

The shift from liberal democracy to an illiberal democracy



In the book "The People v. Democracy" written by Yascha Mounk, we are introduced to many political themes throughout history surrounding democracy. This book gives us very good insight to how democracy has affected the development of different countries over time. This book helps us to understand that there are many different factors that affect whether a country's democratic political system will be successful and lasting or not. These factors include; insight to both liberal and illiberal democracies. It also explores populism and social media and the impact they both have on democracies. Mounk also discusses how a stagnating economy and different economic statuses can affect democracy. He also talks about how national diversity and the idea of nationalism can both impact a democracy. Lastly, we as readers learn what we can do to preserve our democracy for future generations.

A liberal democracy is a political system that is composed both of liberal and democratic political values. Referring to the definition of a liberal democracy, Mounk writes, "One that both protects individual rights and translates popular views into public policy" (Mounk 27). One of the two examples that comes to mind is a liberal democracy throughout history are eighteenth century Prussia. There was an absolute monarch, yet he ruled in a relatively liberal way by attempting to respect his subject's rights and allowing some free speech. A second example of a liberal democracy would be Poland. "Excellent newspapers held successive governments to account, freely criticizing political mismanagement and investigating corruption scandals" (Mounk 125). I chose this quote to support my second example because it directs back to the very definition of liberal democracy. The Poles had an

active system of civil society institutions that represented the free will of the people and helped keep the politicians and government in check.

Another example of a liberal democracy that comes to mind would be Canada. Canada is a good example because of their stance on immigration. Their stance shows that the government can take into consideration the people's collective doubts and fears about the immigration of foreigners, yet Canada's government also is very welcoming and reasonably tough-minded. " By opening its doors to a large number of immigrants but making sure that most of them are highly qualified, the country has quickly become a model of tolerance"(Mounk 215). Canada does a fantastic job of taking into account and combining the people's will and the acceptance of liberal ideology.

Liberal democracy focuses the separation of powers and a system of checks and balances in the governmental system. The government's powers should only be legally exercised only in accordance with written, publicly disclosed laws which have been adopted and enforced in accordance with established procedure.

Illiberal democracy, otherwise known as democracy without rights, is a side of the political spectrum being observed today as well as far back into political history. For example, in ancient Athens, the people's assembly ruled in a completely illiberal way. They exiled unpopular statesmen, executed critical philosophers and even went so far as to censor nearly everything all the way from political speech to music. A second example of an illiberal democracy would be Turkey. " The Turkish government has arrested so many journalists, fired so many civil servants, and abolished so many

institutional safeguards that the country is quickly turning into a
<https://assignbuster.com/the-shift-from-liberal-democracy-to-an-illiberal-democracy/>

straightforward dictatorship” (Mounk 186). In this quote, it is basically saying that Turkey is riding a fine line from becoming a dictatorship. This is a good example to point back at the very definition of illiberal democracy. A third example for an illiberal democracy is Russia. Vladimir Putin believed that he was still strengthening democratic institutions in the country. He made encouraging remarks about the value of political openness and the importance of breaking free from Russia’s authoritarian past. In his first reelection, Putin rigged the playing field towards his own favor in his first reelection. I think this is because he knew that the opposition had a real chance of actually winning the election. After his third and fourth reelection wins however, the country was dangerously close to becoming an outright dictatorship.

In a political sense, populism is the idea that society is separated into two groups competing with one another and is often referred to as the pure people and the corrupt elites. Populists leaders claim to represent the unified will of the people and stand in opposition to an enemy, often embodied by the current system. Populism often aim to take down the corrupt, elite and those in power. Over time, there has been intense fights and debates about the relationship between populism and democracy. Some think of populism as being a natural danger to democracy while others believe that it is the only pure or true form of democracy. Populism can serve as a democratic restraint by enabling the mobilization of social groups who feel excluded from political decision making and enabling the people to act on what they feel. It can also raise awareness among the social and political elites of

popular concerns in society, even if it makes the elites uncomfortable about what society is concerned with.

When some populists have taken power, they have enhanced the use of direct democracy through the regular application of direct decisions and voting procedures. Due to this power, some democratic politicians have argued that they need to become more populist in order to be more in tune with what the people of their countries are actually saying and what they are having issues with. With populism on the rise, the threat of democracy grows. “ But to stop populists for regaining power in the future and save the system in the long run, its defenders also have to do something more ambitious: they must ensure that liberal democracy once again lives up to the expectations of its citizens” (Mounk 186). In recent years, the political changes have put many populists in striking distance of different seats of powers. In order to save democracy, we as citizens need to be united around a common conception of our nation. We as the people need to have hope in our economic future and become more resistant to lies and the hate, or the “ fake news” we encounter every day on social media.

Over the past quarter-century, we as a society have gained the ability of mass communication available to everyone through social media. In the recent past, mass communication was almost used exclusively by the wealthy and powerful. The cost of running a radio show or printing a newspaper would prevent most average citizens from expressing their views. This barrier allowed the established political party to push their agendas and marginalize extreme views. In this sense the adaptation of social media into our political system can be a very positive affect. This allowed normal day to <https://assignbuster.com/the-shift-from-liberal-democracy-to-an-illiberal-democracy/>

day working people to express their political views. It allowed the smallest voice to be heard, whether that by likes, retweets, or views, and made that voice heard to everyone. Even though this idea sounds empowering, not everything is all positive when it comes to social media reflecting political motivations. Along with the transformative impact of the internet on our social and political systems comes a whole profusion of negative issues. As hate speech and fake news have spread like wildfires at times when unknowing viewers spread the false information with the push of a button and without a second thought, there have been calls for social media giants to act as censors in a manner of speaking. If these companies or CEOs started to determine who can say what on the internet, free speech would quickly go down the drain. In my opinion, social media is a double-edged sword in many ways. Social media can be seen as an immense power to the people allowing them to be heard by those in power. However, on the other side, social media can be looked at as creators now have a tremendous responsibility to keep things fair and let people have their rights.

A very serious threat to our democracies as we know, is that the health of the world's democracies turns out to be crucially dependent on their economic growth rate. For example, there is clear evidence that negative and declining economic growth leads to increased political volatility, including in democracies and in rich nations. Different studies have found a relationship between strong economic performance and the electoral survival of the current governments for both high-income countries and for developing countries. Improvements in the gross domestic product have not been felt in developed countries like the United States and the United

Kingdom. As a result, the middle-class people in the traditional heartlands of liberal democracy have essentially been treading water. “ The combined effect of slowing growth and accelerating inequality has been a stagnation in living standards for huge parts of the population”(Mounk 153). The economic dullness has affected our democracy essentially by taking any and all hope that the citizens had in our government. With no hope, this leaves those people weary and unsure of their economic future which leads to an even worse economic situation. After many studies it is clear that economic factors do matter. Even though our countries have significantly decreased the poverty rate, the decrease of the economy has taken all momentum from the consumer away. People are losing hope in the current economic system and that is putting our democracy at risk.

Diversity is a strength of American democracy, or so that is what many of our political leaders have claimed. The next thing our leaders will complain about how the country’s national diverse array of interests, people, and ideologies make it too difficult to reach the agreement between people necessary for any democratic action to be done. As the world becomes more connected and interdependent, the success of nations depends more and more on their ability to get along with other nations. The more diverse your population is, means that you are in a better position to interact positively and constructively with the world. America is now struggling with some of the challenges of national diversity, including a backlash against immigration and bursts of Islamophobia. As the situation calms down however, the diversity of Islamic communities and Latin Americans can be an asset as America tries to engage with a world that includes lots of Latin

Americans, lots of Muslims, as well as other kinds of people. Democracy is a political system founded on a commitment to equality with the goals to adapt to change and diversity. Its main purpose is to offer the voices of our people to a fair hearing and to generate decisions that represent what the people want. Democratic procedures should be inclusive and representative of the people's voice. We trust that all our fellow citizens are obeying the law. Democracies at their core rely on trust among the citizens. This trust comes from the sense that we share norms and values with our neighbors. Not all norms and values will be shared among us due to our great diversity and differences, but we still need to be able to unite under one country. Where citizens believe that norms and values are not being shared, trust may not emerge. We can see this especially in democratic communities that are facing increases in religious and ethnic diversity, trust can be difficult to sustain simply because citizens come to believe that they do not share the norms and values on which trust is based. It is the challenge of democratic states to ensure that citizens share the values and norms that underpin the trust on which democracies depend.

Nationalism is defined as a strong form of patriotism marked by a feeling of being superior over other countries. Democracy is a political system that is supposed to be by the people and for the people and should represent the citizens views. So naturally nationalism and democracy will be involved with each other. In use, democracy enables more freedom and power to the citizen through constitutional and fundamental rights given to all people. Nationalism gives the nation a thought of mind to be supreme and apex towards other resulting in smaller issues such as likes and dislikes to be

trivial and secondary. Nationalism requires resources and time to be put toward enhancing and enabling the nation. In democracy you can express anything against the nation, and it will be considered your personal opinion which you are allowed to be able to voice. However, a negative of nationalism is that it can begin to somewhat take away the rights of the people and the very same rights that democracy has been created to uphold. It is always a good thing to take pride in one's country. It is a single unifying factor among its citizens. That is where nationalism can be a positive thing for democracy. However, when nationalism gets out of control that is where the people's right is taken away and threatened.

Nowadays we hear slogans such as " Make America Great Again" or in the United Kingdom we hear " Take Back Control". In order to bring back the nostalgic pride in our country and restore confidence in citizens there needs to be a hope for the future. " Nostalgia for the economic past is not just about money, though; it's also about diminishing hope"(Mounk 217). People are seeking reassurance that their jobs will command respect in ten or twenty years. The ever-evolving working landscape we are in not one of stability. One example would be how the factory work has become largely automated. One obvious way to restore faith in our governmental systems and preserve our democracy is to put pride into meaningful work. " People who no longer derive a sense of earned identity from their jobs often harbor a growing sense of resentment"(Mounk 233). As the new digital economy is threatening to do away with any meaning of work, so too is globalization threatening the pride of the nation. Liberal democracies need to take bold approaches to the biggest economic challenges in our time, that way they

can remain capable to provide citizens with real improvements for their standard of living. By using the new resources of this day and age in a more proactive way, democracies retain the ability to shape a future in which an adaptive nature to the always changing world does not mean that the citizens have to lose out on any rights or privileges.

When talking about a shift from liberal democracy to an illiberal democracy, we need to be concerned about human rights. This is even more important when discussing our criminal justice institutions. A liberal democracy not only protects individual rights but also translates popular views into public policy. An illiberal democracy puts less emphasis on the individual citizen's constitutional rights. We have to acknowledge the danger that our traditional criminal justice systems are in with the rise of populist's views and the abandoning our liberal democracy. Our criminal justice systems are designed to keep the basic unalienable rights of the people in mind no matter what situation. This has never been more evident than when a liberal democracy is the governing power because we see that the government has a focus on human rights. The problem and growing concern for the shift leading to an illiberal democracy is that people have less and less hope in our governing bodies. This includes the criminal justice institutions set up currently also. As stated, before there needs to be a unifying cause to rally all citizens to have faith and hope for the future of our country under the governmental powers that are in authority.

Throughout history, democracy has taken different forms such as liberal leaning democracy and illiberal democracy. As readers we gain

understanding the many different factors that influenced democracy.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-shift-from-liberal-democracy-to-an-illiberal-democracy/>

Economic status, populism, diversity, and nationalism are all factors that have been influencers. Going forward in time will be interesting to see how our country in general will change in terms of democracy. Before reading this book, I thought that it was going to be a difficult read. After getting about halfway through this, I have learned that without democracy, our country would not be what it is today. Democracy is important because it lays the foundation for our current politics. I did not realize how much of an impact social media had on our country. We as a society have gained the ability of mass communication available to everyone through social media and I think that is amazing in terms of how far we have come. It is exciting to think about the future because social media is constantly changing, as is our form of communication. In conclusion, even though some people may not agree, democracy is a very important building block throughout history for our current politics. It is what makes the US, as well as other countries work.

Works Cited

- MOUNK, YASCHA. *PEOPLE VS. DEMOCRACY: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* . HARVARD UNIV Press, 2019.