

ALFRED STEPAN

Alfred Charles Stepan

22 July 1936 – 27 September 2017

elected Fellow of the British Academy 1997

by

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Fellow of the Academy

A fine boxer in his youth; an active duty officer in the US Marine Corps who spent the 1962 missile crisis at sea, twenty miles off the Cuban coast, in readiness to invade the island; a Marine officer in Vietnam; a special correspondent of *The Economist* who predicted the Brazilian military coup of March 1964; a Chicago native urged by the city's machine politicians to take over the seat of a retiring Democratic Congressman (with hints of a Senate opening to come); a professor who had a six-hour meeting with Fidel Castro in Havana (and a box of Cuban cigars from the revolutionary leader); the holder of prestigious Chairs and Deanships at Yale, Columbia and Oxford; the first President and Rector of the Central European University in Budapest; Chairman of the Board of the Richard Tucker Music Foundation—this would sound like an implausible combination for a character in a novel. Alfred Stepan, best known for his contributions to the comparative study of politics, did all these things and more.



ALFRED STEPAN

One of the most influential political scientists of his generation, Alfred Charles Stepan was born into ‘a very Catholic family’ of seven in Chicago on 22 July 1936.¹ He died of cancer, aged 81, on 27 September 2017. ‘Al’, as he was known to his family and friends, was the eldest of the sons. The five boys and two girls all went to university, but Al was the only one to choose an academic career. Although more bookish than his siblings, he was also an all-rounder. Extremely fit, he was good at sport, including American football—until his lack of height and weight made it impossible to compete with beefier late teenagers—and he excelled as a featherweight boxer. His grandparents, Czech-German on his father’s side and Irish on his mother’s, were immigrants or first-generation Americans. With an initial investment of just 500 dollars, Al’s father, who was also Alfred C. Stepan, founded a chemical business in Chicago during the Depression. It became successful and in due course made the family comfortably off, but it was still developing during Al’s childhood. Hard work was encouraged by his father as well as by his mother Mary Louise (Quinn before her marriage), and though Al went to one of Chicago’s top Catholic schools, Loyola Academy, he did a paper round as a boy. Before Loyola, he had spent a year at a tough Chicago public school (in the traditional Scottish and hence American meaning of public school) at which he got into fights, and this provided an incentive to take up boxing.

His interest in the real world of politics began in the family and long preceded his academic studies in that field. His father and his brothers were Republicans, but Al’s maternal grandfather, to whom he was close, was not only a committed Democrat but one on very friendly terms with Chicago’s Irish-American machine politicians. He had a printing press which produced many of the publications of the city’s Democratic Party organisations. From grandfather Quinn, Al learned a lot about how machine politics worked. He also shared his political leanings, supported Adlai Stevenson in the 1952 presidential election, and was puzzled by the extent to which Senator McCarthy’s activities were found acceptable by so many Americans. From quite an early age, Al’s political convictions were essentially social democratic. He was a staunch Democrat in the United States and sympathetic to the Labour Party in Britain. His partisanship as a citizen, though, did not get in the way of his political analysis. He could understand why others came to hold different views from his own, and when, for example, he studied the military in politics he was able to establish

¹A. Stepan, ‘Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research’, in G. L. Munck and R. Snyder, *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics* (Baltimore, MD, 2007), p. 395. This extended interview with Stepan was conducted over two days—on 15–16 October 2003. Many, though far from all, of the stories which Alfred Stepan relates in the interview I heard from him directly in the course of many conversations during our long friendship which began in the late 1970s and continued to his death. However, since Richard Snyder’s interview with Stepan was recorded, I draw on it liberally in the certainty that I am being faithful to Stepan’s own words.

relations of trust with many of his interlocutors, helped by the fact that he himself had been a military officer.

From his youth, Stepan developed broad academic and cultural interests alongside politics and sport. A lifelong lover of opera, he spent fifteen years as a member of the Board of Directors of the Richard Tucker Music Foundation, from 1985 to 1990 as its Chairman. His father was a personal friend of Tucker, the leading tenor over several decades in New York's Metropolitan Opera Company. Alfred Stepan senior, some of whose Central European forebears had been opera singers, was one of the most prominent early supporters and funders of the Lyric Opera of Chicago. A graduate of the University of Notre Dame, and later a trustee of that university, Al's father discovered that no Jew had ever been awarded an honorary degree at Notre Dame. He used his influence to make sure that Richard Tucker became the first. One evening not long after that occurred, the phone rang in the Stepan household at the unusually late hour of eleven o'clock. The father, whose early-to-bed, early-to-rise preferences were well known, answered with the intention of giving the disturber a piece of his mind. The caller, however, was Richard Tucker 'singing beautifully the Notre Dame fighting anthem, because Notre Dame had just won the national football championship'.²

As a teenager, Al Stepan read a lot, mainly novels, was fond of the theatre and won acting prizes. When he considered universities, he thought of Yale, but he was urged by his parents 'to set an example and go to a good Catholic university'.³ He acquiesced and followed in his father's footsteps to Notre Dame (still at that time an all-male university), majoring in English and graduating in 1958. He discovered how much pleasure he derived from prolonged thinking during solitary walks around the campus lake—and on it during the coldest months of the Indiana winter—though, he recalled, his friends 'dreaded me walking into their rooms at midnight, because, after my period of solitude I would talk until three o'clock in the morning'.⁴

Notre Dame wanted Stepan to be one of their candidates for a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford. He did not pursue that option because the American draft board said he could not leave the country until he had done his military service. Nor did they like the fact that, just a few days after his twenty-first birthday, he had gone to the 1957 World Youth Festival in Moscow.⁵ Stepan discovered, however, that he would subsequently

²Ibid., p. 394.

³Ibid., p. 395.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Stepan was one of 34,000 young people, mainly Westerners, who arrived in Moscow for that event. Although Western security agencies viewed attendance there with deep suspicion, the outcome, as Rachel Polonsky puts it, was that for two weeks 'the Soviet Union felt like an open society'. She quotes the Russian dissident writer and art historian Igor Golomstock (who emigrated to Britain in 1972) saying 'It

be allowed out of the United States to study for two years if he somehow acquired a commission as a military officer. The let-out was to be conditional on serving for three years of active duty on return. Stepan rose to the challenge. He took the Marine Corps Platoon Leaders' Course which he described as 'a very brutal, Darwinian experience' and a course which many candidates started, but few finished. 'I finished', he noted. 'If I had been a more sensitive type, I guess I would have had a nervous breakdown.'⁶

In those days it was common for American students coming to Oxford after a first degree in the United States to take another first degree (in two years instead of the normal three) rather than a postgraduate course. In Stepan's case, this made the more sense because he was switching from English Literature to Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE). He entered Balliol in 1958 and graduated in 1960. He thought that the degree title was a misnomer because 'politics was barely covered', with that part of the degree in the 1950s (and 1960s) being mainly history and political philosophy. The teachers who made the biggest impact on Stepan were the economists Paul Streeten and Thomas Balogh. The latter, he said, 'loved to shock American students. The first essay I had to write for him was: "Why do Americans have such big tits on their cars?"'.⁷

Al thoroughly enjoyed his time at Oxford and some of his fellow-students remained friends for life, among them Steven Lukes, later a Fellow of Balliol (and later still a professor at New York University at a time when Al was teaching at Columbia). In the university vacations he travelled a lot—unsurprisingly, for he had great curiosity about other countries and was an insatiable traveller throughout his life.⁸ His most important

is hard to overestimate the part [the festival] played in the subsequent history of Russia', for the foreigners brought with them 'the fresh air of freedom': R. Polonsky, 'When the Soviets shimmied', *New York Review of Books*, 66 (13), 2019, 36; I. Golomstock, *A Ransomed Dissident: a Life in Art under the Soviets* (London, 2019), pp. 50–4, esp. p. 50. As a general rule, large-scale social and cultural contact between people from democratic and authoritarian states does more to open the minds and broaden the horizons of citizens of the latter than it does to serve the propaganda aims of their dictatorial rulers.

⁶ Stepan, 'Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research', p. 396.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The travel included a skiing holiday in the Alps in early 1960, during which Stepan found himself at odds with Winston Churchill, grandson of the prime minister, later himself a Conservative MP. In Churchill's version of the story, 'I made the mistake', after too much alcohol, 'of playfully pushing away a diminutive American, called Al Stepan, who I judged was definitely smaller than me. Nobody had bothered to warn me that he was in fact the Light-Weight Boxing Champion of the US Marine Corps. The next thing I knew I was sailing backwards through a very large and very expensive plate glass window...' (W. S. Churchill, *Memories and Adventures* (London, 1990), p. 146). Though Churchill had been, Al Stepan told me, extremely annoying and 'I may have pushed him', the future junior minister's story was wrong in almost every particular. Far from being a champion boxer in the American Marines, Stepan had given up boxing before he arrived at Oxford. One day, after sparring with an Olympic boxer at a leading boxing club in Chicago, he finished up so dazed that he travelled for an hour in the wrong

meeting at Oxford, however, was with Nancy Leys, the sister of Colin Leys who taught at Balliol at that time. Nancy Leys Stepan, as she became after marrying Al in 1964, was a PPP (Psychology, Philosophy and Physiology) student who went on to become a historian of science and to hold a series of academic appointments, including a full professorship at Columbia. Nancy was born in Inverness but at the age of eight moved south when her father, a doctor who had studied at Oxford (her mother a Cambridge graduate), switched his place of work to London. Both her parents were staunch socialists and firmly irreligious, which made her introduction to the Stepan family somewhat delicate.

Military and journalistic interlude

After Oxford, Stepan had six months before he had to report for duty in the Marines. He used the time to travel to Iran, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam, reading as much as he could about each country before going there. His intellectual and cultural curiosity led to many interesting meetings with people in each of these countries. It was somehow characteristic that on his first visit to Indonesia he found himself meeting President Sukarno in the presidential palace. His last stop was Vietnam because he believed that the defeat of the French and ‘America’s sense that it was going to control the world’ would lead to the US ‘getting involved there’.⁹

During his military service, he found himself playing what could have been an active role in an American invasion of Cuba. By October 1962 he was well into his second year as a Marine officer. His commanding officer told him that, since he knew Spanish and ‘you’ve been to Oxford’, he wanted him to ‘read and interpret all the communications and intelligence reports and become the combat intelligence officer for our landing brigade’. If, he added, ‘we get the order to invade, we’re going in first, and you’ll help to select the landing site’.¹⁰ Although he didn’t know it at the time, Stepan would have been part of what was designed to be a diversionary attack on the city of Santiago de Cuba, for the main attack was to take place further north, close to Havana. ‘Everybody’, Stepan recalled, ‘was sure we were going into combat, and the amount of testosterone in the air was stunning and dangerous.’ There was total radio

direction on the subway. When he got home, he announced that this was the last time he would box, and he stuck with that wise decision. Moreover, no one could have ‘bothered to warn’ Churchill in the academic year 1959–60 about the fighting qualities of a former US Marine, since the Alpine dispute occurred while Stepan was still an Oxford student and *before* he began his three-year service in the Marines.

⁹Stepan, ‘Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research’, p. 398.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 398–9.

silence and he had to be ‘ferried by helicopter among the boats in the invasion fleet to brief all our units about any changes in our plans’. The helicopter would drop him into a boat that sometimes pitched and drove his knees into his face. But that was the least of his worries. Even during the crisis, he managed to read about ‘American perceptions and misperceptions of Cuba and realized, to my horror, that we had in fact mobilized our nuclear weapons for a war that I felt should never have reached that point’. In graduate school at Columbia, later in the 1960s, his first paper was on ‘the role of mutually self-fulfilling prophecies in generating this near nuclear war’.¹¹

About a year after the Cuban crisis Stepan’s unit received what appeared to be contradictory instructions. One was to prepare the execution of a contingency plan to evacuate Americans from Vietnam which he assumed meant that President Kennedy was considering ending US involvement in Vietnam. But they were also given orders to prepare a contingency plan for landing the first US combat unit. It was about eighteen months later that the first American combat troops did land on the instructions of President Johnson. As with the Cuban operation, Stepan’s unit spent over a month offshore from Vietnam. He spent time also in Vietnam and was already convinced that American active participation in the war would be ‘a terrible mistake’. He had been involved in helping to train South Vietnamese officers in Okinawa, and they would ask him, ‘How is your war going?’. He would reply, ‘It’s your war’, to which they would respond, ‘No, it’s *your* war.’ It was clear to him that if the officers of the country concerned regarded the war not as theirs but as that of the United States, no good would come from it.¹²

Stepan did not return to academia immediately after completing his military service, but spent almost a year in journalism, working for *The Economist*. He came to London and persuaded the journal to take him on as a special correspondent. He first went to Ghana and Nigeria, but he told his employers that his particular interest was in Latin America. He had visited Cuba two years before the Cuban revolution, and his personal experience of the Cuban missile crisis greatly increased his interest in the region. He had taken Spanish at high school and at Notre Dame, although he did not yet know Portuguese in which he later became fluent. Lucky breaks come to those with the acumen and resourcefulness to take advantage of them. On his flight to Rio de Janeiro, an airline steward saw him reading something by the Brazilian economist Celso Furtado, and they got into conversation. Al told him that he would be reporting from Brazil for *The Economist*. The steward asked him if he would like to meet some left-wing oppositionists. Stepan immediately said yes, ‘and virtually the day we arrived, Nancy and I met some of them under very secret conditions’. He continued to have

¹¹ Ibid., p. 399.

¹² Ibid.

useful contacts in different quarters and was a fast learner. Six days before the military coup of 31 March 1964, he filed a story to *The Economist* saying that a coup was highly likely, explaining why it would happen, and why this would be to the detriment of the US-supported 'Alliance for Progress' which Kennedy had launched to counter the appeal of Cuban-style revolutionary politics. His London editors held the story up, believing that their 27-year-old stringer did not know enough about Brazil to be making such a bold prediction. Immediately after the coup took place, they published the piece, noting that their special correspondent had filed it ahead of the military takeover.

In his work for *The Economist*, which took him to Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru and Venezuela as well as Brazil, he learned a lot about the art of in-depth interviewing. As Stepan put it: 'Even politicians get tired of talking only to other politicians and want to hear about the world. A successful interview is a transaction; it has to be interesting for both people. Someone like Salvador Allende would not wave you over several times in three days for a one-hour conversation unless he was learning something every time.'¹³ Allende (who became Chilean president in 1970 and was killed in the 1973 military coup which overthrew his socialist government) was interested in talking about the coup in Brazil and he also wanted to talk about Argentina, both topics on which Stepan had something to offer in return. Politicians, Stepan observed, also believed that talking with a journalist would make that person and his publication more understanding of their perspective. One interview or conversation often led to another. When other leaders learned that he was about to write an article about the politics of their country in an influential international weekly, they would let him know that, since he had spoken to their rival, he should hear their viewpoint, too, before submitting his article.¹⁴

Return to academia

Stepan returned to academia in the autumn of 1964, beginning graduate studies at Columbia, which led to his PhD in 1969. His choice of university was influenced partly by the probable employment opportunities New York offered for his wife, Nancy, who was a science journalist at that time (later she, too, did a doctorate) and also by the availability of world-class opera. Among his political science teachers, he found Dankwart Rustow both knowledgeable and interesting. But the scholar who made by far the biggest impact on him, and with whom he was to go on to form one

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 401–2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

of the great partnerships in the academic study of politics, was Juan Linz. His first encounter with Linz was when he saw some students running across campus, and he asked them where they were going. 'To Linz', they said. 'Who's Linz?', Stepan asked. They told him that he was a young Spaniard. When he asked what Linz taught, 'Everything' was the answer. Al joined them in running to Linz's lecture. Juan Linz liked to teach for two hours just before lunch, so that he could continue the discussion with students who wished to join him over the meal. Sometimes the conversation continued until 4 p.m. Linz was interested in Stepan's up-to-date knowledge of Latin America and soon they were talking for three hours a week.¹⁵

While he was in graduate school, Stepan did a lot of writing in addition to course work and his doctoral thesis. He published review articles in academic journals and argumentative political pieces for *The Nation*, *New Politics* and *The New Republic*. He responded to requests to write policy briefs that came from time to time from Senators Frank Church and Robert Kennedy. Between 1966 and 1969 he was a Policy Analyst for the Rand Corporation. Rand supported his research in Latin America on the military in politics, awarding him a three-year grant to write the book based on his thesis. Among his Rand colleagues, he benefited especially from conversations with Alexander George, a major figure in the study of international relations. When Stepan presented his PhD research proposal—a study of the political role of the military in Brazil—to his Columbia research supervisors, he was told it was a non-starter because he would not have access to key sources. Instead he was steered into working on national integration in Brazil. After three months of work on that topic, he decided that he was far better prepared to say something new and distinctive about his original subject and quietly returned to it, without submitting a research plan. He simply got on with studying the Brazilian military and 'did a prospectus ex post facto'.¹⁶

Stepan studied all five Brazilian constitutions from 1891 and the debates surrounding them. He was astonished to find in all of them a clause which said that the military was responsible for maintaining the correct balance among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, something that would normally be a matter for the judiciary or politicians. More intriguingly, he found that this clause was never inserted by the subcommittee containing military men but by a second subcommittee containing no active-duty officers. He even found 'congressional testimony by the military *against* the clause which they feared was dangerous for the military as an institution because it would divide them'. Remarkably, over sixty years civilians had been inserting into the country's basic law a highly inappropriate judicial role for the armed forces. Stepan's hypothesis was that 'civilian politicians were embedding this

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 403–4.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 406.

role for the military in the constitution so they would have a basis for making public appeals to the military to carry out a coup d'état if, and when, the political elites wanted a coup'.¹⁷ Content analysis of the editorials in the major Brazilian newspapers during sixty days before each coup attempt showed him that, in the case of every successful coup (but not prior to the unsuccessful coup attempts), the editorials were expressing overwhelming support for military intervention, citing the relevant article of the constitution and arguing that, as the president had upset the correct balance among the branches of government, it would be unconstitutional for the military to obey him.¹⁸

Stepan scrutinised the promotion book of the Brazilian military which contained basic biographical data on every officer. He found what the generals who led the most recent coup had in common in their army experience and education, with almost all having attended the same military college. Only after he had done a great deal of research did he begin his interviews with them. He told them he had been a Marine officer and a special correspondent with *The Economist* and that he was writing a book about a history in which they had played a part, a book he would be writing whether they spoke to him or not. As with his earlier journalistic experience, one interview led to another. A senior officer, often with Stepan still sitting in his office, would telephone a colleague and tell him that the young American knew what he was talking about and they should speak to him. Stepan's technique was to ask five questions, the answers to four of which he already knew. If his interlocutor said something that wasn't accurate, he would say, 'Yes, but come to think of it, General, it was actually 1939' or remind them that what they had been talking about did not happen in that particular battle but in another. He had learned a good deal about their military history, understood their hierarchy, and 'could recognize important medals from twenty-five yards'. He did a lot of his research at the elite military college which had educated the key figures in the military coup. Although he was prepared to be challenged and thrown out, Stepan managed to walk into and work regularly in the library of that college (the Escola Superior de Guerra, or ESG) in the company of numerous retired generals and colonels who went there to read the newspapers and reminisce. That he was never ejected owed something to having been, as he put it, always 'incredibly polite to librarians' and always wearing a suit.¹⁹

The book of Stepan's doctoral thesis, *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ, 1971) became a bestseller in Brazil in its Portuguese

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 409–11.

translation. The book was banned, then uncensored, after which its sales soared, and then it was banned again. This, Stepan observed, was ‘absolutely the best thing that could have happened for promoting the book’. The big impact it made was, as he said, ‘not bad for the start of a career’.²⁰

A distinguished former Brazilian president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso (who, during his two presidential terms, 1995–2003, did much to win the military’s acceptance of democratic norms and institutions) has written of the ‘groundbreaking role’ that Stepan played in enhancing understanding of the part the military had played in Latin American societies and politics.²¹ Notwithstanding their major impact, the military was an institution which had been largely neglected by social scientists. Stepan asked questions which in retrospect, noted Cardoso, might seem obvious but that had hitherto been overlooked, such as ‘What are the inner dynamics of the military? How cohesive or fragmented are they? How can these differences favor or hinder processes of regime liberalization?’²² More generally, at a time when political parties and Congress in Brazil were seen as ‘hopelessly subservient to the repressive system’, wrote Cardoso, ‘Stepan called our attention to the role that political society might play in the transition to democracy’, for even ritual elections for a relatively powerless legislature could, at certain moments, acquire real substance. This occurred in 1974 when, to the surprise of many, the Brazilian population seized the opportunity of national elections for Congress ‘to vote en masse for opposition candidates’. This unexpected manifestation of political discontent led to the first ‘faint intimations of a relaxation in authoritarian rule’.²³

Stepan’s concern with developments in the real political world went alongside a critical interest in what was happening in political science. The 1960s saw the ‘behavioural revolution’ in the discipline, in which the quantitative study of political behaviour (to the extent it could be measured by survey research) gained ground, while students of political pluralism focused on competition among various types of organised groups. In Stepan’s view neither the ‘behaviouralists’ nor the ‘pluralists’ paid sufficient attention to political institutions and the state. Those who studied authoritarian regimes, whether in the Communist world or in many Latin American countries at that time, were, of course, less likely to overlook the continuing importance of state power. Stepan complained that in the books he was directed to read as a graduate student ‘there was almost no state’ and ‘it was all interest groups’. While he

²⁰ Ibid., p. 412.

²¹ F. H. Cardoso, ‘Reconciling the Brazilian military with democracy: the power of Alfred Stepan’s ideas’, in D. Chalmers and S. Mainwaring (eds.), *Problems Confronting Contemporary Democracies: Essays in Honor of Alfred Stepan* (Notre Dame, IN, 2012), p. 67.

²² Ibid., pp. 67–8.

²³ Ibid., p. 69.

was reading that literature, many of his friends in Brazil were ‘being censored and even arrested by the authoritarian regime’.²⁴

With the book of his doctorate already in the press, Stepan became an assistant professor of political science at Yale in 1970. While such posts are difficult to come by, securing tenure at an Ivy League university is harder still. Stepan’s spectacularly speedy ascent saw him progress from assistant to associate to full professor within six years. Yale was at that time widely regarded as having the best political science department in the United States.²⁵ Stepan’s years in New Haven were fruitful for him in many ways, but perhaps, above all, for his developing academic relationship, and great friendship, with Juan Linz who had moved from Columbia to Yale in 1968. Their work together was described by Richard Snyder as ‘one of the most sustained and successful collaborations in modern social science’.²⁶ Stepan and Linz continued to publish separately, but their joint publications constituted some of their most important work. Each project involved hundreds of hours of conversation. Much of it took place in the library of Linz’s New Haven home where, Stepan recalled, some of their best ideas came between midnight and three in the morning, following a lengthy day of discussion and reading. When Stepan was working as far away from Connecticut as Budapest and Oxford, they would arrange to be at the same conferences in many different countries. Their first book together was the massive and influential edited volume *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore, MD, 1978), for which Linz wrote a 124-page introduction as a prelude to studies of democratic breakdown in twelve different countries, with Stepan the author of the chapter on Brazil and Linz on Spain.

One of the main conclusions was that in every case they studied, ‘democratic incumbents, the very people who should have been protecting democracy’ facilitated and aided the breakdown of democratic norms and institutions by their ambivalence about violations of the law and their ‘hesitation in using legitimate coercive force against antidemocratic groups’ by, for example, allowing members of such groups to walk the streets wearing uniforms.²⁷ Having as a graduate student already documented civilian initiation of military rule in Brazil, Stepan was not surprised to find that civilian complicity in the degradation and destruction of democracy turned out to be a

²⁴ Stepan, ‘Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research’, pp. 415–16.

²⁵ Stepan’s senior colleagues there included Robert A. Dahl, Robert E. Lane, Juan Linz (whose primary affiliation was, however, with the Department of Sociology), C. E. (Ed.) Lindblom, David Apter and Joseph LaPalombara. (Dahl, Lane and Linz were all elected to Corresponding Fellowships of the British Academy.) The collegial tone of the department was set by Dahl whom Stepan described as ‘the nicest, easiest person in the world’ (Stepan, ‘Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research’, p. 442).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

much more widespread phenomenon, even when the civilians were supposedly committed democrats. Stepan and Linz were alert to the threat to democracy from both left and right, with Linz warning of the dangers posed by self-appointed spokesmen for a class or for ‘the people’ and noting that the ‘vain hope of making democracies more democratic by undemocratic means has all too often contributed to regime crises and ultimately paved the way to autocratic rule’.²⁸

Stepan became one of the authors who brought ‘the state back in’ to American political science (in Britain it was never really out²⁹) with, for example, his book *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton, NJ, 1978). Later he reflected that this work would have had a still wider impact if he had published as a separate volume the first theoretical part on the state, rather than applying his framework of analysis to Peru within the same covers. He had, however, not separated the two parts because he believed it ‘is terribly important to embed general theoretical arguments in an empirical context’.³⁰ In the first part of the book, Stepan noted that in ‘most societies throughout most of history’, people had not been able freely to combine in organised groups and, where such groups *were* to be found, it was important to study ‘the institutional, class and ideological context’ in which they operated.³¹

His analysis drew on the work of Philippe Schmitter and formed part of a revival of interest in the concept of state corporatism, though Stepan placed much more weight on the independent power of the state than did Schmitter.³² He also broke down further Schmitter’s distinction between state corporatism and societal corporatism—associational groups in the former dependent upon and penetrated by the state, and in the latter independent of the state. Stepan argued that the dynamics of state corporatism could not be adequately understood unless one distinguished an ‘inclusionary pole’ in which the state elite attempts ‘to forge a new state-society equilibrium by policies aimed at incorporating salient working-class groups into the new economic and political model’ from an ‘exclusionary pole’ where state power relies heavily on ‘coercive policies to deactivate and then restructure salient working-class groups’. He went on to analyse the conditions influencing the adoption of one or other of these modes of state corporatism, taking the concrete examples of a variety of Latin American countries.³³

Stepan was a strong believer in joint supervision of doctoral theses, partly because he believed the student benefited from the different perspectives of their advisers and,

²⁸ J. J. Linz and A. Stepan (eds.), *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore, MD, 1978), p. 97.

²⁹ As Stepan later noted in his book *Arguing Comparative Politics* (Oxford, 2001), p. 7.

³⁰ Stepan, ‘Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research’, p. 418.

³¹ A. Stepan, *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton, NJ, 1978), pp. 14–15.

³² P. C. Schmitter, ‘Still the century of corporatism?’, *Review of Politics*, 36 (1974), 85–139.

³³ Stepan, *The State and Society*, pp. 73–89, esp. p. 74.

in the field of comparative politics, expertise on different countries, but also in order that the student would not suffer when one of his advisers was on leave. Stepan himself liked to get away for uninterrupted research and writing every few years. He received many offers of visiting fellowships and was highly successful in obtaining research grants from such organisations as the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Guggenheim Foundation and the Social Science Research Council. During the period of his Yale professorship, he spent the 1978–9 academic year as Ford Visiting Scholar at St Antony's College, Oxford (which was when my own friendship with him began).

Chicago politics

It was while he was at Oxford that Stepan received a phone call from Chicago and, with it, the possibility of his career taking a radically different turn. He was offered the Democratic candidacy for an eminently winnable seat in Congress.³⁴ The caller from an influential group of Chicago Democrats informed him that Abner Mikva, who had won his last four elections for the 10th district of Chicago, was stepping down to become a federal judge. An imminent special election was being held to replace him and, having failed to agree on any local candidate, the group of king-makers decided that Al would give them their best chance of holding on to the seat. They asked him to come and talk to them. Without commitment, he flew to Chicago for talks. He began by telling his political backers that he hadn't lived in the city for years and would be regarded as the ultimate carpetbagger. The response was that being away 'at college' didn't count. Asked how many relatives he had in the district, he answered, 'At least thirty'. His sponsors wanted to know how many would hold fundraising parties for him. Stepan said, if asked, all of them would, even the Republicans among them, for family ties would outweigh other affiliations. This was, naturally, music to the ears of his interlocutors whose response was that 'anyone who can organize thirty fundraising parties in a week with their relatives is no carpet bagger'.

Still not satisfied that he knew why the local Democrats were so keen for him to run, Stepan asked, 'What the hell is really going on?' The reply was, 'Well, Al, we're about the most perfect one-third, one-third, one-third constituency in America'. He

³⁴More than once over the years I heard Al Stepan's account of this, for it was a story he loved to tell (probably because it threw light on American—or, at any rate, Chicago—politics, as well as on his own biography). Fortunately, my memory of how it went is echoed in Stepan's detailed answer to the question, 'Is it true that you nearly ran for Congress?' from his interviewer Richard Snyder (Stepan, 'Democratic governance and the craft of case-based Research', pp. 440–1).

asked what that meant, and was told, 'We're one-third Catholic.' He replied, 'I'm not the most orthodox or participatory Catholic.' That didn't matter, he was informed. He had gone to Loyola and Notre Dame—he would get the Catholic vote. What, he asked, was the next one-third. 'WASP',³⁵ he was told. But 'I'm not a WASP', he reminded them. 'You teach at Yale', they said—that was enough. To the question, 'What's the last one-third?', the answer was the Jewish vote. But 'I'm not Jewish', said Stepan. 'Yes, but you're an intellectual'—so that base was covered. Stepan was tempted. The campaign would have to start immediately, but if he won in the special election of 1979 and again in 1980, a Senate seat appeared to be opening up.

One of the Illinois Senators, Charles Percy, a liberal Republican, had told Stepan that he would not be standing again when his current term in the Senate ended. In fact, Percy contested his seat in 1984—and lost to the Democrat. But that Democrat was not Al Stepan. After a lot of thought, he decided not to make the career switch. He enjoyed the intellectual life that was, supposedly, going to commend him to a third of Chicago 10th District voters and worried about the extent to which he might be constrained in saying what he thought. A big factor for Stepan was his wife, Nancy, who had married a young academic and with no notion that she might be 'marrying Chicago politics'. To move into that world, he concluded, was 'too big a jump'. Nevertheless, he sometimes felt guilty about not having accepted the opportunity, for, as he put it, 'Aristotle said only gods or beasts do not have to live in a polis. We are not living in a well-run polis.'³⁶

Stepan, however, never abandoned 'the polis' or his concern for the well-being and improvement of a great many polities. As will become still clearer, when further attention is paid to Stepan's writings, he continued to concern himself with problems of fundamental political importance and in a variety of countries. He was the main author of a much-cited joint article with Linz, published late in his career, in which he applied some of the lessons derived from comparative research to an analysis of the defects of American democracy. Al had no time for the kind of political science which was more preoccupied with the intellectual game of examining a falsifiable hypothesis than with bothering to ask whether solving the puzzle was of any earthly use. Throughout his career, as the editors of a Festschrift for him, Douglas Chalmers and Scott Mainwaring, observed, Stepan 'focused on issues of great importance in the real world and in scholarship', and did not 'seek to make minor incremental contributions to arcane debates'.³⁷

³⁵ White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

³⁶ Stepan, 'Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research', p. 441.

³⁷ Chalmers and Mainwaring, *Problems Confronting Contemporary Democracies*, p. 15.

From New Haven to New York

During the thirteen years he spent at Yale, Stepan published five books.³⁸ As early as six months into his Yale assistant professorship, he accepted the directorship of Yale's Council on Latin American Studies, although he was warned against taking on such administrative duties before he had tenure. He thought, however, that this body had been underperforming when one considered Yale's intellectual resources and library. It had only a \$16,000 budget when he became director but a \$600,000 budget by the time he left.³⁹ In his final year at Yale, 1982–3, he took on—in addition to his other administrative responsibilities, research, writing and teaching—the Directorship of the Yale Concilium on International and Area Studies. This was to be just the beginning, for it was a feature of Stepan's career that he went on to hold a series of major administrative posts while continuing to be an inspiring teacher and a prolifically productive scholar. When he returned to Columbia in 1983, it was as Dean of the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), along with a professorial appointment which became from 1987 a named chair—the Burgess Professorship of Political Science. To his administrative posts, Stepan brought intellectual leadership, vision and boundless energy. He also had a talent for fund-raising. The main reason, he once told me, why he found it easy to ask individual potential donors for money was that he knew how much pleasure his father had derived from his philanthropy. It had been a source of great satisfaction to him that he had helped to save the Chicago Opera when it fell on hard times, and his support for the University of Notre Dame was such that there is both a building and a road on the campus named after him.

Stepan's return to Columbia as Dean of SIPA was influenced by the greater career opportunities New York (as distinct from New Haven) offered his wife. Nancy had just published a second, and well-received, book on the history of science and medicine. On his own insistence, Stepan himself taught courses every year even while he was serving as a dean, and he continued to publish. He was extremely effective at winning large research grants, in attracting big names to Columbia, and in organising conferences. With the help of George Soros, he brought a number of significant Central European academics (who were also political dissidents) to New York. Jay Pritzker, the billionaire philanthropist from Chicago who founded the Hyatt hotel chain, was a longstanding personal friend of Stepan, and Al persuaded him to become

³⁸ Besides *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ, 1971), *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore, MD, 1978) and *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton, NJ, 1978), he had been co-editor (with Bruce Russett) and co-author of *Military Force in American Society* (New York, 1973) and editor of, and contributor to, *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Policies, and Future* (New Haven, CT, 1973).

³⁹ Stepan, 'Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research', p. 442.

chairman of the SIPA board. Pritzker agreed on condition that Stepan took him on one interesting trip a year. Their travels together included a meeting in Hanoi with General Giap who had commanded the North Vietnamese forces against the United States during the Vietnam War, what Stepan called 'a wild meeting with Lech Walesa in Gdansk', and the six-hour session with Fidel Castro in Havana, referred to in the introduction to this memoir.⁴⁰ That meeting ended with a present from Castro of the finest Cuban cigars. Stepan was an occasional cigar smoker but, keeping in mind the American prohibition on bringing Cuban cigars into the country, he gave them away. Asked at the US customs if he had any cigars, he said that he knew they were illegal, so had disposed of those he had before leaving Cuba. 'Too bad', he was told, 'the rules have just changed, and you could have brought them in'.

Central Europe

Stepan stepped down from his Deanship at Columbia in 1991 to have more time for his research which always involved a lot of travel. He was the reverse of a desk-bound scholar. The large theme that was his primary interest at any given time varied over the years, but whether it was the military in politics, the breakdown of authoritarian regimes, democratisation, federalism, or religion and politics, he was a frequent visitor to the countries which seemed to him to be most relevant to that particular subject of his comparative studies. 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 knowledge of how particular institutional arrangements had worked elsewhere.

Having been a successful dean at Columbia, and having reverted simply to his Burgess professorship, Stepan was being sounded out by leading American universities interested in his becoming their president. Al had, however, no interest in any of those positions, for he knew that they would mean 'the absolute end of my life as a field-based comparativist'.⁴¹ Each move in his career he saw as an opportunity for learning as well as for teaching. Thus, his reaction was altogether more positive when, in Paraguay at the time, he took a telephone call from Budapest, asking him to consider becoming the first rector of the new university that was being created there. The invitation was on the initiative of the Hungarian political philosopher, János Kis, who had played a prominent part in the democratisation process in his country and was briefly a party leader before he returned to academia. The possibility of creating an

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 443.

⁴¹ Ibid.

independent university in central Europe had been mulled over by scholars from both sides of the East-West divide in the late 1980s, and with increasing optimism from 1989, the year in which the citizens of one central and east European country after another cast aside their Communist rulers while Soviet troops remained in their barracks.

The Central European University (CEU) became a reality thanks to major funding by George Soros. The intention was that it would have a presence in at least three countries—Czechoslovakia (as it then still was), Poland and Hungary—but in practice it was based mainly in Prague and Budapest. Petr Pithart, a Czech political scientist who had been an influential advocate of democratisation during the 1968 ‘Prague Spring’ (and, in the wilderness years which followed, the author of important samizdat work) was, for two and a half years following the ‘Velvet Revolution’, Czech prime minister. He went out of his way to welcome the idea of the CEU being in Prague and earmarked a building to house it. When, however, he was succeeded in the premiership in July 1992 by Václav Klaus, whose suspicion of Soros presaged that of his Hungarian counterpart in the following decade, the attitude to the CEU changed to one of hostility.⁴² Budapest became the university’s principal institutional base and it was to be Stepan’s main home during the three years, 1993–6, he spent as head of the CEU. Given that the university would not have got off the ground without the enormous moral and financial commitment to it of Soros, the appointment was very much in the hands of the philanthropist as well as resting on the support of central European intellectuals who were keen to attract Stepan. Soros and Stepan spoke for many hours and were, initially, not in full agreement. In providing financial support for opponents of authoritarianism and for intellectual freedom more generally, Soros (who had been a student of Karl Popper at the London School of Economics) was averse to making long-term commitments to particular institutions. Stepan believed that he had helped to persuade Soros that, if he were founding a university, endowment and long-term institutional commitment were absolutely necessary.⁴³

The Soviet, post-Soviet, and Central and East European context was one of growing importance for democratisation studies. Being involved in the early years of a new central European institution, and charged with ensuring it reached high educational standards, suited Stepan admirably. The Central European University got off the ground remarkably quickly. It opened its doors to students in 1991. The chair of

⁴²Long after Stepan’s tenure, the CEU has been under fire from the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, whose studies at Oxford were funded by George Soros. The university, as a result, has now made Vienna its main institutional home. Their earlier anti-communist activism has not prevented some post-communist political leaders from succumbing, in their turn, to suspicion of truly independent institutions.

⁴³Stepan, ‘Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research’, p. 444.

its Senate was Bill Newton-Smith who was concurrently Philosophy Tutor at Balliol and so could not be the formal administrative head of the new university, although he came as close as anyone did to being in charge prior to the appointment of Stepan. There was a lot of argument among the CEU's department heads about whether they should have an American-style university president or, as was more common in Europe, a rector. It was resolved by Newton-Smith's proposal that they should have both, but with the same person fulfilling both roles. Thus, Al Stepan became the first Rector and President of the Central European University.

Notwithstanding the extreme brevity of its existence prior to Stepan's arrival, the CEU already had a range of geographically dispersed departments which operated as separate fiefdoms. Although attending to mundane administrative detail was not his forte, Stepan was the right person in the right place at the right time, for he never lost sight of the big picture. One of his major tasks was to try to turn a collection of departments into a coherent university whose intellectual excellence and academic standards would be widely recognised internationally. This meant taking on the fiefdoms and, in the words of Jonathan Becker, who was Assistant Vice President of the CEU, at times that made for 'pretty fierce battles'.⁴⁴ Some of the freshly-appointed CEU staff were quite unaccustomed to the need to produce any kind of syllabus for their courses. Prominent among the teachers were those who had taught in dissident circles without syllabi, and whose previous experience had made them suspicious of all authority. Enraged by being asked for a syllabus, one faculty member wrote to Stepan (with colourful hyperbole) that 'even under high Stalinism, no one had interfered with his intellectual freedom as much as I had as rector'.⁴⁵ By the time Stepan left, the CEU had a more unified governmental structure and, in further alleviation of narrow departmentalism, a number of innovative inter-disciplinary programmes, including Environmental Studies, Gender Studies and a Centre for the Study of Nationalism.

One of the CEU colleagues whom Stepan esteemed most highly was Ernest Gellner, for whom the issue of nationalism had become his prime intellectual pre-occupation. It was Gellner who, with Stepan's strong support, set up the nationalism studies centre, to which prominent scholars in the field, such as Benedict Anderson and Rogers Brubaker, came as visiting professors. That centre remained in Prague so long as Gellner was alive, but after his untimely death in 1995 it moved to Budapest where the rest of the CEU's teaching and research was being concentrated. Among the new friendships Stepan formed during his CEU years were those with the

⁴⁴ Personal communication from Dr Jonathan Becker (now Executive Vice President and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Bard College in New York State).

⁴⁵ Stepan, 'Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research', p. 445.

Hungarian political sociologist Lázló Bruszt, who became the CEU's Academic Pro-Rector (and later acting director); the Polish historian Bronisław Geremek, who had been a leading figure in the socio-political movement, Solidarity; and Ralf Dahrendorf, Warden of St Antony's College at that time. Geremek and Dahrendorf became founding trustees of the CEU.

The benefits of Central Europe for Stepan's own research and understanding of post-Communism greatly exceeded the headaches. Discussing democracy with Václav Havel in Prague Castle 'was certainly a highlight', said Stepan, and 'George Soros attended many of our meetings and was a great part of that whole experience'.⁴⁶ In Stepan's view,

CEU was the best base of all. The intellectual payoffs were immense. Many of my colleagues in Budapest and Prague had participated in the resistance movement against the old communist regimes, and I was able to talk to them at great length. Because I was traveling constantly across post-communist Europe to explore the possibility of opening branches of CEU in other countries, such as Russia, I also met all sorts of people who had been involved at various levels in the democratization process. I became attuned to a whole set of issues that the democratization literature had failed to address, especially the question of nationalism.⁴⁷

As he pointed out, a very substantial study edited by Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead,⁴⁸ to which Stepan himself had been a contributor (and thus, 'I am as culpable as anyone'), had contained not a single chapter on nationalism.

In the preface to their 1978 book *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, Linz and Stepan had written that 'high priority should now be given to the analysis of the conditions that lead to the breakdown of authoritarian regimes, to the process of transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes, and especially to the political dynamics of the consolidation of postauthoritarian democracies'.⁴⁹ That broad theme came high on their research agenda over the next two decades. By the first half of the 1990s, they were working on what became a major contribution to democratisation studies. In contrast with the 1978 volume on democratic breakdown, it was not a multi-author volume, but a tour de force of the duo. Stepan's three years presiding over the fledgling Central European University could not have been more timely, for it coincided with the writing of the justly acclaimed Linz and Stepan volume, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and*

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 447.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ G. O'Donnell, P. C. Schmitter and L. Whitehead (eds.), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, 4 vols (Baltimore, MD, 1986).

⁴⁹ Linz and Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, p. x.

Post-Communist Europe.⁵⁰ That book was published in 1996, the year in which Stepan moved from Budapest to Oxford. When they were co-authors, Stepan did the actual writing, but he and Linz always argued each point through and neither of them was the sole author of chapters on any particular country or region. Of the two, Linz's knowledge of Southern Europe was especially profound and Stepan had the greater knowledge of South America. Strikingly, specialists on Communist and post-Communist Europe found their chapters on Central and Eastern Europe (Russia included), and their chapter on "'Stateness', nationalism, and democratization', no less rich and insightful.

Oxford

Stepan had agreed with Soros that he would serve as Rector and President of the Central European University for a limited time to get the CEU properly launched. Encouraged to apply for the Gladstone Chair of Government at Oxford, which came with a Fellowship of All Souls, he agreed and was duly appointed. He and Nancy had met in Oxford and had been coming back over the years. Al had many friends in the university, although more at St Antony's College than in All Souls. In the former there were people he knew well, specialists on different parts of the world and in almost every one of the college's regional studies centres—most obviously, the Latin American Centre. Stepan was elected to an Honorary Fellowship of St Antony's in 2006. His election to a Fellowship of the British Academy in 1997 came at the earliest possible date, for he was nominated during the very first academic year (1996–7) in which the appointment he held was at a British university.

Among the Oxford colleagues with whom he enjoyed many fruitful discussions were two leading figures in legal and political philosophy, Ronald Dworkin of University College and Joseph Raz at Balliol, and a specialist on Islamic political thought, James Piscatori (Wadham) who shared the new Gladstone Professor's interest in Islam and democracy. Stepan ran a democratisation workshop on approaches to democracy with Laurence Whitehead at Nuffield College and a seminar with me at his new academic home, All Souls, on problems of democracy in post-Communist Europe.⁵¹ Nancy had obtained a senior fellowship at the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine at Oxford, which had been another factor influencing Al's acceptance of the Gladstone Chair.

⁵⁰ J. J. Linz and A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD, 1996).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 448–9.

For many who taught Politics at Oxford, as well as for graduate students in particular, Stepan was a wonderfully stimulating addition to the senior faculty. But the three years, 1996–9, he spent as a professor at the university where he had studied PPE forty years earlier were not entirely plain sailing. Although Oxford had the largest collection of people teaching Politics as an academic subject of any British university, thanks to the PPE degree which meant there were tutors in that field in every college, and the presence of a large cohort of graduate students, its organisation was somewhat amorphous.⁵² It is as recently as 2000, a year after Stepan's departure, that the Sub-Faculty of Politics (as part of the Social Sciences Faculty) became the Department of Politics and International Relations. Stepan gave lectures for the core course in Comparative Politics but was unhappy with Oxford's separation of teaching from examining, whereby the setting and marking of examination questions at the end of the two-year MPhil in Politics might have only a tenuous link to the themes of his lectures, for examining was in the hands of 'a different group of colleagues'. He also strongly disliked the pressures from UK funding authorities (and the University's willingness to go along with them) for graduate students to complete their doctorates within four years. He held that this was particularly unhelpful for graduate students of comparative politics who might have to learn a new language and who certainly should spend a lengthy period in the country that was the primary focus of their research. It 'did not', he said, 'make intellectual sense to rush home from a great fieldwork experience'. Many of his outstanding earlier students—among them Nancy Bermeo, Evelyne Huber, Margaret Keck, Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell and Kathryn Sikkink—had, he pointed out, taken six years or longer to complete their doctoral degrees.⁵³

There were other more personal reasons for the Stepan's to return to the United States after only three years. Their two children, Adam and Tanya, lived in America, and grandchildren, whom they wished to see more often, were a further incentive to return to the US.⁵⁴ Moreover, not all of Stepan's new colleagues appreciated him as much as the majority of Oxford Politics specialists did and as his graduate students enthusiastically did. There were grumblings about papers getting stuck on his desk and about his not answering emails. His academic lifestyle—combining extensive research-related travel, a steady flow of innovative scholarship, inspirational teaching, and organisational tasks—meant he needed the support of a dedicated PA if mundane, but necessary, administrative matters were to be attended to promptly. The carping of a

⁵²See C. Hood, D. King and G. Peele (eds.), *Forging a Discipline: a Critical Assessment of Oxford's Development of the Study of Politics and International Relations in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford, 2014).

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 448.

⁵⁴*Ibid.* In due course there were to be seven grandchildren: Isabel, Colin, Helena, Esther, Heloisa, Fiona and Erica.

minority of colleagues notwithstanding, Stepan's Oxford friends and advocates thought he was such a breath of fresh air and intellectual stimulus that the University should have accommodated itself to his way of working rather than risk losing him within a few short years. Had the transition from Sub-Faculty of Politics to Department of Politics and International Relations occurred a few years earlier, this might have happened.

Back to Columbia

It was in his interactions with both colleagues and graduate students in one-to-one discussion, small groups and in seminars that Stepan made his greatest contribution at Oxford. That was true also at Columbia to which Stepan returned as Wallace S. Sayre Professor of Government in 1999. He was also, however, an institutional innovator. He became the founder and first Director of Columbia's Center for the Study of Democracy, Tolerance and Religion which, funded by the Luce Foundation, began its life in 2006 and Co-Director of the Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life from 2007 to 2012. As those posts suggest, and as will be elaborated below, Stepan had become particularly interested, during the last two decades of his life, in the relationship between religion and democracy. He accepted that all the world's great religions had very different strands and tendencies within them—'multivocal' was his term—and he was interested in establishing what was required if they were to be compatible with democracy.

Although Columbia had good specialists on different parts of the world, Stepan felt that when he was there earlier the Political Science Department was relatively weak 'in terms of scholars doing systematic comparative analysis'. Things had improved in the intervening period. There had also been some progress in overcoming the artificial divide between comparative politics and the study of international relations (IR), although Stepan's friend and immediate successor as Dean of SIPA John Ruggie, a leading representative of the 'constructivist' tendency in IR, had left Columbia. Stepan's links with American studies had also improved, thanks to the arrival of Ira Katznelson. Specialists in the United States on American politics are often disparaging of 'area studies', although their ranks include many of the world's narrowest area specialists, with little knowledge of countries other than their own. Katznelson, an outstanding scholar with historical depth and a comparative dimension to his work, was the antithesis of that kind of specialist. Other significant new arrivals included Jon Elster and Brian Barry. With the latter, Stepan 'spurred over such issues as group rights'.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Stepan, 'Democratic governance and craft of case-based research', p. 449.

Committed though he was to comparative studies, Stepan deplored the tendency in modern political science whereby a young scholar—unless studying some aspect of politics in the United States (not, apparently, an ‘area’)—was expected, at the very outset of his or her academic career, to be working on several countries. He had come across doctoral theses in which the student had compared as many as six or eight countries, but relying entirely on secondary literature, and without ‘having lived in a single foreign country’. He was a firm believer in young scholars acquiring in-depth knowledge of one country, substantiated by research *in* that country and supplemented by reading relevant secondary source materials on several other countries. The appropriate scope of research of the comparativist varied, he held, from one stage of a political scientist’s career to another. It made sense for the broader comparative studies to be carried out when the scholars had established their credentials with work on the country of their primary speciality, and, having become better known, belonged to ‘two or three invisible colleges’. Then they could tackle a big topic comparatively across a number of countries.⁵⁶ That had been Stepan’s own approach. As a young scholar, his speciality was Brazil. As a mature scholar, he took up large themes, such as federalism and the part federations could play in holding together multinational states, or the compatibility of Islam and democracy, involving comparison of a variety of countries in which Islam was the dominant religion and including also the special case of India where Islam was the religion of a very substantial minority.

During his second, and final, period as a Columbia professor, Stepan received several honours and awards to add to his Fellowships of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences since 1991 and of the British Academy. In 2002 he was presented with the *Ordem do Rio Branco*, *Commendador*, of the Brazilian government by President Cardoso; in Rio de Janeiro in 2009 he was given the Kalman Silvert Award for lifetime contributions to the study of Latin America by the Latin American Studies Association; and still more impressively (and deservedly), he received in 2012 the Karl Deutsch Award of the International Political Science Association, which is bestowed only once every three years, for especially distinguished cross-disciplinary research.⁵⁷ Stepan was unattracted by the idea of belonging to a fixed inter-disciplinary group as distinct from getting together with people interested in the same problem who happened to be from a variety of disciplines. He had ‘lots of friends who are philosophers, economists, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists’. He read their work and they exchanged papers and argued. But, ultimately, he agreed with Albert Hirschman who said, ‘The best inter-disciplinary work is done under one skull’.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 451–2.

⁵⁷ The last three recipients of the Karl Deutsch Award before Stepan were Juan Linz in 2003, Charles Tilly in 2006 and Giovanni Sartori in 2009.

⁵⁸ Stepan, ‘Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research’, p. 432.

Stepan as teacher

Working with graduate students was a component of academic life Stepan relished as much as he did research and writing. In the four institutions in which he taught—Yale, Columbia, the Central European University (even while he was Rector of the CEU) and Oxford—he left an indelible impression on those whose work attracted his scrutiny. Following his death, the *Journal of Democracy*, after describing Stepan as one of the ‘most brilliant, prolific, and seminal scholars of the last half-century’ in their field, noted that he was such ‘a devoted teacher, generous mentor, and inspiring colleague’ that the ‘warmth, openness, and humanity’ he brought to his personal interactions ‘surpassed even his towering professional accomplishments’.⁵⁹ Vivienne Shue (now Emeritus Leverhulme Professor of Contemporary China Studies at Oxford) wrote: ‘For me, as an assistant professor just starting out at Yale, Al was an immensely inspiring figure.’ And he was one who always offered junior colleagues ‘straight, no-nonsense counsel’, distinguished by its integrity, directness and astuteness.⁶⁰

Graduate students who were, in due course, to become good friends of Stepan could, nevertheless, recall their feelings of nervousness before submitting any work to him. Katherine Hite (now a Professor of Political Science at Vassar) said, ‘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 ‘had to come to graduate seminars absolutely over-prepared’, and a meeting with him on dissertation chapters 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’. But the ‘anxiety was inevitably worth it’, for Al would come up with insights that led to a rethinking of the organisation of the thesis or of its arguments.⁶¹ The editors of the 2012 Festschrift for Stepan described him as a ‘vortex of energy’ who ‘challenges colleagues and students alike’, confronting conventional wisdom and persuading people ‘to reconceptualize problems in researchable ways’, making ‘an art form of collaboration’ in the way he worked with scholars worldwide, and drawing ‘many students into his projects, often giving them an indispensable start on their own careers’.⁶²

Graduate students did not need to be among Stepan’s official supervisees for him to spend a remarkable amount of time helping them to improve their work if it was in a field which interested him and he believed that they were capable of making a serious contribution. Thus, Jeffrey Kahn, now a Professor of Law at Southern Methodist

⁵⁹ ‘Alfred C. Stepan (1936-2017)’, *Journal of Democracy*, 29 (2018), 188–9.

⁶⁰ Vivienne Shue, email to the author of this memoir, 29 September 2017.

⁶¹ ‘Alfred C. Stepan (1936-2017)’, 190.

⁶² Chalmers and Mainwaring, *Problems Confronting Contemporary Democracies*, p. ix.

University, Dallas, remembered a day in Oxford when he was invited to the back garden of Stepan's house in Norham Road to work through the comments the Gladstone Professor had 'inked all over one of my dissertation chapters'. This took an entire afternoon as Stepan thrust page after page 'into my hands with his many suggestions (these were not phrased, I have to admit, as *suggestions* per se; I usually did what I was told, to my ultimate advantage)'. Describing Al Stepan as 'a force of nature', Kahn wrote: 'To be in his company, even for a short time, was an exhilarating experience. When his attention focused on you, the feeling was of being at the center of things with a trusted guide.'⁶³ Tomila Lankina, currently Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics but studying at Oxford when Stepan held the Gladstone Chair, recalled seminars and meetings with him as among her 'most memorable and lasting intellectual experiences' as a doctoral student. Meeting him for the last time early in 2017 (the year of his death), receiving his wise advice on the book she had in progress, and learning about his own recent research visits to Tunisia and lectures in various Asian countries, she was impressed (as were so many) by his 'boundless intellectual curiosity and energy'.⁶⁴

Al Stepan was a self-confident scholar, but never self-satisfied. He was as eager to draw on the expertise of others, not least graduate students and other younger scholars, as he was generous in sharing, with infectious enthusiasm, his own wide-ranging knowledge. Madhulika Banerjee and Yogendra Yadov, the latter of whom was subsequently to become a collaborator with Stepan in research, recalled their first meeting with him in Oxford in 1997. Describing themselves as 'academic nobodies from India', they were overwhelmed by the 'warm and unaffected Al Stepan', an 'internationally acclaimed scholar' who was prepared to spend hours with them. When they later became friends of Stepan, they learned that their experience had been no exception, and that he was 'willing to learn from anyone and everyone, irrespective of their rank or fame'. Writing that Stepan's 'curiosity knew no bounds' and that 'he was willing to go to any length to satisfy it', they added: 'Quite literally. He travelled all the way to Mizoram, a tiny state on the northeastern border of India, just because we were planning to write a few paragraphs on how the insurgency came to an end there.'⁶⁵

⁶³<https://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/about/news/obituary-alfred-stepan> (accessed 7 October 2019). In the Acknowledgements to the book of his thesis, Kahn wrote, 'Professor Alfred Stepan, in the capacity of an unofficial supervisor, was extraordinarily giving of his knowledge and guidance. An hour spent in his company was the equivalent of a full academic conference, but much more enjoyable': J. Kahn, *Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia* (Oxford, 2002), p. vii.

⁶⁴<https://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/about/news/obituary-alfred-stepan>.

⁶⁵'Alfred C. Stepan (1936–2017)', 191.

Reflecting on his relationship with his graduate students, Stepan described it as ‘a lifelong commitment and mutual learning experience’. He continued to talk with his former students ‘to get their feedback on my work and for pure pleasure’. The ‘intensity may taper off’, he said, ‘but it remains a profound relationship. Students are a huge part of one’s personal and professional life. We are in a very special profession that offers a continuous learning experience and many human rewards.’ In what might fittingly serve as his last word on the adviser-graduate student relationship (though it was uttered in October 2003), Al said, ‘It’s not over until it’s over, which means until one of you is dead.’⁶⁶

Stepan’s contribution to scholarship

During well over half a century Stepan was one of the world’s most innovative and influential scholars in the field of comparative politics. The subjects to which he devoted himself were diverse, but they were united by being matters of profound consequence in the real world. They fell into six broad areas: (1) the military in politics; (2) the breakdown of democracy and advent of authoritarianism; (3) pathways from authoritarian rule and transition to and consolidation of democracy; (4) federalism, nationalism, and ‘stateness’; (5) the role of the state and the quality of democracy; and (6) religion and politics (with particular reference to the relationship between religion and democracy).

Stepan’s contribution to the first two of these broad subjects has already been discussed and his work on the third of them has been touched upon. Even as Stepan and his colleague Linz completed their large book on *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* in the late 1970s they were, as has already been noted, turning their attention to transitions from authoritarian rule. Stepan’s contribution to the 1986 collective volume on *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* was concerned with ‘Paths to redemocratization’.⁶⁷ By the time his 1996 book with Linz on democratic transition and consolidation was published, they had also to take account of democratisation processes in countries which had never been democracies in the first place. What happened in the last years of the Soviet Union, and in the early post-Soviet era, in Russia and several other of the successor states was not ‘redemocratization’ but the advent of more democracy and greater freedom than those states had hitherto known.

⁶⁶ Stepan, ‘Democratic governance and the craft of case-based research’, pp. 452–3.

⁶⁷ A. Stepan, ‘Paths toward redemocratization: theoretical and comparative considerations’, in O’Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives*, vol. 3, pp. 64–84.

This made the question whether it could be sustained and consolidated all the more salient.

In his 1986 chapter, written before the geopolitical map of Europe was transformed, Stepan outlined the varied paths as he then saw them which could theoretically lead towards redemocratisation (from which I pick out and italicise three). *Warfare and conquest* had historically been one of them, with Germany and Italy after the Second World War cases in point. As, however, was noted by a former student at Yale of both Linz and Stepan, Robert M. Fishman (now Professor of Sociology at the Carlos III University in Madrid), Stepan ‘appreciated that the successful imposition of democracy by the Allies at the close of World War II was a historically bounded episode, not likely to prove replicable in the future’. Stepan and Linz explicitly warned, prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, that ‘the plan to impose “regime change” on that country by military conquest was likely to lead not to successful democratic consolidation but instead to a far less felicitous outcome’.⁶⁸

The key initiatives in moving away from dictatorial rule could in other instances come *from within the authoritarian regime itself*, as had occurred in post-Franco Spain. Alternatively, *oppositional forces* could play the major role in the transition to democracy. ‘On theoretical grounds’, Stepan wrote apropos the latter point, ‘one is tempted to argue that society-led upheavals *by themselves* are virtually incapable of leading to redemocratization but are, nevertheless, often a crucial, or in some cases an indispensable, component to the redemocratization.’⁶⁹ There remains some force in that argument. It was too early for Stepan to cite it, but Poland was soon to illustrate his point. ‘Solidarity’ had been a mass movement which challenged the very existence of Communist rule in 1980–1, but the regime (with the might of the Soviet Union still standing behind it) had enough strength to impose martial law in December 1981. Solidarity’s leaders were imprisoned, and the movement was confined to a subdued and underground existence. It remained a shadow of its former self until the late 1980s, by which time transformative change in Soviet domestic and foreign policy had dramatically altered the entire political context in East-Central Europe, making possible negotiations between Solidarity and the Polish party-state which facilitated rapid and peaceful transition to democracy.

Stepan was aware that democratic transition and the consolidation of democracy depended not only on institutions but on the values and political skill of leaders. He attached great weight to the collegial and inclusionary style of Adolfo Suárez, the Spanish prime minister who played a key role in Spain’s democratic transition, and

⁶⁸R. M. Fishman, ‘Revisiting “Paths toward redemocratization”’, in Chalmers and Mainwaring (eds.), *Contemporary Democracies*, p. 146.

⁶⁹Stepan, ‘Paths toward redemocratization’, p. 79.

whom he interviewed at length. Examining the Spanish and Russian breaks with authoritarianism, Linz and Stepan in 1996 contrasted Boris Yeltsin's 'winners take all' approach and lack of interest in democratic institution-building with Suárez's consensus-building style and willingness to prioritise what was good for Spanish democracy over clinging to power.⁷⁰ But institutions, as well as people, mattered a great deal, for they could reframe the democratic process. Stepan and Linz dismissed the view that when former Communists formed governments in Central Europe, this signified a 'return to Communism'. As they put it, 'Even if some of the reformed Communists might not actually have undergone profound changes in their mentality (and many, of course, have not) the external reality to which [they] must respond has changed profoundly. As long as democracy is the only game in town, the incentive structure of those who seek governmental power is derived from the democratic context.'⁷¹

For Linz and Stepan the necessary conditions for the completion of transition from authoritarianism to democracy, and for the consolidation of democratic norms and institutions, were: the rule of law and freedom for civil society; the autonomy of political society, meaning, especially, free electoral competition among autonomous political parties; constitutional rules to allocate power democratically; a state bureaucracy that has not been politicised but is professional and capable of serving democratic governments; and sufficient autonomy for economic society to prevent fusion or excessive concentration of political and economic power (a criterion wholly compatible with a mixed ownership economy and regulation of the market).⁷² Working on their magnum opus on democratic transition and consolidation was an illuminating experience for Stepan and Linz. Only after they had completed it, wrote Stepan in 2001, were some things still clearer to them. In particular, 'No state, no democracy. Free and fair elections are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of democracy. A complete "free market" has never existed in a democracy and never can.' Moreover, in the many countries where there was more than one nation, 'nation-state building' and democracy building were conflicting logics. As human beings are capable of sustaining 'multiple and complementary identities', it was up to politicians to 'help create structures of inclusive citizenship' and to deliver a framework of rights, making loyalty towards what Stepan called a 'state-nation' possible.⁷³

That last point leads into consideration of the fourth of the six broad areas of Stepan's work noted earlier—on federalism, nationalism and 'stateness'. Al became

⁷⁰ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, esp. pp. 88–96 and 301–7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 3–15, esp. p. 7.

⁷³ Stepan, *Arguing Comparative Politics*, p. 18.

increasingly impatient with what he regarded as the French conception of the nation-state and the constant talk, even in the twenty-first century, of the need for 'nation-building' in states where this was liable to lead to disaster. His argument was that in countries with a variety of different languages and ethnic groups, state-building was entirely appropriate, but that the attempt to create a single nation in countries with profound cultural diversity, some of it territorially based and politically articulated by significant groups, was a recipe for oppression or civil war.⁷⁴ Contesting 'the old wisdom' that 'the territorial boundaries of a state must coincide with the perceived cultural boundaries of a nation' meant that his argument could be used against a homogenising state *and* against the insistence of different nations within a state that their sense of national identity necessitated their separate statehood. Stepan applied his analysis to many different countries and paid particular attention to India. As he and his co-authors wrote in 2011, 'The anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002 in Gujarat reminds us that the success of a state-nation is contingent on continuous political practices. Creating a state-nation is not a one-shot affair but a continual effort. It also reminds us that what is made can also be unmade. As in the case of nation-states, a state-nation is also a politically imagined community that needs to be sustained through continuous contestation and re-creation in the realm of ideas, institutions, and political practices.'⁷⁵

Stepan recognised that 'nation-state and state-nation at one level are analytic ideal-type distinctions', but they could, nevertheless, be 'operationalized using a range of indicators'.⁷⁶ He challenged the idea that '*only* a nation-state can generate the necessary degree of strong identity and pride in membership of the state that is necessary for a democracy'. Drawing on the findings of the World Values Survey, which included scores for 'strong pride' in belonging to one's country, Stepan noted that the results were 'virtually indistinguishable between nation-states and state-nations, with the latter actually having marginally more pride'.⁷⁷ He devoted a lot of attention to different modes of federalism and the part they could play in sustaining democracy within multinational states. The academic literatures on democracy, federalism, and nationalism had, he noted, developed 'in relatively mutual isolation' from each other, and he did much to bring them together.⁷⁸ 'Asymmetrical federalism', he concluded, on the basis of wide-ranging comparison, could make a huge contribution to the preservation of democracy within a multinational state. Indeed, he went so far as to argue

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 315–61.

⁷⁵ A. Stepan, J. J. Linz and Y. Yadov, *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies* (Baltimore, MD, 2011), p. 88.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷⁸ Stepan, *Arguing Comparative Politics*, pp. 313–61, esp. p. 316.

that ‘it may be true that all democracies that are strongly multinational are federal and asymmetrical’, although that did not mean that they were immune from encouraging polarising identities or from threatening civic peace. Avoiding such calamities required a continuous focus on the political practices and incentives conducive to acceptance of multiple and complementary identities and of democracy.⁷⁹

Stepan and Linz paid attention to the ‘stateness’ question in their analysis of problems of democratisation in the countries emerging from Communist rule. They note that an essential starting point was well expressed by Robert Dahl: ‘*The criteria of the democratic process presuppose the rightfulness of the unit itself.* If the unit itself is not [considered] proper or rightful—if its scope or domain is not justifiable—then it cannot be made rightful simply by democratic procedures.’⁸⁰ A bald insistence on majoritarianism does not resolve the problem if the appropriateness of the unit is not accorded legitimacy.⁸¹ ‘Because political identities are not fixed and permanent’, Linz and Stepan observe, ‘the quality of democratic leadership is particularly important. Multiple and complementary identities can be nurtured by political leadership. So can polar and conflictual political identities.’ Conscious use of ethnic-cleansing as a strategy to construct nation-states in the former Yugoslavia produced civil war and destroyed harmonious inter-communal relations in places where they had previously existed, such as Sarajevo, ‘a multinational urban area, whose citizens had multiple identities and one of the highest rates of interfaith marriages of any city in the world.’⁸²

The fifth broad area identified earlier to which Stepan made an important contribution was on the state and the quality of democracy. He observed that in the democratisation literature, ‘most of the theoretical reflection was on civil society, not enough on political society, and very little about what to do with the coercive apparatus of the state if and when democrats came to power’.⁸³ Yet, ‘if there is no usable state with a democratically controlled coercive apparatus, citizens’ rights cannot be effectively defended in a new democracy’.⁸⁴ Stepan concerned himself also, especially in the last decade of his life, with the quality of democracy in his own country, though the United States counted not only as a thoroughly consolidated democracy but one widely assumed (especially in America) to be an exemplar for the world. In an influential article co-authored with Linz (this time with the names not in alphabetical

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 360.

⁸⁰ R. A. Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven, CT, 1989), p. 207.

⁸¹ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, p. 27.

⁸² Ibid., p. 35.

⁸³ A. Stepan, ‘Introduction’, in A. Stepan (ed.), *Democracies in Danger* (Baltimore, MD, 2009), p. 6.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

order, for it was predominantly Stepan) in a journal of the American Political Science Association, he brought a comparative perspective to the study of the USA.⁸⁵

Stepan and Linz made important points about American political science as well as about the defects of American democracy. Criticising the ‘splendid isolation’ in which the United States is so often studied in American universities, they noted that their country had become ‘the world’s most unequal longstanding democracy in the developed world’, and that the preoccupation of many Americanists with Congress, the presidency and the Supreme Court obscured this important fact and its implications for the US political system.⁸⁶ They pointed to the fading of a tradition whereby some of the most important contributions to an understanding of American politics had been made by scholars who combined comparative research with work on the US—from Robert Dahl and Seymour Martin Lipset to Ira Katznelson. The failure to see the American political system in comparative context was being reinforced by trends in political science teaching. Writing in 2011, they remarked that two generations ago ‘all of the best PhD programs in political science required the demonstration of at least a reading ability in one (or two) foreign languages’, whereas now most of the programmes allowed doctoral candidates to substitute quantitative or formal modelling skills, with academic career incentives perversely promoting monolingualism. Of the twenty-five top PhD programmes in political science, by 2011 only New York University retained an explicit language requirement for all its doctoral candidates.⁸⁷

In their substantive observations on American politics and society, Stepan and Linz focused on two issues in particular—the degree of inequality and the system’s ‘majority-constraining features’. In significant part a product of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, the Civil Rights movement and, not least, Lyndon Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ reforms, the United States achieved in 1968 its best-ever Gini index of inequality (that is, its least unequal). Even then, the authors pointed out, ‘during the heyday of income *equality* in the United States’ no other democracy for which comparable data were available was as *unequal* as the US. They noted that inequality subsequently became substantially greater—from the 1970s onwards—and that ‘by 2009 the US Census Bureau had put the US Gini at .469, America’s worst Gini index in many decades’.⁸⁸

Stepan and Linz saw a link between the ‘inequality inducing’ and ‘majority constraining’ aspects of American politics. The US Constitution, they observed, was by far the most difficult constitution to amend of any democracy, with minorities

⁸⁵ A. Stepan and J. J. Linz, ‘Comparative perspectives on inequality and the quality of democracy in the United States’, *Perspectives on Politics*, 9 (2011), 841–56.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 841 and 853.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 842.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 843–4.

possessing exceptional powers to block the wishes of majorities. That was nowhere more clearly manifested than in the equal representation of every state in a political institution as powerful as the Senate which, at the time they wrote their article, meant that a vote for a Senator in California had sixty-six times less weight than a vote in Wyoming. When there was an 83 per cent vote in the House of Representatives to abolish the Electoral College, the proposal for such a constitutional amendment was, entirely predictably, blocked by the Senate.⁸⁹ The authors were writing before, for the second time in a presidential election this century, the candidate who got fewer votes than his Democratic opponent (almost three million fewer in the case of Donald J. Trump) entered the White House. ‘The time is long past’, Stepan and Linz concluded in 2011, ‘for unthinking acceptance of America’s founding political institutions not only by citizens but also by academics.’⁹⁰ Six years later, in his valedictory piece as editor of the journal which published that article, Jeffrey C. Isaac wrote that the Stepan and Linz contribution had enhanced a much-needed understanding that the United States was a problematic polity among many, rather than being ‘some exceptional “city on a hill”’.⁹¹

Finally, we come to Stepan’s major interest in religion and politics, the subject which most preoccupied him during his last two decades. The very name of the ‘Center for the Study of Democracy, Tolerance and Religion’ he founded at Columbia indicated the scope of his concern with a major real-world problem—a world in which inter-communal and intra-communal conflict on religious lines and pretexts is pervasive. In several publications, Stepan elaborated his argument about the ‘twin tolerations’ that are needed if religion and democracy are to co-exist harmoniously within a given society.⁹² This meant establishing, on the one side, acceptable boundaries of freedom of action for political institutions vis-à-vis religious authorities and, on the other side, for religious individuals and groups vis-à-vis political institutions. Since democracy, wrote Stepan, is, among other things, ‘a system of conflict regulation that allows open competition over the values and goals that citizens want to advance’, this meant that ‘as long as groups do not use violence, do not violate the rights of other citizens, and stay within the rules of the democratic game, *all* groups are granted the right to advance their interests, both in civil society and in political society’.⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 844–6.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 853.

⁹¹ J. C. Isaac, ‘Making America great again?’, *Perspectives on Politics*, 15 (2017), 626.

⁹² Most notably in A. Stepan, ‘Religion, democracy, and the “twin tolerations”’, *Journal of Democracy*, 11 (2000), 37–57; and, in a fuller version, A. Stepan, ‘The world’s religious systems and democracy: crafting the “twin tolerations”’, in Stepan, *Arguing Comparative Politics*, pp. 213–53.

⁹³ ‘Religion, democracy, and the “twin tolerations”’, 37; and ‘The world’s religious systems and democracy’, p. 216.

Having set out (in greater detail, of course) what he meant by the ‘twin tolerations’, Stepan was able to show that these have been respected at various times, including those we are living through, and in various places by each of the world’s major religions. It was, he readily acknowledged, no less true that every one of those religions had on other occasions and in other places been brutally intolerant. He was sharply critical of Samuel Huntington’s ‘civilizational’ approach, summarised as: in Islam God is Caesar, in Confucianism Caesar is God, and in Orthodoxy God is Caesar’s junior partner. Stepan observed that all the world’s major religions harbour diversity of belief and practices. He was a vigorous contributor to the debate on whether or not Islam is compatible with democracy, noting that while some strands of that religion are at odds with democracy, there are other strands which are compatible with democratic norms. His more empirical answer to the question was to point to the fact that several hundred million people have experienced democracy in countries in which the main religion has been Islam.⁹⁴

Stepan noted that at one time there was a widespread belief, certainly by many Protestants, that if Catholicism was the main religion within a state, the chances of that country becoming a democracy were negligible. Yet, while the Catholic Church had, indeed, often been closely allied with authoritarian right-wing regimes, there were by now so many examples of predominantly Catholic, yet democratic, countries that the notion of such incompatibility was clearly untenable. Countries of ‘Confucian civilization’ (in Huntington’s terms) were regarded as ill-equipped to make a transition from authoritarian rule, with China cited as the prime example. Yet democracy was vibrant enough in South Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

On the question of Islam and democracy, Stepan took a particularly keen interest in Tunisia, the one country where the high hopes of democracy raised by the ‘Arab Spring’ had not been extinguished at the time of his death.⁹⁵ Between March 2011 and January 2017, he made seven research visits to Tunisia (the last of them less than nine months before he died) and spoke with the main political and religious leaders. Especially notable among them was Rached Ghannouchi, the leader and founder of Tunisia’s main Islamist movement and political party who was at the same time an influential proponent of the compatibility of Islam and western-style democracy. Stepan’s first interviews with him took place in London and Oxford in 1997 when

⁹⁴ A. Stepan, ‘The multiple secularisms of modern democratic and non-democratic regimes’, in C. Calhoun, M. Juergensmeyer and J. Van Antwerpen (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism* (New York, 2011), pp. 114–44, esp. 136–7. Writing in early 2013, Stepan and Linz observed that ‘close to 300 million Muslims have been living under democracy for each of the past ten years in the Muslim-majority countries of Albania, Indonesia, Senegal, and Turkey’: A. Stepan and J. J. Linz, ‘Democratization theory and the “Arab Spring”’, *Journal of Democracy*, 24 (2013), 17.

⁹⁵ A. Stepan, ‘Tunisia’s transition and the twin tolerations’, *Journal of Democracy*, 23 (2012), 89–103.

Ghannouchi was in exile. Following imprisonment in Tunisia, Ghannouchi left his native country in 1989 and successfully claimed political asylum in Britain in the early 1990s. After more than two decades in exile, he returned to Tunis at the end of January 2011. Less than two months later Stepan was there to see him, and they met on each of his subsequent visits to Tunisia. It was a two-way process. Ghannouchi was interested in Stepan's ideas on, and knowledge of, democratic transitions and on religion and democracy, while Stepan was greatly impressed by Ghannouchi and the part he was playing in promoting religious and political tolerance in an Islamic country emerging from authoritarian rule.⁹⁶ In Stepan's view, 'the more political actors do', in such circumstances, 'to reach consensual agreement on the rules of democratic contestation by negotiating among themselves, the better'. Tunisia in 2011 was following that course, while Egypt was doing the reverse.⁹⁷

It was during one of Stepan's research trips to Tunisia that in 2013 he met the young scholar Monica Marks who was based there, conducting, as she put it, 'riveting interviews' but completely unsure about the direction of her doctoral research. As she discovered, 'Instead of sloughing off young scholars, Professor Stepan sought their expertise in the field.' She proceeded to sit in on most of his Tunisian interviews, including those in January 2017 when he was conducting up to six of them a day. Dr Marks (as she now is) wrote: 'The tenacious energy with which he approached his sharply insightful, question-driven research and the genuine concern he had for Tunisia, its people, and the survival of its fragile young democracy were unparalleled.'⁹⁸

Stepan also interviewed major Islamic political figures in Indonesia, Turkey and Iran, but the country, in addition to Tunisia, to which he devoted special attention was the West African state of Senegal. He spent time there and conducted extensive interviews with Senegalese religious and political leaders. Some of his writing on Senegal, especially on 'rituals of respect', could have come from the hand of an anthropologist, had it not been for the fact that he used quantitative data (as he did whenever relevant survey research existed, often commissioning such research himself) as well as qualitative.⁹⁹

⁹⁶See A. Stepan, 'Multiple but complementary, not conflictual, leaderships: the Tunisian democratic transition in comparative perspective', *Daedalus*, 145 (3) (2016), esp. 101 and 105–6.

⁹⁷Stepan, 'Tunisia's transition and the twin tolerations', 95.

⁹⁸M. Marks, 'Foreword', in A. Stepan (ed.), *Democratic Transition in the Muslim World: a Global Perspective* (New York, 2018), p. x. This was Stepan's final book. It was just going to press at the time of his death in September 2017. His own chapter in it is called 'Mutual accommodation: Islamic and secular parties and Tunisia's democratic transition', pp. 43–71. He accorded pride of place as author of the opening chapter to an important contribution by Rached Ghannouchi.

⁹⁹A. Stepan, 'Rituals of respect: sufis and secularists in Senegal in comparative perspective', *Comparative Politics*, 4 (2012), 379–401: 'Institutions matter', wrote Stepan, 'and I have devoted much of my scholarly life to studying them.' But 'Respect matters, too, and it is more difficult for institutionalists to study', he noted (p. 380), before going on to examine rituals in relation to inter-religious and intra-religious

While his many friends, colleagues and readers of his academic work greatly miss Al Stepan—as, still more, do his devoted family—one loss which should not go unnoticed is the book he had embarked on when cancer overtook him in the summer of 2017 and developed very fast. The divisiveness and aggressive rhetoric of such a president as Donald Trump made it the more essential, Stepan felt, to get his ideas on Islam and democracy across to a broader public. He had been thinking of doing this for some years, but his more specialised writing took precedence. However, he had produced a substantial outline and had made a start on a book aimed at a general readership which was to be called *The Minaret and the Ballot Box*. Whether it will be published in its outline form or filled out by another scholar, drawing on the substantial body of more specialised work Stepan produced on this subject, remains at the time of writing uncertain. That he did not live long enough to bring the book to completion himself is a matter of huge regret. With his journalistic experience in his earlier years, together with the vast knowledge he had accumulated over a lifetime, Al was more than capable of putting into plain and expressive language a narrative that would have challenged much of the conventional wisdom on Islam and democracy, while not glossing over the problems.

Stepan was realistic enough to caution social scientists and policymakers not to ‘deceive themselves that all problems are solvable’. But, he added, ‘we should also be aware that more appropriate, more timely actions might prevent some solvable problems from *becoming* insolvable’.¹⁰⁰ At heart, he remained an optimist, and one always on the lookout for ways to turn his deep academic knowledge to practical use. It may be fitting to give the last word to one of the many younger scholars who, regardless of whether or not they were one of Al Stepan’s official supervisees, gained so much from having him as a mentor. Monica Marks concluded her Foreword to Al’s posthumously published edited volume, *Democratic Transition in the Muslim World*, by writing: ‘To have known Professor Stepan was to have received a rare education and to have encountered an extraordinary role model in research and in life. We are all in his debt.’¹⁰¹

Acknowledgements

I am particularly grateful to Nancy Leys Stepan for answering a number of my questions, for our conversations about her late husband, for reading (with a critical eye) what I have written, and for our long friendship. To Adam Stepan I owe thanks for sending a number of photographs of his father, from which we have chosen to accompany this memoir the official Columbia University portrait of Alfred Stepan

toleration in Senegal. See also A. Stepan, ‘Stateness, democracy, and respect: Senegal in comparative perspective’, in M. Diouf (ed.), *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal* (New York, 2013), pp. 205–38.

¹⁰⁰ Stepan et al., *Crafting State-Nations*, p. 275.

¹⁰¹ Marks, ‘Foreword’, p. x.

when he was Dean of its School of International and Public Affairs in the 1980s. I am much indebted also to a number of scholars who knew Al Stepan and his work—former doctoral students and friends of even longer standing—who read and commented on my draft of this memoir. In revising it, I have taken account of their valuable comments to make some additions and amendments. In alphabetical order, they are: Alan Angell (St Antony's College, Oxford); Dr Jonathan Becker (Bard College); Professor Jeffrey Kahn (Southern Methodist University); Professor Katherine Hite (Vassar College); Professor Tomila Lankina (London School of Economics); Professor Steven Lukes (New York University); Professor Scott Mainwaring (Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University); Professor Stephen Whitefield (Pembroke College, Oxford); and Dr Michael Willis (St Antony's College). I am grateful also to Professor Vivienne Shue (St Antony's College) for sharing her memories of Al Stepan at Yale.

My own four decades of friendship with Al Stepan included periods when we were colleagues not only in Oxford but also in the United States when I was a Visiting Professor of Political Science at Yale in 1980 and at Columbia in 1985. I have, accordingly, been able to draw on many conversations with Al in different places (Budapest and Moscow, among them) over the years. In some passages of this memoir, I have drawn lightly on a review article I published in *Government and Opposition*, 49 (2014), 313–30—'Alfred Stepan and the study of comparative politics'—and I am grateful to the journal's editors, Professors Laura Cram and Erik Jones, for granting permission to do so. The fullest appreciation of Alfred Stepan's work is to be found in the Festschrift edited by Douglas Chalmers and Scott Mainwaring, *Problems Confronting Contemporary Democracies: Essays in Honor of Alfred Stepan* (Notre Dame, IN, 2012), in which the editors and contributors engage with many of the issues of central concern to Stepan. The single most useful source on Stepan's life is the long interview he gave to Richard Snyder in Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder, *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics* (Baltimore, MD, 2007), pp. 392–455. Further illuminating reading in the same Munck and Snyder volume for anyone interested not only in Alfred Stepan but also in the big questions with which he engaged is the interview by Snyder with Juan J. Linz, 'Political regimes and the quest for knowledge', pp. 150–209.

Note on the author: Archie Brown is Emeritus Professor of Politics at the University of Oxford, and Emeritus Fellow of St Antony's College. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1991.

