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## ALFRED C. STEPAN (1936–2017)

On September 27, the field of comparative democratic studies lost one of its most brilliant, prolific, and seminal scholars of the last half-century, Alfred C. Stepan. The longest-serving member of the *Journal of Democracy* Editorial Board (one of only two members still serving from the founding Board of nearly 28 years ago), Stepan authored or coauthored more than a dozen articles in the *Journal*. These were groundbreaking works, often previewing longer essays or books, on such important themes in comparative politics as the relationship between religion and the state, the relationship between Islam and democracy, and the origins and diverse forms of democratic federalism.

Stepan's frequent collaboration with Juan Linz (another founding member of our Editorial Board) was the most productive and influential intellectual partnership in the history of democratic studies. Their four-volume edited book *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (1978) focused on what Stepan called, in his case study of Brazil, "the quality and style of political leadership"—the actions and choices, decisions and nondecisions that tilted a stressed political system toward failure. Two decades later, in *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (1996), they presented the field's most systematic theory and conceptualization of the process of democratic consolidation, as well as the most comprehensive, case-based analysis of the paths of democratic transition and the tasks of democratic consolidation in three regions: Southern Europe, South America, and postcommunist Europe. That book's reflections on the relationship between state and nation in multinational democracies, particularly the need to accommodate multiple and complementary political identities, led to their highly original 2011 book (with Yogendra Yadav), *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies*.

A former U.S. Marine and former journalist, Stepan had an abiding commitment to understanding countries from the ground up. As a special correspondent for the *Economist* in West Africa and Latin America, he filed a story about an impending coup in Brazil shortly before it unfolded in late March 1964. As he reflects in the introduction to his 2001 collection of essays *Arguing Comparative Politics*, he could sense "the growing centrality of the military in domestic politics" in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay before the coups of the mid-1970s wiped out democracy in all three of those countries as well.

Stepan acquired intimate knowledge of a wider range of cases of democratic change than any other political scientist of his generation. Among the fruits of these labors were his early definitive work on Brazil, *The Mil-*

*itary in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (1971), and his comparative analysis of the military's role in democratic transitions in the Southern Cone, *Rethinking Military Politics* (1988), which remains to this day an essential guide for forging civilian control of the military. His 1978 book on Peru, *The State and Society*, returned the state to a central theoretical role in political development. While based in Budapest for three years, Stepan became intimately acquainted with the challenges of democratic transition and consolidation in Europe's postcommunist states. Subsequently, his keen moral and intellectual interest in democratization and the management of religious and cultural diversity led him to engage with several Muslim-majority countries (Indonesia, Senegal, Tunisia, and Turkey), as well as with India and Burma.

Stepan began his academic career at Yale (1970–83) before moving to Columbia, where he became dean of the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) and Burgess Professor of Political Science. He departed for Europe in 1993, serving as the first rector and president of Central European University. From 1996 to 1999, he was Gladstone Professor of Government and Fellow of All Souls College at the University of Oxford. He returned to Columbia in 1999 to become the Wallace S. Sayre Professor of Government, a position he held until his retirement in 2015.

We mourn here the loss of Al Stepan the person as well as the intellectual. A devoted teacher, generous mentor, and inspiring colleague, he brought to all of his personal interactions a warmth, openness, and humanity that surpassed even his towering professional accomplishments. On November 17, a memorial ceremony was held in his honor at Columbia's St. Paul's Chapel. Speakers included Columbia Provost John Coatsworth and SIPA Dean Merit Janow, as well as Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro of the University of São Paulo, Katherine Hite of Vassar College, and Mamadou Diouf of Columbia. Some of these remarks are excerpted below, along with tributes by Archie Brown of St. Antony's College, University of Oxford; Madhulika Banerjee of the University of Delhi and Yogendra Yadav of Swaraj India; and Ahmet Kuru of San Diego State University.

**Merit Janow:** Al was so many things during his remarkable life—a brilliant academic and scholar, a beloved teacher to generations of his students, a mentor and collaborator, an accomplished and prolific writer and editor, a former dean and university president, a Marine, a journalist in Africa and Latin America, and above all, someone with an infectious passion for life and a boundless energy for ideas and intellectual engagement and exploration. . . .

Al was an important part of the SIPA community for more than thirty years, serving as its dean for a period of eight years (1983–91) and leading the school through an important period of growth and refinement. As a professor, he taught courses on the world's religious systems and democracy, federalism, and other subjects. At Columbia, we know he also

led important interdisciplinary centers focusing on democracy, toleration, and religion as well as culture and public life.

Beyond the academic sphere, we know that Al loved his family. . . . And Al was a great lover of music—as this beautiful service will attest. As some of you know, while he was dean of SIPA, he organized a music group of students known as the SIPA Chorale, which in fact performed at Lincoln Center at Alice Tully Hall. I suspect he will be the first and only dean of SIPA to hold that distinction.

**Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro:** *Querido Al*, you are arguably the most distinguished scholar in the fields of comparative politics, authoritarianism, democratization, religion, and politics. . . . You used Brazil as a base to carry out research in over twenty countries on five different continents. No other political scientist did fieldwork in so many parts of the world. . . .

With Juan Linz, you produced two foundational books in democratization studies. Beyond the breakdown of democratic regimes, you created a new emphasis on the process of transition from authoritarian regimes, and especially on the consolidation of postauthoritarian democracies. You have brought the state and its monopoly of physical violence back to the forefront of political science after decades of disregard.

Your inquisitiveness is well captured by your motto: “All aspects of comparative politics research are, in a fundamental sense, problem-driven.” Everywhere you have taught, you have also brought along your luminous commitment to democracy, humanism, and human rights. Throughout your highly productive career you have been a generous and indefatigable institution builder. . . . I owe so much to your generosity, so much joy, adventure, ubiquitousness, liveliness, friendship.

**Katherine Hite:** While I won’t speak for my great doctoral cohort here at Columbia, many of whom are here this afternoon, I don’t think I am entirely alone in my memory of how terrifying Al could be when we were graduate students—terrifying in the sense that it was impossible to wing an argument or fudge a concept with Al, you really had to have your ducks in a row, you had to come into graduate seminars absolutely over-prepared. When it came to sharing dissertation work in a meeting with Al, it meant losing some sleep the night before with anxiety and then steeling oneself for questions relating to your work [that] you just would not know the answers to. And the anxiety was inevitably worth it because there would be some brilliant kernel, some insight from Al that would emerge and make you have to rethink the organization of your thesis or your argumentation. . . .

As we know, Al’s first contributions developed from research on Latin America and with Juan Linz on Southern Europe. He then brought his theoretical prowess on civil-military relations, democratization, re-democratization, and state-crafting to bear in his work these past several years in many regions of the globe, theorizing and writing about distinct

dynamics in North Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and more. And as a member of my cohort, Monique Segarra, eloquently said, “Al has inspired us to try this. . . . This is a part of his legacy.”

**Archie Brown:** Stepan’s books and articles on comparative politics were exceptionally broad-ranging, perceptive and innovative. . . . Al Stepan wrote on many countries, but never in a desk-bound way. He was a frequent visitor to the countries whose politics he studied. When there, he would ask probing questions of politicians and scholars who, before long, were asking Al for guidance, having become eager to draw on his own knowledge of how particular institutional arrangements had worked elsewhere. In recent years Stepan made half a dozen visits to Tunisia and published a number of articles on that country where, notwithstanding its “difficult neighborhood,” more of the democratic upsurge of the “Arab Spring” survives than anywhere else.

. . . . For a much fuller appreciation of Alfred Stepan’s achievements, see Douglas Chalmers and Scott Mainwaring, *Problems Confronting Contemporary Democracies: Essays in Honor of Alfred Stepan* (2012), and Archie Brown, “Alfred Stepan and the Study of Comparative Politics,” *Government and Opposition* 49, no. 2 (2014).

**Madhulika Banerjee and Yogendra Yadav:** A cold winter in Oxford in 1997 was when we met the warm and unaffected Al Stepan, who was ready to embrace two younger colleagues from India whom he didn’t know at all. . . . Professor Alfred Stepan, by then an internationally acclaimed scholar, was willing to spend hours on end with us, academic nobodies from India. He just needed an excuse to include, to embrace, to bring closer together—an attribute we saw so many times in the years thereafter when we became friends and colleagues. We were to discover that we were not an exception. . . .

Professor Stepan’s curiosity knew no bounds, and he was willing to go to any length to satisfy it. Quite literally. He travelled all the way to Mizoram, a tiny state on the northeastern boarder of India, just because we were planning to write a few paragraphs on how the insurgency came to an end there. He was willing to learn from anyone and everyone, irrespective of their rank or fame. . . .

In an academic world surrounded by methodological cults, Professor Stepan represented the power of common sense. He was intensely political without ideological blinkers, a quality so rare in the world of political science today. He was a great comparativist, not just because he could discuss more than two dozen countries in depth and at ease, but because he placed them all at par. For him no country was a model for others to follow. . . .

One small anecdote sums up for us Al the comparativist who could have hashtagged Brazil and India comfortably together. His old friend Professor [Fernando Henrique] Cardoso was once berating him for having abandoned Brazil for India. Professor Stepan said that India was

fascinating because there one could easily find thousands of football fans that knew and loved Pelé, including a couple that would name their son after him—but would we find a parallel in Brazil? We will always remember and love him for this bias he developed in the last phase of his work and bask in its warmth for years to come.

**Ahmet Kuru:** Stepan brought a truly comparative perspective to the study of religions and democracy. In a path-breaking [*Journal of Democracy*] article published in 2000, “Religion, Democracy, and the ‘Twin Tolerations,’” Stepan argued that Islam, Confucianism, and Eastern Orthodoxy were not inherently more authoritarian than Western Christianity. He also criticized Samuel Huntington’s thesis that the separation of religious and political spheres only existed in Western Christianity.

He depicted secularist ideologies as multivocal as well; secularists could establish authoritarian or democratic regimes. He therefore offered the “twin tolerations” rather than an absolute separation as a solution to the problems around religion/state disputes. The “twin tolerations” formula requires that the religious and political domains tolerate each other as independent spheres, while they can still have certain levels of interaction. For Stepan, all religions were multivocal; they all had pro-authoritarian and pro-democratic interpretations. . . .

At Columbia, Stepan established an institutional network to develop the study of democracy in Muslim countries. With a Luce grant, he founded the Center for Democracy, Toleration, and Religion (CDTR) at SIPA. He also served as the cofounder of the Institute of Religion, Culture, and Public Life at Columbia and helped [with] the development of a book series with the same name at Columbia University Press. . . .

I began working with Stepan in January 2008 as the assistant director of CDTR and a postdoctoral fellow at SIPA. . . . CDTR particularly focused on three non-Arab, Muslim-majority secular democracies: Turkey, Indonesia, and Senegal. Stepan’s main goal was to show the compatibility of Islam, democracy, and the twin tolerations in these three cases. The result was three edited volumes: one on Turkey (coedited by Stepan and me), another on Indonesia (coedited by Stepan and Mirjam Künkler), and the third on Senegal (edited by Mamadou Diouf). . . .

Stepan and I kept in touch via email and discussed writing a coauthored article on Turkey. I became more prone to holding Islamic ideas and actors responsible for the breakdown of Turkish democracy. Stepan, by contrast, focused on Erdoğan’s leadership. He asked whether there were some Muslim activists resisting Erdoğan’s authoritarianism. Stepan had sympathy toward Muslims and exerted a profound effort to understand them. He consistently criticized the stereotypical depiction of Islam as an inherently authoritarian religion. Stepan’s deep respect for Muslims was an extension of his general respect for all human beings. It was also a reflection of his independent and curious mind, and big and compassionate heart.