

# What makes democracy succeed or fail? essay

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The word democracy is famous in the world today. It is used to describe a form of government that allows equal opportunities to all its citizens. Also, it is used to influence the policies and laws of a nation. In such administrations, people who meet certain standards are free to convey their views.

As Abraham Lincoln once said, “ democracy is a government of the public, this government works for the citizens and it is administrated by citizens”. In America, democracy is demonstrated in the exercise of democratic procedures such as voting for the president or members of congress. Before any democratic government comes into power, people have to be enlightened. In other words, enlightenment precedes democracy.

Immanuel Kant claims that “ enlightenment is man’s liberation from his self-incurred immaturity” (Kant, 1784). Immaturity in this text is the inadequacy of a man to make his own decisions without the input of other people (Kant, 1784). It is said to be self-imposed when people choose to lie not because they lack understanding but because they do not have the will and courage to make a personal decision (Kant, 1784).

For this reason, it is necessary for the public sphere, civil society and state to be enlightened to strengthen democracy. Enlightenment will help them to reason publicly and express their opinion while keeping the state in check. The success or failure of democracy is determined by the state, civil society and the public sphere. When these institutions are functioning properly democracy succeeds. This paper examines how these three institutions influence the democratic process.

The public sphere is a key component of democracy because it represents the opinions of the people. It determines whether democracy succeeds or fails. Jurgen Habermas (1996) in his article “ Civil society and the Political Public Sphere” claims that the public sphere is a social experience. It is similar to a collectivity but different from an organization.

It does not embrace the principles or frameworks of an institution. It has no membership or leaders. The public sphere is a system that represents the opinions or views of different people. The opinions of people in different social spaces vary. All these views are synthesized and combined to form one common opinion (Habermas, 1996). These opinions are reproduced in the course of communication. There are different forms of the public sphere: political, religious, scientific, and art among others.

Democracy requires freedom of speech and this freedom can be found in the public sphere. Influence is a vital element of the public sphere that affects democracy. It is based on a mutual understanding of individuals in a social space (Habermas, 1996). Consequently, public views can be used to influence the voting behavior of the jury, government organizations or citizens.

The influence of the public sphere in a political realm can be used as political power when it follows institutionalized processes (Habermas, 1996). This power can be controlled by political leaders or other parties. On the other hand, this influence usually attracts a power struggle.

Some leaders or organizations that have the influence of the public sphere can capitalize on their power for their own selfish gain (Habermas, 1996). Such actions destroy democracy because power is transferred to a minority instead of the public. According to Habermas, the public sphere should recognize problems, categorize them and find a feasible solution (Habermas, 1996).

If the communal opinion is manipulated, then it means that the solutions will meet the needs the few people in power. Therefore, democracy thrives where the public domain is free from manipulation or blackmail. In addition, the system of communication must capture the views of the citizens without biases. The public sphere enlightens the citizens. It provides an avenue where people think for themselves without considering the views of others.

Civil society has a decisive role in preserving democracy. In the past, civil society was defined in terms of the Marxian theory. It represented the Bourgeoisie class. However, civil society has undergone a revolution. Habermas describes the civil society as organizations that are distinct of the government or any economic affiliations (Habermas, 1996).

They include institutions of learning, religious groups, and mass media. They are voluntary groups that secure the systems of communication that make up the public sphere. Religious groups typically provide moral boundaries as opposed to political. According to Tocqueville, associations help to fight individualism and promote freedom in politics (Habermas, 1996). Civil society exists only in civilized communities that allow liberation and freedom.

Otherwise, different organizations can arise without a cause. Unlike public spheres, civil societies can only find influence and not political control. This is because civil groups seek power for the people and not themselves.

Additionally, these organizations must meet certain requirements. They have to respect the rights of people and the rule of law.

The function of the civil society is to represent the people and regulate the authority of the state (Habermas, 1996). They can do this by ensuring that the state uses its power efficiently. One of the vices that lead to the failure of democracy is corruption.

Once the state is corrupt, people will be denied the opportunity to express their opinion and build the nation. Corrupt officials control public issues in order to benefit. For that reason, the civil society holds the key to democracy. They have the ability and power to educate the public on issues concerning their rights and duties as egalitarian citizens.

In this process, civil society provides enlightenment. Moreover, civil society can help citizens, and the government to develop critical values such as respect for divergent views, concession, acceptance, and control. Civil society brings people from different social and symbolic spaces together based on their common interests. By encouraging people to come together, civil society curbs individualism. Civil society is a key partner of a democratic state.

Although a democratic government refers to a government managed by the people, the state is equally significant. A successful democracy requires a

dependable state. Such a state must promote equality and not dictatorship. It also requires the support and reverence of its people. Tocqueville in his book *Democracy in America* compares democracy in two states, France and America (Tocqueville, 1835). He claims that one of the dangers facing democracy is extreme devotion to equality.

According to Tocqueville (1835), if everyone is equal then no individual has the right to regulate the affairs of another. The only opinion would be majority rule, but this will lead to authoritarianism. If multitudes control power they will acquire despotic tendencies and the minority will suffer. The role of the state in democracy is to ensure that citizens are not trapped in individualism and materialism.

Hence, to minimize or avoid these tendencies, the state can endorse institutions such as the Supreme Court and the jury (Habermas, 1996). These institutions may be flawed, but they provide balance. Such systems allow individuals to respect other people and use their freedom wisely. Additionally, the state can support other non-institutional organization like the media and religious group.

Democracy demands equality. However, equality has two consequences. First, individuals are enlightened and allowed to express their opinions. Individualism and oppressive characteristics can emerge.

Secondly, equality can prevent an individual from thinking and instead depend on the decisions of others. Kant describes this as immaturity. Such people allow others to think for them. Fascism and Nazism developed

because people allowed other people to make decisions. The state, civil society and the public sphere offer a balance for equality and promote democracy.

The views of Kant, Habermas and Tocqueville are relevant and credible in strengthening democracy. Tocqueville in his book recommended the democratic system in America because it embraces the elements of the public sphere, civil societies and the state. All these institutions and prodigy have to function well for democracy to flourish. The public sphere communicates the opinion of the people. The civil society anchors the public domain by supporting them.

It also checks on the state. Similarly, the state provides a framework for the civil society and the public sphere to succeed. These associations combat despotic and individualism tendencies. The question as to “ what makes democracy succeed (or fail)?” is determined by the achievements of the public sphere, the civil society and the state. If these key institutions prosper then democracy will succeed.

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