The Limits of Democratization: Climate, Intelligence, and Resource Distribution

Tatu Vanhanen *(2009). Atlanta, GA: Washington Summit Publishers, 362 pp, US$21.95, ISBN:* 978-1-59368-031-2.

Reviewed by Hiram Caton, Griffith University, Brisbane

This book culminates the author's lifelong study of the inner relationships between climate and IQ, the relation of this factor to the extensiveness of resource distribution within a nation, and the relation of these factors to democratization. The basic finding is that higher average national IQ activates resource distribution to larger numbers of inhabitants, which in turn promotes democratic government. Conversely, the lower the level of national IQ, the less the national gross income, the more restricted its distribution, and the more autocratic the government. Climate refers to mean average temperature under which a people evolved to their current state. Colder climates drove the evolution of IQ over the period 40,000–10,000 BC.[1] Higher IQ was adaptive in coping with the more complex survival requirements. Vanhanen describes each of the world's 172 nations in political and economic terms, and each population is assigned a specific place on the climate chart. The population of a given territory today does not, of course, correspond to the population tens of thousands of years ago. Singapore is an example. It lies on the tip of the tropical Malay Peninsula, but its population of 5 million is 72% Chinese. The Chinese class in the highest IQ level (100–108), whereas Malaysians are in the fourth tier (IQ 85–89). This shows in that the per capita GDP of Singapore ($38,972) is about five times that of Malaysia ($8,140), whereas its positive residual is the world's highest.

The two lowest IQ blocks, 59–69 and 70–79, are comprised of 30 countries in the first block, and 20 countries in the second. All of the first category are sub-Saharan, with one exception, Haiti, whose population is 90% sub-Saharan. The second category includes 15 sub-Saharan populations. One of the exceptions, Jamaica, has an African population of 91%. (The other four are Nepal, Sri Lanka, Guatemala, and Qatar.)

Vanhanen uses linear regression analysis to quantify his hypothesis that climate (mean temperature) influences IQ level. Separate regression equations plot the distribution of power resources and the level of democratization. The implementation of this analysis yields tables indicating the location of each nation in a particular value range. For example, the table on the annual mean temperature lists the number of temperature stations, the years measured and the mean temperature. Another table shows the tertiary enrolment, adult literacy, the level of democratization, resource distribution and mean temperature. Altogether there are 29 tables.

What counts as democracy is contested. Vanhanen opts for liberal democracy on the Anglo–American model, whose world influence is substantial, thanks to the British colonial influence and its Commonwealth aftermath. But the change process is continuous, as is visible in current disputes about Muslim and gay rights, and in the erosion of royal rights in the few remaining constitutional monarchies. He resolves this flux by basing his equations on annual detailed reports on freedom in 172 countries prepared by Freedom House, a nonprofit organization. He also uses the corruption percentage index (CPI) prepared by Transparency International. Corruption subverts due process and as such is negative to democracy. The CPI is rated on a 10-point scale.

The author systematically evaluates outliers at variance with predictions. Let me mention two. North and South Korea are a stark contrast between the world's most absolute, impoverished despotism and a relatively stable, prosperous democracy, although the population of both are in the highest IQ category. Vanhanen doesn't mention the 3-year famine, from 1996 to 1998, in which 2 million died of starvation and illnesses related to undernourishment. As of today, about 7% of children are chronically malnourished and 24% are underweight. The author acknowledges that North Korea and China 'contradict the hypothesis' that democracy improves with IQ level. Obvious, but what are we to make of it? Before considering the author's gloss, let's return to Singapore. Like Malaysia, Singapore's government is a titular British parliamentary system, yet it has been controlled by the People's Action Party since 1959. Opposition parties are allowed but they are vexed by censorship, gerrymandering, and libel suits. They also always lose elections. Although the People's Action Party receives about 65% of the popular vote, it controls 82 of the 84 seats in the unicameral parliament! Thus, Singapore combines an open civil life with authoritarianism. Let us consider another factor, birth rate. Because of the high birth rate in the early days, the government encouraged birth control. It worked; the birth rate fell to 1.26. But the fall in the population level, and increase in the proportion of the aged provoked a policy reversal in 2001 intended to encouraged reproduction by providing a 'baby bonus'. The policy's effect has been meagre. Population decline is avoided by encouraging immigration. This population predicament is widespread, and of course includes Australia. It means, especially in Europe, change in the ethnic composition of national populations, with many of the immigrants from nations at IQ levels three and four and chronic violence due to ethnic conflict.

The People's Republic of China, the author acknowledges, contradicts the hypothesis that higher IQ populations tend toward democracy. China

enforces a one-child policy, introduced in 1979. The government boasts that 400 million births have been avoided, but abortions are indispensable and the population is skewed toward 60/40% male ratio in the younger generation. The only ostensibly democratic east-Asian governments are Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. The first two have oscillated between auhoritarian and democratic governments, while Japan has been governed by the Liberal Democratic Party since 1955. Do these facts not refute the hypothesis that high IQ nations tend toward democracy? Do 'Asian values' perhaps better explain the discrepancy? Vanhanen rejects this proposal because it 'cannot explain the extreme differences in the level of democratization within the group of east Asian countries ... clear differences in socioeconomic systems better explain the differences in the level and quality of democracy' (p. 248). Leaving North Korea aside, there is not a great difference between the governments of Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. And China, which Vanhanen styles 'an extremely deviating country' (p. 248), is not so much an outlier as the main Asian stream because its population exceeds that of all other east Asian nations by about 1 billion people. It exceeds the combined populations of the EU and the United States. From these data I don't detect a trend toward democracy at the highest IQ level, but a split down the middle between authoritarianism and democracy.

The author does not include reproductive rates among his variables, yet they are significant for projecting national futures and for the evolutionary postulate that, as Darwin said, all organisms do their darndest to reproduce. The result is unsustainable population growth and the struggle for existence in which only the fittest survive. Oddly enough, this principle was no sooner launched than European reproductive rates commenced a long term decline that continues today. Indeed, many European nations, notably Russia, are in dramatic population decline. How can this be reconciled with natural selection, and what are its implications for the continuing advance of democracy?

1 Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending published a detailed study of recent evolution, in terms of single nucleotide polymorphisms, in their book *The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution*. New York: Basic Books, 2008. Website: http://the10000yearexplosion.com/

The 10,000 Year Explosion: How Civilization Accelerated Human Evolution

Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending. *(2009). New York: Basic Books, 304 pp, US$27.00, ISBN:* 0465002218.

Reviewed by Rosalind Arden, King's College London

The *10,000 Year Explosion,* by physicist Gregory Cochran and population geneticist Henry Harpending, should be required reading for students of genetics, evolution, archaeology, anthropology and palaeontology. It is stuffed with suggestions about recent human evolution; many of which are testable, some of which may even be right. But it is not the proportion of right versus wrong hypotheses that makes it a *must* read; it's because the book is an implicit primer on how to think expansively, speculatively and imaginatively about the big questions in our cultural history.

I first fell under Greg Cochran's spell when he gave a talk at the University of New Mexico a few years ago. He was arresting. How could dressing be such a mystery? Shirt buttons were all hooked into the wrong button-hole, the sagging '50 cent' trousers, huge spectacles last cleaned in the Miocene, hair by Van de Graaf generator. It was exactly like watching a physicist lecture at CERN: the excited gestures, the scribbled scrappy slides with formulae, instead of the usual nancy-pants greater-crested powerpoints with their horrid, vacuous bullet-points on pelagic backgrounds. It was thrilling; the mile-a-minute talk (which over-ran) was electric; the ideas hummed with originality and credibility. I'm sure many left the room, as I did, thinking 'every department should have one of those' — if only there are enough to go around.

Two key features make these scientists (Greg and Henry) special. First, they are not afraid to be wrong. Second, they are most impolite; in rebutting 'received wisdom' they make our clinging to it seem silly. In this respect they are almost Swiftian. Where we like to avow that there are no genetically based population differences, they present strong evidence for such differences: not just in looks, but in behavioral differences. Moreover the sky doesn't seem to have fallen. What a relief, we can acknowledge what must be true — human groups vary in noticeable ways for genetic reasons and that's just fine. Perhaps our morality is sturdier than we surmise; very few readers, perhaps none, will become cannibals, bigots or sadists by reading this book. So what are its big ideas?

The central narrative is that evolution has not stopped; in fact it has likely sped up. The reason is forehead-slappingly simple: mutations hit larger mating populations more often than smaller ones (random arrows hit larger targets more often than small targets). Even if most mutations are neutral or harmful, some are beneficial. These arose more often in the big, settled communities generated by farming, than the smaller, more nomadic or hunter-gatherer communities. A mutation that promotes lactose tolerance into adulthood confers a huge benefit

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