

Part I - Analyze Seminar/Lecture/Tutorial Discussion

Civil society is a community of citizens linked by common interests and collective activity. In civil society, individuals and organizations are independent of government and serve to keep the government transparent. Discussions on civil society are often related to democracy, as many scholars believe that when civil society is diminished, democracy is threatened. This idea was first raised by Alexis de Tocqueville in his book *Democracy in America*. He argued that for democracy to function properly there must be a robust civil society. A robust civil society can be defined as a society with strong cross connections between people in that society, including people of different ethnicities, religions, values, opinions, etc. Democracies run effectively if groups of people with like values and expectations lobby government, and monitor the conduct of public officials to ensure access to information and accountability without corruption. In the 1990s, Robert D. Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, reinforced Tocqueville's initial claim, but added a warning that civil society is getting less diverse, which will ultimately hurt democracy. Essentially Putnam was suggesting that people are not interacting enough anymore. Regardless of Putnam's opinion, the main point still remains that without a robust civil society, democracy is in jeopardy. British theorist John Keane agrees with de Tocqueville and Putnam that a cross-connecting society is important to democracy. He states, "Where there is no civil society there cannot be citizens with capabilities to choose their identities, entitlements and duties within a political-legal framework" (Keane, 1998). As a part of democracy, citizens have to be able to assemble and interact with one another. Without this important aspect, it is impossible to come to a consensus on issues. A robust civil society produces the ability for citizens to determine conflict amongst the society and then attempt to resolve this conflict through compromise. In the absence of conflict management and compromise, democracy does not exist. Professor of Politics Jan Aart Scholte supports this idea stating that, "...civic bodies can provide opportunities for concerned parties to relay information, testimonial, and analysis to governance agencies" (Scholte, 2002). As democracy is the rule of the people, it is crucial that citizens have the capability to interact and form associations to get their voices heard. If this does not happen, it is difficult to argue that citizens are being truly represented, and without proper representation, democracy fails. Therefore, it is clear that without the active participation of citizens, a robust civil society does not exist and democracy is jeopardized.

References

Keane, John (1998): *Civil Society: Old images, New visions*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Scholte, J (2002). *Civil Society and Democracy in Global Governance*, 8(3), 281-304. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27800346>

Part II - Analyze Readings

Reading: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way

The topic of the article *The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism* by Steven Lewitzky and Lucan Way revolves around competitive authoritarian political regimes and what they entail. A competitive authoritarian regime is a specific type of regime that appears to be democratic, but acts in an authoritarian way. With this considered, it is important that competitive authoritarian regimes be viewed as distinct from democracies and full-scale authoritarian regimes. Firstly, competitive authoritarian regimes must be differentiated from democracy. In the modern world, in order for a regime to be considered democratic it must meet certain requirements, including free and fair elections, citizens have the right to vote, elected officials possess authority to govern, and citizens have rights and freedoms that are protected. At first glance, competitive authoritarian regimes may appear to meet these democratic requirements, but in fact, the requirements are often infringed upon to the point that the political arena is unfair and political competitors do not have a legitimate opportunity to take power. Consider Stephanie Matti's analyses of the Democratic Republic of Congo in which she explains that "Due to the repression of the opposition figures, the lack of power invested in the judiciary, and the targeting of media freedom, the Kabila regimes do not meet the minimal requirements for democracy" (Matti, 2010). Although, like in the Democratic Republic of Congo, elections are free and fair, competitive authoritarian regimes often include manipulation of the media, abuse of resources, and manipulation of the opposition making it difficult for them to take power. Thus, it is crucial to differentiate between democracies and competitive authoritarian regimes. Secondly, competitive authoritarianism must be separate from full-scale authoritarianism. Like competitive authoritarianism, full-scale authoritarian regimes can appear to be democratic. However, instead of infringing on democratic rules and regulations, full-scale authoritarian regimes are able to completely eliminate them, or at the very least, reduce them to the point where they are almost non-existent. On the other hand, competitive authoritarian regimes are more likely to use its government agencies, such as the judiciary, to manipulate the rules. In full-scale authoritarian regimes it is almost impossible for opposition of the regime to rightfully take power, due to the elimination of these rules. This can be further contrasted to competitive authoritarianism in which oppositions have the chance to take power through free and fair elections, even though it might be difficult. Thus, it is clear that competitive authoritarianism does not meet the requirements to be considered a democracy, and is it is not full-scale authoritarianism, so it must be clearly differentiated.

- 1) What is the difference between competitive authoritarianism and democracy?
- 2) What is the difference between competitive authoritarianism and full-scale authoritarianism?

References

Matti, S. (2010). The Democratic Republic of the Congo? Corruption, Patronage, and Competitive Authoritarianism in the DRC. *Africa Today*, 56(4), 42-61.
doi:10.2979/aft.2010.56.4.42

Part III - Connect Analysis of Current Events/Social Media

“Pundits: Illiberalism Poses Threat to Democracy”

By: James Dean

Oct 7, 2019

<https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2019/10/pundits-illiberalism-poses-threat-democracy>

The article *Pundits: Illiberalism Poses a Threat to Democracy* summarizes a conversation between conservative author Andrew Sullivan and Vox editor Ezra Klein discussing the state of democracy in America. Although neither side clearly wins this debate, both make interesting claims that will be discussed further. Sullivan makes a bold argument that the American society and political system is moving towards an anti-liberal democracy. In this case, liberal is not referring to a political ideology, but rather the liberties of individuals in that society. Sullivan points to the decline of civil society as a cause of this illiberal movement, “People feel adrift because institutions including the church, which provided a sense of identity and shared values, have broken down.” A robust civil society is often seen as one of the most significant promoters of liberal democracy. So naturally, if the civil society in America is indeed declining, meaning less associations and interactions between individuals, then it is fair to say that this could lead to illiberal ways. On the other hand, Klein does not believe America is headed for illiberalism and claims structural breakdowns are the cause of the political turmoil. Yet one claim he makes appears to support Sullivan’s argument. He points to the Republicans ability to take power without a majority vote, as a structural breakdown. Indeed a structural breakdown, but one that directly suggests an illiberal democracy. In a liberal democracy individuals have the right to vote for representatives, but in this scenario a representative with minority votes rose to power, therefore it was not the representative the people elected. This supports the idea of illiberal democracy where citizens can vote, but are not necessarily represented properly.

“Democracy in retreat” Freedom in the World 2019

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/democracy-in-retreat>

The article *Democracy in Retreat* discusses the idea that democracy is in danger globally, based on data collected and analysed by Freedom in the World. It states that we are currently in the 13th consecutive year that global freedom is in decline, indicating that liberal democracies

are failing worldwide. It points the blame to authoritarian governments who put on the facade of democracy, to corruption in post-cold war democracies, and to populist political forces that jeopardize long-standing democracies. This makes me wonder, is democracy truly in jeopardy or are we seeing a reverse wave of democracy like we have in the past? The concept of *waves of democracy* comes from Samuel Huntington who put forward his 3 waves of democratization theory in the 1990s. Huntington defines a wave as a group of transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes occurring in a specified time period. Further, the number of transitions must greatly outnumber those in the time period before and after. One phenomenon that occurs after a wave of democratization is something called a reverse wave or a counter-wave, where the opposite effect takes place. A reverse wave can be considered as democratic down sliding, meaning that countries who have recently democratized may fall back into their old authoritarian ways. We saw this phenomenon take place after the first two waves, where after the rise of so many democracies, many fell back into anti-democratic systems. With the third wave peaking at the start of the 1990's, I believe it is fair to think that democracy may not be facing the immediate danger as this article is claiming. Instead, we may just be seeing the process of democratization run its natural course.