Democratization

"If you do it in a right way, science is fun!" in memory of Professor Alfred Stepan (1936–2017)

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OBITUARY

"If you do it in a right way, science is fun!" in memory of Professor Alfred Stepan (1936–2017)

Professor Alfred Stepan, one of the most prominent and outstanding political scientists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, passed away on 27 September 2017, at the age of 81. Al (as he was known to friends and colleagues) was a world-leading scholar in comparative politics, theories of democratic transitions, federalism research, and the relationships between religion and democracy. His work and legacy will surely continue to inspire original, rigorous, and meaningful scholarship committed to making an impact inside and outside the academy.

Al's distinguished academic career started at the University of Notre Dame, where he earned a BA in 1958. Shortly after, in 1960, he earned an MA at Balliol College, University of Oxford. His decision to join the United States (US) Marine Corps (1960–1963) increased his interest in Latin American politics, which was particularly important as he later became a special correspondent of *The Economist* covering Brazil's *coup d'état* in 1964. Upon his return to the US, he earned a PhD at Columbia University in 1969 on the role of the military in Brazilian politics. After graduation, he accepted a teaching position at Yale University's Department of Political Science, where he stayed until 1983. In this short period of time he was promoted to the position of the full professor, in what was then widely regarded as the strongest political science department in the US. Upon his return to Columbia in 1983, he became Dean of the School for International Politics and Public Affairs, a position he held until 1991. In 1993 he moved to Europe and became the first president and rector of the Central European University, where he stayed until 1996 when he moved to All Souls College at Oxford University. Later, he returned again to Columbia University in 1999 as the Wallace S. Sayre Professor of Government. In 2006, he founded the Center for the Study of Democracy, Toleration and Religion at Columbia. Al retired in 2015, but remained very active in writing and mentoring students and colleagues until his death. During his remarkable career, he earned numerous awards (including the highest honour a political scientist can achieve, a Karl Deutsch Award from the International Political Science Association) and was a member of both the British Academy and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

By a combination of strong theory and firsthand knowledge and empirical findings, Al's research was, and still is, very seductive for both scholars and students. That is why one can find his publications in political science syllabi around the globe. With Juan Linz, Al was part of the most famous duo in political science. They co-authored some of the landmarks in political science, including *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (1978) and *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (1996). Al's book *Arguing Comparative Politics* (2001) represents a must-read piece for political science students, particularly graduate students. In order to answer the question of the possibility of democracy in states with high ethnic, linguistic or cultural diversity, Al spent almost

a decade studying India. His research with Linz and Yogendra Yadav was published as *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies* (2011). During the last two decades, Al was interested in the relationships between religious systems and democracy, tackling the question of compatibility between religion and democracy. Despite the fact that he got interested in the field of religion and politics rather late in his career, Al left a remarkable legacy in understanding the relationship between different religious systems and democracy. In his masterpiece on the "Twin Tolerations" (2000), published as "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations'", *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 4 (2000): 37–57, he showed that religions are "multi vocal" regarding democracy, supporting his argument with reference to fieldwork covering various religious systems and traditions.

I had the pleasure of meeting and working with Al Stepan at Columbia University in 2016, where I was appointed as a visiting scholar. We first met at the promotion of Michael Walzer's book *Paradox of Liberation, Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions* (2015). Al was in the audience and gave a short speech on the book, with his insights on the experience of India, Algeria and Israel. As a graduate student in political science, I was fascinated by his comprehensive analysis and vast knowledge. Later on, during our meetings, Al gave significant comments and suggestions on my dissertation on exploring the roles of Orthodox Churches in the democratization processes in Greece, Serbia and Russia. But what was even more important was his catchy excitement and enthusiasm over my work, a thing every graduate student should experience. I will never forget one of the last words from him: "See, if you do it in a right way, science is fun!"

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