

## **The Crisis of Liberal Democracy**

Student Name

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Due Date

## The Crisis of Liberal Democracy

Liberal democracy refers to a form of government where representative democracy is practiced. Under such governments, the powers to make decisions by the people who are elected as representatives are regulated by the constitution. Such constitution ensures that the rights and freedoms of the people are protected.<sup>1</sup> It also puts restrictions on the leaders and the extent to which the majority rule can be applied against the rights of the minority groups.

- The rights and freedoms that are protected by the constitution under liberal democracies vary and usually includes;
- The right of every individual to due process and fair hearing,
- The people's rights to privacy, rights to own property and the right for equal treatment before the law.
- The constitution also provides for such freedoms as the freedoms of speech, freedom to assemble and expression of one's religion.<sup>2</sup>

Major characteristics of liberal democracies are pluralism and tolerance. These characteristics offer wide and differing views, both socially and politically. All the members of the society are allowed the the equal chance of existence and are free to compete freely and fairly for political power. Elections are periodically held in liberal democracies.<sup>3</sup>This

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<sup>1</sup>Avery Leiserson and David Beetham, "Max Weber And The Theory Of Modern Politics", *The American Political Science Review* 71, no. 2 (1977): 631.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Seidman and Rogers Brubaker, "The Limits Of Rationality: An Essay On The Social And Moral Thought Of Max Weber.", *Social Forces* 64, no. 2 (1985): 516.

<sup>3</sup>Shadia Drury, "The Crisis Of Liberal Democracy: A Straussian Perspective Kenneth L. Deutsch And Walter Soffer Eds. Albany: State University Of New York Press, 1987, Pp. Ix, 304", *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 21, no. 01 (1988): 204.

provides a platform for groups who have differing political views to compete and achieve political power effectively. Since these elections are practically won by groups that support liberal democracy, the system automatically perpetuates itself.

### **Crisis of liberal democracy**

While liberal democracy presents a favorable political and social environment regarding protection of individual rights and the interests of the minority, the world has had serious cases of crises in liberal democracies. There have been cases where the rights of the individuals are completely abused, the interests of the minorities are ignored, and those opposed to the ruling governments are seriously oppressed. These scenarios have mainly been witnessed in developing nations of Africa, the Arab countries and some countries in the Latin America.<sup>4</sup>

People have always believed that free markets are identical to free societies. Besides believing that neoliberal capitalism goes along with liberal democracy. Everyone buys into the idea that there is no alternative. Right from the 2008 financial crisis to the political crisis of the modern era, all the ways leading to democratic transformation have been barred at every single turn.<sup>5</sup> The wills of the majority have always been subordinated to the will of the few. Mostly, politicians lean towards the whims of the wealthy as opposed to that of the majority. In fact, it can be concluded that today, the majority does not rule and whenever the majority differs in opinion with the economic elites, the majority is bound to lose. The bias of

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<sup>4</sup> David W. Tarbet, Michael Foucault and Alan Sheridan, "Discipline And Punish: The Birth Of The Prison.", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 11, no. 4 (1978): 509.

<sup>5</sup> NanetteFunk, JurgenHabermas and Thomas McCarthy, "The Theory Of Communicative Action. Vol. 1: Reason And The Rationalization Of Society.", *The Philosophical Review* 95, no. 2 (1986): 269.

class does not only cost people their democracy, but it also costs them their jobs, health, and security.<sup>6</sup>

The social theory of Max Weber doubts if the goal of liberalism that rationalizes the society is possible to develop such that it becomes consistent with politics **that are normatively grounded**. He feels that the liberalism perspective is no longer able to offer conceptions of neither social order nor the freedoms that can independently stand as the important foundation of moral meaning and value.<sup>7</sup> His agreement partially draws from the insight into the indeterminate social freedom of the people. However, the misconception that exists between Weber's perspective and the perspective of the liberalism is mainly brought about by the former's accounts of developmental paradoxes concerning the rationalism of the present culture.

### **Practical failure of liberalism**

After the institutionalization of the rationalization of administration and capitalism in the contemporary world, the vocational depersonalization of conduct was no longer able to give a proving ground for the commitment of individuals to their spiritual and cultural values. Depersonalization of authority and power would be the expression of commitment to rationality. However, the growth of depersonalization represents a functional imperative that connects to the use of the standardized and calculated process in law, administration, capital

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<sup>6</sup>Gerd Schroeter and Charles Turner, "Modernity And Politics In The Work Of Max Weber.", *Contemporary Sociology* 22, no. 5 (1993): 754.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Kellner and Jurgen Habermas, "Moral Consciousness And Communicative Action.", *Contemporary Sociology* 21, no. 2 (1992): 278.

accounting and factory discipline.<sup>8</sup> Weber recommends societies to adopt an ethics of responsibility requiring them to express forbearance towards the demands of the life order that a person is placed.

According to Leo Strauss, Weber only shares the adherence of social science to method but not to evaluative reason. His primacy of methods forces the social science to separate objectivity from particular values or ideologies. Based on this, social sciences can claim an achievement into the insight of the real nature of value systems hence the qualification to analyze them from an objective point of view. Weber believes that the reductionist thinking can only be avoided by distinguishing facts and values.<sup>9</sup>

### **The crisis of liberalism**

Social sciences are important to us in clarifying and explaining how commitments can influence the horizon of human actions to values.<sup>10</sup> To this extent, the claim is that; no truth about culture is knowledgeable if it is not the truth about truth. Social sciences do not only begin with the respect for ideas that are influential but also with the acceptance that it may be

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<sup>8</sup> Akihiko Mougi and Kinya Nishimura, "A Resolution Of The Paradox Of Enrichment", *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 248, no. 1 (2007): 194-201.

<sup>9</sup> Leon Mayhew, "In Defense Of Modernity: Talcott Parsons And The Utilitarian Tradition", *American Journal of Sociology* 89, no. 6 (1984): 1273-1305.

<sup>10</sup> John O'Neill, "Religion And Postmodernism: The Durkheimian Bond In Bell And Jameson", *Theory, Culture & Society* 5, no. 2 (1988): 493-508.

ignorant to believe that conservative facts can be surpassed by truths of nature, implying the discovery of what is good or best and highest in the life of humans human.<sup>11</sup>

The founders of the modern school of thought should shoulder much of the blame. These founders viewed nature as an original lost state that man is trying to recover using culture as the main supplement.<sup>12</sup>

Liberal democracy, also referred to as high-quality **democracy, refers to majority rule**. The majority has their sovereignty, and they exercise control over the governance of a nation. It is characterized by competition, vertical accountability, and responsiveness.

It also entails the liberal government, which mostly talks about the rights of the majority. The majority have the right to **exercise their freedom**, equality in the distribution of resources and civic culture. The third aspect of the liberal democracy entails good governance<sup>13</sup>. In good governance, the rule of law has to be strictly followed by the office holders. There also has to be horizontal accountability in all spheres and effectiveness in the running of state affairs. All the three are examples of liberal democracy. The minimum level of democracy allows the people to choose and replace their leaders in a free and fair election.

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<sup>11</sup>Richard Rorty, "Truth And Freedom: A Reply To Thomas Mccarthy", *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 3 (1990): 633-643.

<sup>12</sup> Guy Oakes, ""Rickert's Value Theory And The Foundations Of Weber's Methodology"", *Sociological Theory* 6, no. 1 (1988): 38.

<sup>13</sup> T. Burger, "Social Systems And The Evolution Of Action Theory. By Talcott Parsons. New York: Free Press, 1977. 429 Pp. \$15.95 And The Evolution of Societies. By Talcott Parsons (Edited By Jackson Toby). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977. 269 Pp. Cloth, \$11.95; Paper, \$6.95", *Social Forces* 57, no. 1 (1978): 308-310.

For a certain period, the world was in equilibrium but has yet tilted towards a mild recession of freedom and democracy. As such, the world may be tilting into a global crisis of democracy and potentially even into the third reverse wave of democratic breakdown. During such periods, the number of reversals from democracy considerably goes beyond the number of transitions to democracy. As earlier mentioned, electoral democracy is a minimal form of political democracy.<sup>14</sup> During the past decades, electoral democracy has greatly extended to reach the peak in 2005. The major reason behind the breakdown of liberal democracy is that many of the electoral democracies were not democracies in the first place; instead, they were authoritarian regimes. There is great difficulty in establishing the line between electoral democracies and authoritative regimes<sup>15</sup>.

In a comparison of countries, it becomes clear that countries that have descended from electoral democracy to competitive authoritarianism, freedom houses have been slow in recognizing the descent. This is evident in Russia where it happened earlier under president Putin. The same state of affairs has been experienced in Venezuela and Nigeria.

### **Democratic recession**

As already indicated, most electoral democracies picked in 2005, and there has been a lot of in and out movements since then with not much improvement recorded. Currently, freedom house accounts for around 122 democracies. While electoral democracies may be defined as countries with free and fair elections though not liberal, competitive authoritarian

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<sup>14</sup>Walter B. Mead, "Participatory Democracy \* Carole Pateman: Participation And Democratic Theory. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. Pp. 122. \$4.95.)", *The Review of Politics* 36, no. 01 (1974): 205.

<sup>15</sup>Blaine McBurney et al., "Max Weber's "Science As A Vocation."", *Contemporary Sociology* 19, no. 4 (1990): 631.

democracies regimes do not meet the conditions of democracy despite having multiple political parties.<sup>16</sup>

For each of the last ten years, the freedom house has made a rather disturbing judgment. The judgment looks at the changes in its more refined point scores, the ones making up the scales of political rights and civil liberties. For each of the last ten years, the number of countries improving their freedom scores has only been roughly half of those declining in the same. All this has been happening during a period of overall democratic expansion in the world. The fall of democracies below a certain threshold is what is referred to by the freedom house as the breakdown of democracy<sup>17</sup>. Nearly 30 percent of all the electoral democracies that existed between 1991 and 2005 ended up failing. A majority of the breakdown though, have seen a return to democracy. In some cases, the breakdown has been experienced more than once. Around one-third of the democracies in the world have experienced failure with some returning and others failing to return to democracy after some period.

### **Democratic erosion in Africa**

It is no surprise that democratic erosion is more pronounced in Africa. It is evident in the political-sociological theory about the conditions that are strongly related to the economic development, well-developed state, and the educated population. Africa is the region of the world where all these conditions are least present. This explains the reason why democracy

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<sup>16</sup> Barry Hindess, "Book Reviews : MAX WEBER's 'SCIENCE AS A VOCATION'". Edited By Peter Lassman And Irving Velody. London, Unwin Hyman, 1989. Xviii + 220Pp. \$98", *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 27, no. 2 (1991): 256-2577

<sup>17</sup>Lawrence A. Scaff, "Fleeing The Iron Cage: Politics And Culture In The Thought Of Max Weber", *The American Political Science Review* 81, no. 3 (1987): 737.

has not emerged very much in the continent and in cases where it did; it experienced many problems.

Authoritarianism characterizes the continent; the countries mostly do not meet the standard conditions for electoral democracy. There are multiple political parties, some uncertainties in elections, the opposition parties, can win a significant share of electoral seats in the parliament or assembly, and whenever there is a presidential election, there is perhaps at least a possible share of the presidential votes. Authoritarian regime states are not always politically competitive in this way.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the continent can be projected to be moving towards the right direction. Usually, though not always, the regime is more oppressive. Evidently, this category of liberal democracy has been gaining a lot of momentum.

During the period starting 1991 through the 1990s to the year 2005, democracy was in a sense, the geopolitical sense of power and a sense of the negative about regimes in Africa. The Soviet Union had collapsed, and China was not so much present in the minds of the authoritarian African rulers.<sup>19</sup> The democracy donors or rather the states that gave aid to Africa such as the U.S, Canada, the European Union, and the individual European donors were starting in a variety of ways to condition their aid on democracy and better governance.

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<sup>18</sup> John H. Hallowell, "Natural Right And History. By Strauss Leo. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press. 1953. Pp. X, 327. \$5.00.)", *American Political Science Review* 48, no. 02 (1954): 538-541.

<sup>19</sup> Richard O. Nahrendorf, Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, "Max Weber On The Methodology Of The Social Sciences.", *American Sociological Review* 14, no. 6 (1949): 821.

The pressure was mounting to at least move in a democratic direction or at least have some semblance of the same and not just look nakedly authoritarian.<sup>20</sup>

In sub-Saharan Africa, democracy reached its highpoint in the early 2000s. However, for the last few years, there has been a downward trend. There is an element of vulnerability on the ground. Given the geopolitical balance in the world, with China's rising advantage in development systems, Europe and America's lack of inspiration as a model for democracy, and the declining willingness of the European Union and the United States to continue to exert advantage for democracy.<sup>21</sup> Another factor is the increasingly conflicting imperatives of the global war on terror, struggle for resources, and struggle for markets, among others. Some of the countries under the authoritarian regime no longer even see the need to gesture at multipartyism.

### **Erosion of democracy in Latin America**

The following are some of the key areas of liberal democracy crisis in the Latin America;

- The deepening populist authoritarianism in Venezuela.
- The breakdown/decline of democracy in Nicaragua
- Incipient populist authoritarian leadership in Bolivia and Ecuador
- Between the years of 2005 and 2013, seven countries deteriorated in the free house score while another four improve in the same score.

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<sup>20</sup>Sheldon S. Wolin, "Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, And The Politics Of Theory", *Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (1981): 401-424.

<sup>21</sup>Alan Gewirth and Bernard Williams, "Ethics And The Limits Of Philosophy.", *Noûs* 22, no. 1 (1988): 143.

The illiberal populism has been an Avenger, quiet broader in Latin America. In some way, it is the movements of lower class people who have been excluded from the distribution of benefits, not well empowered by the pre-existing institutions, and who are certainly heavily marginalized by the two-party dominant system.<sup>22</sup> The systems are, for example very corrupt in countries like Venezuela and has prevailed for years and are not adapted to incorporate the people. The same situation is characteristic of Bolivia and Ecuador. In these Latin American countries, there have been trends regarding the intimidation of the media and the political opponents<sup>23</sup>. This element delegitimizes their position as electoral democracies. These trends crease these states into the descent into some form of authoritarian democracies. A country like Venezuela, for instance, is slipping into possible large-scale violence, organized civil strife, and an increasingly desperate regime. The absence of a level playing field in the elections of these states. Furthermore, the regime takes crude, oppressive, violent and oppressive approach to deal with the opposition. As a result, several young people lose their lives as crimes escalate out of control. The looming partial state disintegration may be the only way that the country gets rid of the steepening authoritarianism. However, such disintegration is not a favorable condition for any democracy.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Paul Silverman, "Political Theology: Four Chapters On The Concept Of Sovereignty. Carl Schmitt , George Schwabthe Crisis Of Parliamentary Democracy. Carl Schmitt , Ellen Kennedypolitical Romanticism. Carl Schmitt , Guy Oakes", *The Journal of Modern History* 62, no. 1 (1990): 101-105.

<sup>23</sup>Michael Walzer, "I. Liberalism And The Art Of Separation", *Political Theory* 12, no. 3 (1984): 315-330.

<sup>24</sup>Brian Barry, "Liberalism And The Limits Of Justice. Michael J. Sandel", *Ethics* 94, no. 3 (1984): 523-525.

## **The Arab freeze**

Under the Arab community, the following are some of the cases under which crisis in liberal democracy is seen.

- The implosion of authoritarianism in Egypt

The authoritarian explosion in Egypt has been in the process of creating a more oppressive and vindictive state against the opposition than any oppression seen in Egypt for decades. There were tones of demonization of the opposition and arrests of civil society activists. These events turned Egypt in a very hard and ugly authoritarian direction.

- The crushing of the Arab spring in Bahrain

The brutality of the crackdown in Bahrain crashed what was otherwise a peaceful movement for democratic change. Such a movement could be willing to incorporate the minority and work out some deal for their inclusion.<sup>25</sup> The invasion by the U.S troops and the imposition of brutal political orders are just some of the factors that have further led to an increased decline in liberal democracy.

- The fragmentation that occurred in Libya

- The recurrent civil wars in Syria.

- The unstable spillovers of Syrian civil war in Jordan and Lebanon.

The possible explanation of all these happenings can be said to be the Muslim Brotherhood. The vote that the Arab states tend to cast for the fellowship may not be for religious reasons. The question that the Arab societies should be asking is whether future

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<sup>25</sup>T. H. Minshall, "Swiss Neutrality, Its History And Meaning", *International Affairs* 23, no. 1 (1947): 116-117.

elections will be free and fair, whether they will be open to real contestation hence future evaluation of governments' performance.<sup>26</sup>

Despite all these declining trends, there are some reasons for some hope. The emergence of the first array of democracy witnessed in at least 40 years in Tunisia. The second is a national dialogue conference process that gets facilitated by the United Nations mediation team.<sup>27</sup> This dialogue may not have created a framework in the whole of Yemen, but at least created a framework in which constitutional negotiations can proceed in Myanmar.

A comparison of the free house scores of the years 2010 and 2013 of the 16 Arab states found in the Middle East and the North Africa, it does not give a good picture of democratic progress. There has been more of regression in progress with just one success story of Tunisia.

### **Other reasons for concern**

When the danger of crisis is liberal, democracy creeps in, among many of the things that society needs to be worried about is the deepening authoritarianism. For instance, in countries like Russia and China, which has continued its economic dynamism, political self-

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<sup>26</sup>P. S. Gorski, "The Protestant Ethic And The Spirit Of Capitalism. By Max Weber And The Protestant Ethic And The Spirit Of Capitalism And Other Writings. By Max Weber", *Social Forces* 82, no. 2 (2003): 833-839.

<sup>27</sup>Michael Walzer, "I. Liberalism And The Art Of Separation", *Political Theory* 12, no. 3 (1984): 315-330.

confidence, and resistance to democratic change.<sup>28</sup> The authoritarian regimes are increasingly coordinating with one another, adapting, and sharing technology to suppress the internet.<sup>29</sup> In a lot of places in the world, there is a sense that the dynamism, momentum, and power are shifting away from the democracies to the authoritarian states. The European Union and the individual democracies should, therefore, stand up vigorously against these kinds of aggression and intimidations to prevent the shift from becoming more pronounced.

Even for some of the developed states in the world such as the United States of America, there may be little to do than repairing her democracy. Many people may continue to look at the United States and some of the European allies and wonder why they should indulge themselves in such a kind of paralysis and incapacity to deal with obviously serious government challenges such as budget adoption. This poor performance seriously erodes the image and self-power of these states.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Sheldon S. Wolin, "Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, And The Politics Of Theory", *Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (1981): 401-424.

<sup>29</sup>Peter Ronald de Souza and R. Brubaker, "The Limits Of Rationality: An Essay On The Social And Moral Thought Of Max Weber", *The British Journal of Sociology* 36, no. 1 (1985): 140.

<sup>30</sup>Joseph A. Varacalli, Arthur J. Vidich and Stanford M. Lyman, "American Sociology: Worldly Rejections Of Religion And Their Directions", *Review of Religious Research* 29, no. 3 (1988): 306.

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