

The Hidden Aspects of American Democracy

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Abstract:

The United States has had a greater impact on the world, for better or for worse. Its involvement in democracy promotion has attracted such great attention, together with a good deal of skepticism and suspicion. The building blocks of U.S. democracy promotion have come into question after September 11, 2001 where the pursuit of democracy promotion policy historically has served US national self-interests. This paper argues that placing U.S. democratic ideals in a secondary rank to geopolitical concerns along with the tendency to promote US-style democracy resulted in ideological polarization within America and many other countries-a conflict created by the US that is hard to assimilate by the Arabs.

Keywords: American, democracy, rest of the world.

1. INTRODUCTION

People all over the world want to build futures for their families in free and open societies. This aspiration includes the desire to have basic human rights, participate in fair elections, practice one's religion, speak freely on public issues, and be certain that an impartial court system will decide violations of the law. Several key components of genuine democracies and the experiences of various nations in fashioning the form of democracy that suits their cultures, protects minority populations, and helps all citizens fulfill their aspirations.

Equal political voice and democratically responsive government are widely cherished American ideals. Indeed, the United States is vigorously promoting democracy abroad. Yet, what is happening to democracy at home? Our country's ideals of equal citizenship and responsive government may be under growing threat in an era of persistent and rising inequalities. Disparities of income, wealth, and access to opportunity are growing more sharply in the United States than in many other nations, and gaps between races and ethnic groups persist. Progress toward realizing American ideals of democracy may have stalled, and in some arenas reversed.

Democracy promotion has been a long-standing element of U.S. foreign policy. In recent years, however, it has become a primary component. Under the George W. Bush Administration, efforts to spread freedom to Iraq and around the world have been viewed as a tool to end tyranny and fight terrorism, as the way to promote stability in troubled regions, and as a mechanism to increase prosperity in poor countries.

The democracy promotion ideal is now under close scrutiny. While some observers believe that spreading democracy is a key foreign policy priority, others argue that democracy promotion is but one of a number of U.S. strategic objectives and not necessarily the overriding one.

The American Democracy has a significant impact on the world's governing systems today. It altered people's lives and changed the way they looked to the rule of the fittest through its positives and negatives.

The aim of this paper is to introduce the American Democracy, its characteristics and principles, besides its influence on America and other parts of the world. Also, it aims to show how people conceive the American Democracy considering its positives and negatives, and whether its results are good or bad for either the people or the country itself. This topic has instigated us to do a research work because we are prompted by the idea of Democracy issued by the state at a time when America itself seems to violate the principles of democratic country.

In this respect, we have thought of a descriptive historical and argumentative work based on the following research questions

- What is peculiar with the American democracy?
- How does the rest of the world perceive the American Democracy?
- What impact could the American democracy have on the rest of the world?

2. Types of Democracy

The establishment of democracy has great momentum around the world today. The parallel movement toward international guarantees protecting democratic institutions free and fair multiparty elections, the rule of law, minority rights, and independent judiciary, is also gaining force. (Morton H. Halperin, p 74) (1). The American democracy is to be classified into different types:

2.1 Parliamentary Democracy: A democratic form of government in which the party or coalition of parties, with the largest representation in the legislature was originated in Britain. There are two styles of parliamentary government, the bicameral system that consists of a lower house, which is elected, and an upper house can be either elected or appointed.

In a parliamentary democracy, the leader of the leading party becomes the Prime Minister or Chancellor, and leads the country.

2.2 Jeffersonian Democracy (1790s-1820s): It was of two philosophies of governing, to dominate the U.S. political scene. The term typically refers to the ideology of The Democratic-Republic Party, which Thomas Jefferson formed to oppose Alexander Hamilton's Federalist Party, which was the first

American Political Party. The Jeffersonian outlook believed in equality of political opportunity for all male citizens. It became functionalized in 1820s.

2.3 Jacksonian Democracy: It was initiated by Andrew Jackson- a political movement that emphasized the needs of the common man rather than the elite and educated favored by the Jeffersonian style of government.

The period from the mid-1830s to -1854 is referred to the second party system. Democracies can be classified as *liberal* and *social*.

2.3.1 Liberal Democracies: Also known as Constitutional Democracies are built on the principles of free and fair elections, a competitive political process and universal suffrage. Liberal democracies can take the form of constitutional republics, such as Japan, Spain, or The U.K. (<http://www.Procedural Democracy and corruption.com>) (2)

2.3.2 Social Democracies: Emerged in the late 19th century and advocated universal access to education, health care... where democrats aimed to reform capitalism with state regulation. However, another group of democrats made two most common and basic categories, which are *direct and representative*.

In a Direct Democracy, citizens can participate in making public decisions, without the intermediary of elected or appointed officials. Such a system is clearly most practical with relatively small numbers of people, tribal council or the local unit of a labor union. The specific rules may vary: perhaps everyone must agree, maybe there must be consensus or a mere majority is required to decide.

But today, the most common form of democracy is Representative Democracy, in which citizens elect officials to make political decisions, formulate laws, and administer programs for the public good.

What characterizes a republic is that it has an elected government. Representative democracies are, therefore, a kind of republic. Self-appointed governments such as monarchies, dictatorships, oligarchies, theocracies and juntas are not republics.

For example, if we take the Roman Republic, in which only a tiny percentage of citizens, members of the nobility, were allowed to vote for the Senators, who made the laws and also acted as Rome's Supreme Court. Most

people would say that Rome was a Republic, but not a democracy, since it was very close to being an oligarchy, ruled by the few.

Although the Roman Republic was not a dictatorship (until Augustus Caesar grabbed power), it did not allow for rule of the people. In both theory and practice the Soviet Union, that was a republic (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) because the lawmakers were elected, if only by the Communist Party members.

3. Characteristics and Principles of Democracy

Democracy is more than just a set of specific government institutions; it rests upon a well understood group of values, attitudes, and practices all of which may take different forms and expressions among cultures and societies around the world.

The characteristics of American democracy are in a synchronically enumerated within the constitution. The principles are adhered to in spirit and law to assure every citizen of equal opportunity and right. Democracies lay upon fundamental principles, not uniform practices.

Here are some of its characteristics and principles:

- Democracy is exercised by all adult citizens, directly, or through their freely elected representatives.
- Democracy rests upon the principles of majority rule and individual rights.
- Democracies guard against all-powerful central governments and decentralize government to regional and local levels.
- One of their prime functions of democracies is to protect such basic human rights as freedom of speech and religion, the right to equal protection under law, and the opportunity to organize and to fully participate in the society- political, economic, and cultural life.
- Democracies conduct regular and fair elections, open to citizens of voting age.

- Citizens in a democracy have not only rights, but also the responsibility to participate in the political system that protects their rights and freedoms in turn.
- Democratic societies are committed to the values of tolerance, cooperation, and compromise. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit”.
- Popular consent is the idea that governments draw their powers from the governed.
- Individualism is the value and focus placed on individuals in democracy and culture, because individualism holds that the primary function of government is to enable the individual to achieve the highest level of development.
- Equality is the idea that everyone is equal under law.
- “Personal liberty from government interference.” (*James T. Schleifer, p172*) (3)

The Constitution and rule of law are closely related. This latter is the idea that we are governed by laws that are created in a democratic process rather than by the whims of kings or those in power. There are no monopolizing elections for special interest representatives. It is the very spirit of the American democracy that empowers every citizen to stand up against corruption. “The resilience and sense of self-worth of American people are the outcome of the stronghold provided by the democratic principles.” (<http://www.Democracy in Brief.com>) (4)

3.1 The First Established Democracy in the USA

In 1830’s, Alexis de Tocqueville and his friend Gustave de Beaumont visited America to examine and report upon the American prison systems, but even before leaving France, the two friends had determined to study more than criminal codes and penitentiary schemes.

They said:

We are leaving with the intention of examining in details and as scientifically as possible all the mechanisms of this vast American society about which everyone talks and none knows. And if events allow us the time, we expect to bring back the elements of a Bon Ouvrage, or at least of a new work, for nothing exists on this subject. (*James T. Schleifer, p. 219*) (5)

This visit was the start of Tocqueville's search about America. He decided to write a book about it but he had no chance until his next visit, when he drew up lengthy bibliographies of printed sources that were available in the Library of the institution. Alexis de Tocqueville had accomplished some preliminaries in his first journey to America, so he drew a design for his work in his second journey. Setting the stage by describing the "Fait Primitif" of the American republic seemed an excellent way to begin the search.

The early blueprint of Tocqueville's first volume disclosed two intriguing aspects of his proposed organizations in 1833. The very order of chapters in the first half of the 1835 Democracy was intended to illustrate a basic premise of his thinking about American political structure. In this respect, Tocqueville claimed:

Democracy constitutes the social state. The dogma of the sovereignty of the people constitutes the political rule. These two are not analogous. Democracy is a society's fundamental condition. Sovereignty of the people is a form of government." (Morton H. Halperin, *p. 72*) (6)

Alexis De Tocqueville's sees the United States as a unique entity because of how and why it started as well as its geographical location. De Tocqueville explains that the foundations of the democratic process in America is completely different from anywhere else on the globe. The people who came to America were the oppressed and unhappy in England and all were trying to find a place where they could start anew and create a political structure that would facilitate an individual freedom unlike anything that they

had previously experienced in Europe. De Tocqueville believed that all of the emigrants were basically from the same social strata.

Tocqueville writes that

Americans do not believe that man and woman have the duty or the right to do the same things, but they have the same esteem for the role of each of them, and they consider them as beings whose value is equal although their destiny differs (*Tocqueville, p 253*(7)).

Women are not allowed to leave the domestic circle. Tocqueville's comment that women are of interest not for their ability to clean the house but for their ability to transmit the mores due to their unique education and situation. (*Critique: A worldwide journal of politics Liberating, USA, p. 33*) (8). Tocqueville seeks to elucidate a system of gender roles in which man and woman, due to their natural differences, play distinct roles but are treated with equal respect for their respective roles, morality, and intellect. Due to their distinct characteristics, education, and situation, women serve a distinct role and therefore practice "the great principle of political economy." He remarks that Americans "have carefully divided the functions of man and woman in order that the great social work is better done" (Tocqueville2000: p. 574) (9). The division of roles Tocqueville describes, however, is not limited to family farms or even economic roles, but extends to every form of civic participation.

The establishment of democracy is the best thing that ever happened in the American history, thanks to Alexis de Tocqueville, who first talked and wrote about American policy, and the first who established the new form of democracy in the USA.

4. The Positives and Negative Assets of American Democracy

The name of the U.S echoes a powerful strike in others' spirits. It brought the new policy which was called democracy which brought America into a new life style.

4.1 The impact of Democracy on The USA as a Leading Nation

As democratization has advanced in the developing world, developed countries such as the United States have implemented strategies of democracy promotion by helping governments, political parties, and other non-governmental groups and organizations through a variety of channels.

This analysis examines the relationship between democracy support by the US Agency for International Development and democratization in the developing world between 1988 and 2001. In a model that examines the simultaneous processes linking democratization and democracy aid, it is argued that carefully targeted democracy assistance has greater impact on democratization than more generic economic aid packages. The data reveal a positive relationship between specific democracy aid packages and progress toward democracy.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, "democracy sponsor states" such as the United States and others in Western Europe publicly committed themselves to support and expand democratic governance in the developing world. Unfortunately, such enthusiasm for democracy promotion and its expected impact on target states remains relatively disconnected from investigations of the processes and prospects of democratization. Little conclusive evidence links democratic sponsor states to the success of democratization in target states among which the United States.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) adopted democracy as one of its four main goals in 1990. Democracy aid increased substantially in those years with the passage of the Support for East European Democracy Act and the Freedom Support Act.

The first Bush Administration maintained dominant realist democracy promotion during and after Bush endowment for international peace in its policy. Bush policies have done significant harm to the image of U.S. democracy promotion, which normally must embody strong elements of modesty, subtlety, and the awareness of limitations without losing the vitality, decisiveness, and creativity necessary for success.

Scholars have argued that general development assistance should promote democracy and civil society welfare.

The main advantage of a direct democracy is that people have a great sense of involvement in government decisions as they actively participate in policy initiatives. Democracy can provide for changes in government without violence. In a democracy, power can be transferred from one party to another by means of elections.

The jurisdiction of the citizens of a nation determines its ruling authority where any government is bound by an election term after which it has to compete against other parties to regain authority. The ruling authorities owe their success in the elections to the citizens of the nation.

Another important advantage of democracy is that people gain a sense of participation in the process of choosing their government. They get the opportunity to voice their opinions by means of electoral votes. This breeds a sense of belonging towards society. So, American authorities would choose what is better for them, because the bright side of democracy is what makes people love the country and sacrifice their lives for the sake of its own good, and that is exactly what America wants in order to gain the trust of the people and guarantee that they would be always in its side.

4.2 The Impact of US Democracy on the Rest of the World

The American democracy is not merely positive. It is undeniable that democracy altered people's lives and brought the world into a new political system, but also it brought some parts of the world into destruction.

What one can notice on the figure is that the Americans themselves are dissatisfied with democracy, as they believed it deviated from its ancient norms with a rate of 39% satisfied against 59% dissatisfied-a fake Democracy.

The case of Iraq, which saw - Corruption in rebuilding communities and the illusionism of Iraq's possession of atomic weapons and the murder of hundreds of civilians besides and the miss planning of a withdrawal schedule from Iraq. (*Jonathan Steele, p 294*) (10)

This made Iraqi people get upset of being colonized. But the deepest matter that led to failure is in Bush's and Blair's failure in understanding the

political and cultural Iraqis powers that determines the future of Iraq after the system's fall.

The dearth of democratic regimes in the Middle East and North Africa is a well-known phenomenon, with much debate about the causes. Increasing unemployment and job insecurity have fostered a climate of fear and self-censorship among journalists in many countries. The concentration of media ownership has tended to increase, which has had a negative impact on the diversity of views and the freedom of expression. Advanced nations have become more inward-looking and hence less interested and capable of monitoring and pressurizing emerging market governments to ensure freedom of the press.

Another disadvantage of democracy is that mobs can influence people. Citizens may vote in favor of a party under the influence of the majority. Compelled or influenced by opinions of those around, a person may not use his own judgment when voting.

Every form of government is bound to have some shortfalls. Different people have different views about the various political systems. The advantages and disadvantages of any political system have to be weighed carefully before arriving at any conclusion.

So, it can be said that American democracy is just a cover to the real situation that is lived under the American rule. It is true it did really brought America into a gilded age with a new governance system, but actually is merely golden, where in the outside looks like helping, defending, promoting, developing, and changing the situation of the country and the people's, but the reality is known only by those who are responsible for it, the reality is that beneath the surface lays corruption, poverty, discrimination, insufficiency, and shortage in many needs of social and political life of the Americans. But despite all of this, it continues deceiving people by illusioning them of democratizing them and preparing them for what is better. (Manali Oak <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-democracy.html>)(11)

4.3 American Democracy in the Eyes of the International Community

As the term Democracy differed in meaning, genres, and principles, people's views differed also. They gave various opinions about the term, its influence, and how do people look at it through the changes and different views it has brought in order to change lives and ways of thinking.

President Obama was one of the ones who gave opinions about democracy, he said:

If we do not change our politics -- if we do not fundamentally change the way Washington works -- then the problems we've been talking about for the last generation will be the same ones that haunt us for generations to come." But let me be clear -- this isn't just about ending the failed policies of the Bush years; it's about ending the failed system in Washington that produces those policies. (*The Liberal Critique of Obama, p.4:31*) (12)

It is worth noting that Obama has not played the game that he promised. Instead, the game he has played has been exactly the game that Hillary Clinton promised and that Bill Clinton executed: striking a bargain with the most powerful lobbyists as a way to get a bill through--and as it turns out, the people don't have the most powerful lobbyists.

People have seen democracy as the saving rope that pulled them out of the bottom of the bad conditions they were living in. On the other hand, some communities see that the new brought democracy that came under the name of unity and support of the individual is actually an indirect form of colonialism that lies behind the will of helping and promoting people.

Democracy promotion expenditures compete with domestic spending priorities. Critics note that using the various tools to promote democracy abroad — foreign aid, military intervention, diplomacy, and public diplomacy — can be very expensive and may provide little assurance those real long-term gains will be made. For Alexis de Tocqueville, democracy is the idea that a country is based on, since he was the first who established democracy in America, of course he would support democracy promotion everywhere if he could. Besides, he wanted the best for all countries; and he wanted to prove that his new created method is as good as he and the people wanted it to be, so he would not be criticized.

5. CONCLUSION

Since the role of American democracy is supporting and encouraging the individual, it gave a key role to citizens to participate in public life freely. This article aimed to show what really democracy meant and what does it mean today and how American democracy really infects the neighboring countries especially those of the Arab world such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Finally, democracy came to have two different directions in people's minds, some think of it as the saving boat that brought them out from darkness to light, and others argue that it was the worst thing that have ever happened to them, because it brought destruction and inequality to the developing nations. Not all people thought of it as good as it seems, actually lot of people were against its promotion, even leaders and presidents did not agree on how it should work within other countries next to America.

5. Endnotes

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