are to be conducted across nations in a way that allows comparison, require that one thinks systematically about what one does, why one does it, and how to do it.
- The study proposed a general explanation of a complex phenomenon: stable democracy. Social science very often takes its agenda from major events. A great puzzle of the era of the civic culture study was the stability of democracy; and the particular democracy that posed the puzzle was Weimar Germany. Many of the leading figures in U.S. social science were refugees from the Nazis. For them, the

collapse of Weimar democracy was both an intellectual puzzle and a deeply personal part of their history. My entry into political science in the 1950's included attention to that issue. Political science had been a subject that focused heavily on constitutional structures; and comparison, as noted, was often comparison of constitutional forms. Weimar had one of the most carefully and self-consciously drafted democratic constitutions. And yet it did not survive. Why had such careful constitutional engineering failed? One answer was cultural: one can not impose a constitutional form on a people whose values were not supportive of democracy. This, in turn, led to the study that Almond and I conducted of political culture. And how else to study political culture but to look at the values and attitudes in a population? Hence a study of two established democracies (the United States and Britain); two nations coming out of authoritarian regimes (Germany and Italy), and what we thought of as an aspiring democracy (Mexico). Finally, how else to study the evolving political values and attitudes of a people than by surveying them?

- And, following that lead, the study proposed a cultural explanation of democratic survival.

The combination of these features indicates how bold —or foolhardy— was the study. It applied a new technique (social surveys) never or rarely used across cultures, to a vast subject never studied systematically (political culture – a subject everyone thought important, though no one was sure what it meant), and it connected culture to democracy. Luckily, I was so early in my career that I did not realize the *hubris* of this enterprise; or I would have been terrified.

There were other features of the civic culture study worth mentioning.

- Technology: we had no computer when we began. Data were collected on punch cards, and analyzed in the beginning by counter-sorter machines that sorted the cards into little piles.
- Organization: the study was centrally designed and implemented. Almond and I designed it in our offices in Princeton. The field work was contracted out to survey organizations in the several countries. Though we consulted with them, it was largely an U.S. based project.
- And the ideas of substance derived from analyses of American and British politics: what was the political culture in those countries and could other nations achieve it?

Looking back on the study, one can see it as primitive in the light of what is done now. The methods were crude in attempting to ask the same questions in different places, We were concerned with comparable question wording in the different languages which sometimes led to a too literal set of translations – though we were, for the time, sensitive to equivalence that was not embodied in identical questions. We had no guide for comparable sampling in different nations with different census data and different social and organizational structures. The data analysis was crude: depending largely on tabular comparisons. (No Ph. D. dissertation today would get away with that.)

Yet, what innovation does not look primitive in hindsight? And the main point is that it was a technique that could be improved. The contemporary understanding of every aspect of survey design and analysis and structure could not have been visualized then; they are here now.

The organizational structure was, in the light of our standards today, clearly wrong. Though there remains great variation in the leadership structure of comparative research, it would be unthinkable today to have a study so closely controlled by one national group. Again, though, the point is that research design and organization can move on. My own next study was a seven nation study (small by today's standards, but pretty big then) of citizen participation. It was a much more fully collaborative study, involving partners from the participating nations. And it incorporated into the analysis a more systematic consideration of the political structures of the participating nations. We did not compare the citizenry in each nation as a set of individuals, but as people in different political parties and organizational structures – which provided a much more complete account of their attitudes and behaviors.[1]

Survey techniques were crucial to the collaborative structure of the study. We were seven collaborating teams from seven different nations and cultures. We differed in background and in many values and expectations. Our goal was to collaborate in studying citizen civic values and attitudes, as well as their behaviors. We agreed on wanting to study values, but which were important? We wanted to study political activity, but what kinds of activity were key? Equality was a major theme; but equality among whom? Whose voice was heard in each country? Whose voice should be heard? We had a long discussion of the role of gender. At one point it was suggested

[1] Verba, Sidney *et al*., *Participation and Political equality: A Seven Nation Comparison*, New York-Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970.

by a few collaborators that we might perhaps sample men only. Women, after all, did not take much part in politics and had few political views. In the 1960's, when this second study was done, that notion was not unusual. Women were less active in politics – and in some of the countries almost completely inactive. Politically, they were invisible. We now know that the silence was not volutary but enforced by nen, or enforced by culture, or enforced by culture defined by men. Luckily the bulk of the collaborators wanted a sample of women and men. If they had not, our study would have been an anachronism before it was done!

The structure of this next study is what has become common and necessary in comparative work on citizen culture, beliefs and activity. It is an example of how one can build on social science work by learning from it. The crucial aspect of the Civic Culture was its use of systematic surveys in each country. In the more collaborative work that has followed the Civic Culture, the bond of a common research technique was crucial. Throughout the many discussions and disagreements in the next research, we were held together by our method and its requirements: the need to come to a common research design in a technical field. One might say that we were inventive in having a common substantive research question, and then finding and refining a research technique that allowed us to pursue our agreed upon goal. In fact, it may have been the common technique that created the collaborative program. Policy analysts often talk about solutions looking for problems. It may be that we had the technical solution, and then found a problem to which we could apply it.

Let's move from the process to the substance of the Civic Culture. The substantive results of the civic culture study were interesting. The study was one of the first to highlight the organizational structure of civil society underlying much civic participation, including family socialization and organizational participation. And it went from there to the role of civil society in a democratic polity. It made clear the role of civic values and beliefs in relation to democracy. Numerous studies followed that replicated, expanded on, and in various ways revised and expanded the civic culture results.

In one crucial aspect, the study had the future wrong. It focused heavily on the role of education in developing a civic culture. Educated individuals were more participant, more tolerant of others, more supportive of democratic norms. This result about individuals has held up pretty well over time. But the book was written in a time of great optimism about the future of democracy. As education spread, we —and many other scholars of that period— expected that a new, more secular and rational world would

emerge. The role of religion, of ethnic and racial identity and clashes based on basic characteristics like religion or race or ethnicity would diminish, creating a more peaceful and democratic world. Looking back fifty years, it is clear that the prediction was wrong. We live in a world of conflict, and much of it centers around those basic characteristics.

And in general, what one found out about culture 50 years ago will not match what is going on now. It is in part that our ability to study and to understand things like political culture has changed (improved, we hope), but more important the world has changed. Consider technology and globalization (two related massive changes.) Political culture now exists in a global world —of population movements of communications revolution. The internet is creating new ways of doing things, new ways of thinking. One mistake we used to make is that culture is somehow permanent— something that one is born into and that a nation keeps and passes on from generation to generation. And there is a stickiness to cultural patterns. New innovations come along and are absorbed into the ongoing culture. But cultures are permeable and people do change and nations do change.

I do not consider that a failure of the book. As the great Italian sociologist-economist, Vilfredo Pareto put it "Give me fertile error bursting with the seeds of its own correction; … you can keep your sterile truth!"[2] *The Civic Culture* was fruitful. The book has been criticized as having a naïve, too Anglo-Saxon model of democracy, as paying too little attention to context and institutional structures; that it put cultures into similar a mold. There is much to these criticisms. But the technique was such that it could be improved upon, and has been. The seeds it planted led to many corrections.

Where have we come in survey research and comparative politics in the past fifty years? It is difficult to say what has happened in the few moments I have for this talk. One simple answer is to suggest that the participants in this conference look around at the number of people here from all over the world dealing with so many aspects of the research field; researchers who form a comparative surveys community. That community is sophisticated, multinational, engaged in many methodological issues and a wide range of important substantive issues. The combination of methodological and substantive concerns is most impressive. There is no purpose to the methodology without significant substantive uses for it. And substantive results based on inadequate methods are not valuable. It is not that the issues faced ear-

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[2] Quoted in Triska, Jan F., Cocks, Paul M. and Almond, Gabriel, *Political Development in Eastern Europe*, Praeger, 1977, p. VII.

lier have gone away. It remains difficult to achieve comparable data from different cultures and language areas. But, to paraphrase Pareto, there are many methodological uncertainties, but there are many researchers cultivating better practices to reduce uncertainties.

It is significant how much more we know about the state of public values, attitudes and behaviors across the world. Survey results are often criticized for their uncertainty and superficiality. The people we study often have unclear views or have no views on many subjects. If they have views that are likely to change easily. And the views they have may be badly communicated in response to the questions we ask. As all survey researchers know, the answers you get depend on the questions you ask. And when those questions are in varied languages, a lot may depend on which country the question is being asked in. Nevertheless, what can be learned from direct questioning of a populace goes well beyond the speculations of observers who "know" what the public thinks – especially beyond those governing officials whose perception of the views of the public are often self-serving.

It is, nevertheless, important that we remember the uncertainties of our results. One of the great advantages of systematic measurement is that it allows us to estimate the error in our measurements. Our work becomes more precise the more we are aware of the boundaries of its precision. It is a lesson that users of statistical results need to be reminded of.

One danger in using survey results from cross-cultural surveys either to typify the situation in one country or, even more so, to describe or explain differences across countries is the danger of overstatement. I believe that scholars using techniques such as surveys benefit by maximizing concreteness – or at least by keeping in mind the concrete information we have. Cross-national survey research deals with comparing nations or societies in terms of major characteristics: the health of the citizenry, the extent of equality in many domains, the activism of citizens and their value commitments. But what we have to work with are specific answers to specific questions. There is much important work trying to systematize the levels at which we work: from broad themes, to concepts, to general versions of a question, to specific versions in one language or another. This is important to allow us to travel down and up the levels of abstraction which we inevitably do. But we must always remain cognizant of the concrete ground on which we rest: questions to individuals and the answers they give.

One danger of comparative survey studies of things like political culture is that we focus heavily on the comparison across nations. How does one country differ from another? We did that is the Civic Culture – typifying

each nations as having one kind of culture or another. We did write of sub-cultures and we must always remember that heterogeneity is a main feature of nations and also of the groups we compare within nations. As an example: there is a long tradition of analysis of the political culture of the United States in terms of its exceptionalism. It differs from other comparable industrialized democracies (members of the European Union, for instance) in the absence of social parties or movements, in the weakness of its welfare programs, and in the beliefs and behaviors of its citizens. But there may be as much or more difference in the political cultures of Mississippi and California than there is between the US and many other countries —which are also heterogeneous. And we tend to typify groups within nations: women, Moslems, the rich, the poor, and so forth. These perspectives are valuable—but those groups are internally divided; not all the same. The typifications are illuminating, but there is a danger of over simplification,

This is not to diminish the value of comparative surveys. It is difficult to derive valid information from cross-national surveys, but in fact, often easier to do that than to derive valid information of other sorts about nations. It is easier to gauge whether a sample of citizens believes that a nation's elites are running the nation democratically or that the citizens of one country are more supportive of gender equality policies than those in another, than it is to tell if, in fact, a nation is democratic or what a nation's gender related policies actually are in practice.

In sum, comparative survey research has come a very long way in the fifty years since the Civic Culture study. It has become more scientific which means more technically sophisticated. It has created a scientific community. It has demonstrated one of the major features of a science: it has been cumulative in terms of the improvement of methods and in the accumulation of substantive knowledge. It has and will always have a longer way to go. And that is what makes the enterprise so important and exciting.

Let me raise a broader question before concluding. It is a question that contradicts my statement about the desirability of modest foot-on-the-ground concreteness. But I do so to raise an issue of potentiality rather than to suggest conclusions. *The Civic Culture* was part of a social scientific revolution in the study of people and societies and nations. It predicted educational progress that would result in a world guided by reason; a more humane, tolerant, and globally cooperative world. And it foreshadowed a world of the social sciences that would be more scientific and more global; that would be more of a world wide community. The latter seems to have happened. The former is not there yet. The world of politics within and across na-

tions does not seem to be doing as well. Can the world of social science help us achieve our hopes for a more rational political and social world. Can what we do, as social scientists —and more specifically as cross-national survey specialists— contribute to fostering a better, more peaceful, healthier and, yes, more democratic world. How is that for a BIG question?

One positive feature of the social science represented by this conference is the commitment to science; a commitment that by its nature transcends national and cultural borders (not completely, but quite a bit). It gives us a common language and a common set of values and standards. Technical education is spreading and can create such communities. If they are linked to social, economic, and political issues, they may move us forward to that better world.

Social science, and comparative surveys in particular, can help us understand the dilemma of particularism versus universalism. Those who plow social science fields seek general truths. We look for general or, at least widespread, patterns of behavior; we seek general causes and effects. And, yet, we all know that everything, everywhere, is different. In a sense, we know that there are two truths: Every nation, every community, every person is different from every other. And we know that all nations and communities are made up of members of one human species. If we are to create a more humane and peaceful world, we are going to have to reconcile these two truths: to find our common humanity and accept our differences.

The issue of universalism versus diversity is a major moral issue in the world. It is an important aspect of the great debates in the terribly important and terribly troubling area of human rights. How does one evaluate national standards on human rights issues. It comes up at international conferences and in relation to the policies of the United Nations and other international agencies. One position challenges the universality of human rights by arguing that such rights exist as a function of a nation's history, culture, level of development, and religion. The other position is that human rights are universal no matter what the culture, religion, or level of development. These issues appear on such matters as the nature of democracy, the rights of women, and on and on.

Note how parallel this is to debates in the social sciences. Can one find universals across nations or regions or cultures, or is each place different? As a comparativist, I have long been committed to a search for broad, universal truths. The ultimate goal is to do away with those fixed-effects variables in our regression equations that control for unspecified differences

from nation to nation or from place to place. But, however we try, we know we cannot.

Over the years, I have come to appreciate more and more ths importance of context. My own substantive work is in the area of political equality. The basic questions are: who becomes active in political life, by what process, and with what consequences in terms of the euality of voice among citizens? I have studied this in my own country, the United States, and in other nations. We search for similar processes that work from place to place. And we find such —based on resources, motivation, and location within social networks— but the processes work differently with different consequences in terms of whose voice is heard because of different institutional patterns such as the nature of the political party system,

If surveys can tell us anything cross-nationally it is that there are general processes and there are differences. And we need to understand both if we are to create societies with (some) universal rights and (some) acceptance of difference. What we do as survey researchers will not get us there, but it might move us a bit closer.

Lastly, one feature of surveys is that they are at base democratic. The random sample is based on the assumption that all people are relevant and have an equal chance to be heard – a basic democratic principle. They give equal voice to women and men, to different economic, religious, and ethnic groups.

Thus, survey research can help create an international intellectual community and can tell us about the universality of humanity and the variations. And it can further social understanding which (we hope) will create a better world.

Will the world then be better? One can hope, but one does not know. Consider the technology that does so much to make our cross-national work possible, and to further global communication: the internet. It is a positive force for connecting people across space. It can foster understanding . It can provide new ways by which citizens can cooperate, by which government control over individuals can be limited. But it can also be used for repression by governments and to allow planners of violence to communicate and plan.

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* —a play about a Utopia with a dark side— Miranda says to the mis-shapen and ill-tempered Caliban: "I gave you language to express yourself". Caliban replies: "You taught me language, and my profit on it is that I can curse".

Social science —especially the brand we practice— will not solve the evils of the world. It may be used for good or for evil. What one learns about people can be used for oppressive purposes. Some of what it finds can lead to increased tensions among people. But I like to think that that will not be the largest impact. I believe it can give us better understanding of who we are and who the other people of our own nation and other nations are. And this will especially be the case if we can stay together as a scientific community dedicated to understanding —objectively, rigorously, and openly— who we are. Surveys can give people everywhere the opportunity to express themselves. And we can hope the world will profit on it.