

Hearts, Minds and Schools

By LAWRENCE E. HARRISON

The war in Iraq has produced many casualties. One lesser-noticed one may be the death of an idea — the idea that the culture of a nation or region can be transformed quickly by well-intentioned foreigners. The recent report of the Iraq Study Group scarcely mentions the grand goals of bringing democracy to Iraq, and instead contemplates a drawdown of U.S. combat troops. It seems that the notion of transforming the political culture of the Middle East has been drawn down as well.

"Are the people of the Middle East somehow beyond the reach of liberty?" President Bush asked in 2003. "Are millions of men and women and children condemned by history or culture to live in despotism? I, for one, do not believe it." As his audience applauded, he went on to criticize the "cultural condescension" of skeptics who believe that Islam and democracy don't mix.

The president was, at best, half right. In the long run, the values of freedom may be right and true for all people in all societies. But the cultural values favorable to pluralism and entrepreneurship are indispensable to building democracy and capitalist prosperity.

For the past half-century, politicians and experts in rich countries have tried to improve living standards and build democracy in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Early on, they, too, were convinced that tyranny and poverty could be defeated, that democracy and capitalism were rooted in human nature. With a few exceptions, such as South Korea and Taiwan, meaningful progress has not materialized.

Some cultures and some religions clearly do better than others in promoting democracy and prosperity. Iraq and Afghanistan show that, where culture is adverse, a blind belief in the power of freedom is a frail foundation for U.S. policy.

But culture is not destiny. The failures in Iraq and instability in Afghanistan do not prove that these or other countries are condemned to stagnation and political oppression. For politics to change, however, culture must change, too — and that takes much more than dispatching troops, holding elections and writing constitutions.

During my 20 years (1962-82) with the U.S. Agency for International Development, I directed five missions in Central America and the Caribbean. Like other young idealists, I believed that President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress — a "Marshall Plan" for Latin America — would make the region safe for democracy.

But as I encountered daily the intractability of Latin America's problems, it became clear to me that poverty and injustice were rooted in the region's values. I was learning what Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan would articulate years later, after the Russian economy collapsed in the late 1990s. "I used to think that capitalism was human nature," he reflected. "But it isn't at all. It's culture." The same is true of democracy.

In the late 1970s, I worked in Haiti, which shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. In 1804, when Haiti became independent, it was vastly richer and more powerful than the Spanish colony to the east. But today Haiti is by far the poorest country in the hemisphere — in 2003, its per capita income was \$1,740, compared with \$6,820 for the Dominican Re-

public, according to U.N. estimates. Adult literacy was 51 percent in Haiti, vs. 88 percent in the Dominican Republic. And while Dominicans have experienced substantial democratic continuity in the past 40 years, authoritarianism has been the norm for Haiti.

The Dominican Republic's evolution has been typical of Latin America, while Haiti's has been typical of Africa. Why the difference? The dominant religion in Haiti is voodoo, which nurtures mistrust and irrationality. Its roots are in the Dahomey region of West Africa — what is today Benin. The levels of income, child malnutrition, child mortality, life expectancy and literacy are virtually identical today in Haiti and Benin.

Some religions and cultures do better than others at promoting personal responsibility, education, entrepreneurship and trust — all values that shape political and economic development. When it comes to democracy, prosperity and rule of law, Protestant societies — above all, the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden — have generally done better than Catholic nations, particularly those of Latin America. Confucian societies such as Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and now China have produced transforming economic growth. Islamic countries, even those with oil, have not.

The late senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan once stated: "The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society. The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself."

With these words in mind, I've spent the past four years leading the Culture Matters Research Project at the Fletcher School at Tufts University, where I am a senior research fellow. The effort has involved 65 social scientists, journalists, politicians and development practitioners from 25 countries. We undertook case studies of more than two dozen countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe, several of which had experienced or were undergoing transformations from traditional to modern societies.

Our goal was to capture the role of culture and cultural change in a society's evolution. We found that Confucian values of education, achievement and merit played a central role in the economic "miracles" in East Asia. Open economic policies and the welcoming of foreign investment triggered several transformations, including in India, Ireland and Spain. Visionary leadership was crucial in the cases of Botswana, Turkey and Quebec. In Ireland, Italy, Spain and Quebec, modernization was also accompanied by decline in the influence of the Catholic Church.

We concluded that enlightened policies can, over time, produce cultural change — change that in turn spurs political pluralism and economic development. However, it is extremely difficult to impose such changes from outside; war is not a helpful instrument. Better tools include education that inculcates democratic and entrepreneurial values; improved child-rearing practices; religious reform; and development assistance keyed to cultural change.

The first step is to end illiteracy, which is the greatest obstacle to progressive cultural change. It impedes the human capacity to learn and perpetuates fatalism and superstition. Human progress lags most in societies in which illiteracy is highest, above all in Islamic countries and Africa. Literacy among women may be even more important than literacy among men because of the crucial role women play in child-rearing.

A second, longer-term goal is ensuring a high school education for all. Spain offers a telling example: In 1965, during the Franco dictatorship, 38 percent of the coun-

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try's high school-age population was in school; in 1982, seven years after Spain's transition to democracy, it was 88 percent.

Child-rearing techniques must also be rethought. Traditional child-rearing patterns are sustained from generation to generation, yet in many countries such customs may instill values that impede progress for individuals and for society. For example, Costa Rican psychiatrist Luis Diego Herrera argues that child rearing in his country typically upholds shrewdness over honesty. "Children are taught contradictory standards of behavior," he said. "They are supposed to abide by the rules, but if they break them, the important thing is to get away with it."

Reducing the role of religion in politics and religious reform more broadly may also be crucial, particularly in the case of Islam. The groundbreaking U.N. Arab Human Development Reports stress openness to the values, ideas and institutions of the non-Islamic world, including tolerance of other religions and commitment to education and gender equality. The advocacy group Freedom House judges not one Arab country to be free, and that has much to do with a culture that nurtures authoritarianism, discourages dissent and places a lower priority on education.

Catholic ambivalence about free markets has contrib-

uted to Latin America's costly dalliances with socialism, a point stressed by Catholic writer Michael Novak. Orthodox Christianity's similar ambivalence has contributed to anti-capitalist currents in Russia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Support of democratic capitalism by both religions, coupled with their concern about injustice, corruption and crime, could play a key role in progressive cultural change.

Finally, aid agencies and universities must take culture seriously. Because their staffs include professionals committed to cultural relativism, such institutions have largely avoided confronting cultural obstacles to progress. However, they can play an important role in support of reform-minded national leaders by integrating culture into their research, strategies and projects.

Culture does matter. But politics can change culture and enable more rapid progress, substantially transforming societies within a generation. The anguish of the U.S. adventure in Iraq, genocide and famine in Africa, and the huge flow of poor people seeking a better life in rich countries are among the vivid reminders of how difficult it is to create a more democratic, just and prosperous world. Confronting culture can make that challenge more manageable.

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Table 2.1
Typology of Progress-Prone and Progress-Resistant Cultures

Factor	Progress-Prone Culture	Progress-Resistant Culture
WORLDVIEW		
1. Religion	Nurtures rationality, achievement; promotes material pursuits; focus on this world; pragmatism	Nurtures irrationality; inhibits material pursuits; focus on the other world; utopianism
2. Destiny	I can influence my destiny for the better	Fatalism, resignation, sorcery
3. Time orientation	Future focus promotes planning, punctuality, deferred gratification	Present or past focus discourages planning, punctuality, saving
4. Wealth	Product of human creativity is wealth expandable (positive sum)	What exists (zero-sum) is wealth; not expandable
5. Knowledge	Practical, verifiable; facts matter	Abstract, theoretical, cosmological, not verifiable
VALUES, VIRTUES		
6. Ethical code	Rigorous within realistic norms; feeds trust	Elastic, wide gap twixt utopian norms and behavior = mistrust
7. The lesser virtues	A job well done, tidiness, courtesy, punctuality matter	Lesser virtues unimportant
8. Education	Indispensable; promotes autonomy heterodoxy, dissent, creativity	Less priority; promotes dependency, orthodoxy
ECONOMIC BEHAVIOR		
9. Work/achievement	Live to work; work leads to wealth	Work to live; work doesn't lead to wealth; work is for the poor
10. Frugality and prosperity	The mother of investment	A threat to equality because those who save will get rich, provoking envy
11. Entrepreneurship	Investment and creativity	Rent seeking; income derives from government connections
12. Risk propensity	Moderate	Low
13. Competition	Leads to excellence	Is a sign of aggression, and a threat to equality—and privilege

Table 2.1 (continued)

Factor	Progress-Prone Culture	Progress-Resistant Culture
14. Innovation	Open; rapid adaptation to innovation	Suspicious; slow adaptation to innovation
15. Advancement	Based on merit, connections	Based on family and/or patron connections
SOCIAL BEHAVIOR		
16. Rule of law/ corruption	Reasonably law abiding; corruption is prosecuted	Money, connections matter; corruption is tolerated
17. Radius of identification and trust	Stronger identification with the broader society.	Stronger identification with the narrow community
18. Family	The idea of "family" extends to the broader society	The family is a fortress against the broader society
19. Association (social capital)	Trust, identification breed cooperation, affiliation, participation	Mistrust breeds extreme individualism, anomie
20. The individual/ the group	Emphasizes the individual but not excessively	Emphasizes the collectivity
21. Authority	Dispersed: checks and balances, consensus	Centralized: unfettered, often arbitrary
22. Role of elites	Responsibility to society	Power and rent seeking; exploitative
23. Church-state relations	Secularized; wall between church and state	Religion plays major role in civic sphere
24. Gender relationships	If gender equality not a reality, at least not inconsistent with value system	Women subordinated to men in most dimensions of life
25. Fertility	The number of children should depend on the family's capacity to raise and educate them	Children are gifts of God; they are an economic asset

Table 4.1
Religion Summary

Category/Country	Religion ^a	Population ^b	UN Index ^c	Literacy ^d	Female Lit. ^e	Fertility ^f	Freedom Totals ^g	Dem. Date ^h	Per Cap. GDP ⁱ	GINI ^j	Trust ^k	Corruption ^l
Total	Protestant	530	9.2	99%	99%	1.8	2.3	1826	\$29,784	36.8	42%	14.9
Weighted Average	Protestant		18.8	99%	99%	1.7	2.5	1877	\$22,373	32.3	46%	14
Unweighted Average	Protestant		8.5	99%	99%	1.8	2.3	1826	\$30,062	36.8	42%	14.7
1st World Wtd. Avg.	Protestant		9.2	99%	99%	1.6	2.5	1852	\$26,340	31.4	50%	9.1
1st World Average												
Israel	Jewish	6	22	96%	94%	2.9	4	1948	\$19,320	35.5		16
Total	Catholic	904	58.3	86%	88%	2.6	5.5	1940	\$ 9,358	45.6	16%	45.6
Weighted Average	Catholic		63	88%	86%	2.9	5.4	1969	\$ 9,366	42	22%	45.7
Unweighted Average	Catholic		17.4	99%	99%	1.4	2.7	1927	\$22,890	30.4	24%	24.4
1st World Wtd. Avg.	Catholic		17.3	98%	98%	1.5	2.6	1934	\$23,311	30.3	32%	22.3
1st World Average												
Total	Orthodox	262	58.9	99%	99%	1.3	8.6		\$ 7,045	40.4	25%	75.7
Weighted Average	Orthodox		62.6	99%	99%	1.4	7.2	1985	\$ 6,038	34.3	25%	63.8
Unweighted Average	Orthodox											
Total	Confucian	1491	77.8	86%	79%	1.8	11.7		\$ 6,691	38.5	51%	52.2
Weighted Average	Confucian		34.6	93%	90%	1.5	7.8	1976	\$19,133	33.2	47%	27.6
Unweighted Average	Confucian		14.5	99%	98%	1.4	3.4		\$24,239	27.3	46%	25.8
1st World Wtd. Avg.	Confucian		21.5	96%	94%	1.4	5		\$22,172	31.4	44%	20.3
1st World Average												
Total	Buddhist	146	92.2	86%	83%	2.9	8.9		\$ 4,813	39.5		61
Weighted Average	Buddhist		42.2	70%	67%	3.8	9.7	1992	\$ 2,625	37.3		
Unweighted Average	Buddhist											
Total	Islam	1122	111.9	65%	54%	4.1	9.7		\$ 3,142	36.3	26%	78.6
Weighted Average	Islam		105.5	66%	54%	4.4	10.7		\$ 3,755	39.6	27%	65
Unweighted Average	Islam											
Total	Arab countries	252	103.3	64%	51%	4	12.1		\$ 4,950	33.7	28%	50
Weighted Average	Arab countries		91.8	68%	58%	4.3	11.8		\$ 5,721	35.8	25%	40
Unweighted Average	Arab countries											
Total	Islam: non-Arab	870	114.8	65%	56%	4.3	8.9		\$ 2,781	37.5	26%	82
Weighted Average	Islam: non-Arab		116.6	64%	51%	4.5	9.8		\$ 2,674	41.3	27%	73
Unweighted Average	Islam: non-Arab											
Total	Hindu	1041	115	57%	45%	3.3	5	1950	\$ 2,390	37.8		71
Weighted Average	Hindu		115	57%	45%	2.8	5	1950	\$ 2,390	37.8		71
Unweighted Average	Hindu											

^a50% or more of population; ^bIn millions, source: World Bank, World Bank Development Report 2002; ^cUN Human Development Index 2001, most advanced is 1, least 162; ^dUN Human Development Report 2001; ^eUN Human Development Report 2001; ^fUNDP total fertility rate 1995-2000; ^gFreedom House. 2001 Survey, assesses political rights and civil liberties, best = 2, worst = 14; ^hDate of start of democratic continuity; ⁱIBRD, World

Development Report 2002 (purchasing power parity); ^jIBRD 2002, lower is more equitable income distribution; ^kWorld Values Survey 1999-2002, percent who believe people can be trusted; ^lTransparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2001, lower is cleaner.