

It was a paper that I had to submit for my GOVT133 class. I wrote about democracy and threats to democracy in today's world. While it was hard to research and select sources due a wide variety of sources, I enjoyed writing it and I'm glad that I completed it.

Democracy in a Whirl:

Democratic Recession Comes After Wrong Practices of Democracy

Chaeyeon Lee

Government 133

Professor Soyoung Kwon

November 27, 2021

In today's world where injustice triumphs, it became more difficult for a country to achieve democracy in the world these days. Democracy is a political system in which power of a state is distributed among citizens through participation, competition, and liberty. Democratic regimes focus on the citizen's voice and take it into consideration when governing. The pros of a democratic regime are that a democratic government aims to assure freedom and it provides opportunities to politically participate for its people. Thus, citizens feel more connected with the state. On the other hand, the cons of democracy are that because the citizens are actively engaged in politics, important decisions are made slowly. Also, due to the gap between the rich and the poor, minorities can be excluded and ignored in a country. When the democracy of a state is fully constructed, it is difficult to break down the regime. Reversely, flawed democratic governments are at risk of becoming non-democratic regimes as they are easily affected by other illiberal countries that hamper democratic institutionalization. The democracy of the world today is in decline because global freedom has been threatened and authoritarianism has been empowered since the last decade. However, making adjustments to the wrong practices of democracy will help democracy thrive once again.

One of the reasons that cause democratic regimes to be hindered is that global freedom is in decline. According to Van Leeuwen (2012), press freedom in South Africa is diminished as "It is frequently feared by politicians that press freedom gives journalists a lot of power although they have not been elected by the public to be in power" (88). The infringement of freedom of expression undermines democracy as liberty is one of three major components that define democracy. In particular, without the freedom of the press, it will limit the access to information around the country and the right of the journalists to express their opinions. In another research, as Williams and Coddington (2021) said, "...policies emerge and play out in ways that infringe on the human rights" (143). Disregarding human rights means a failure to address the basic principles of democracy, which are participation and liberty. Also, civil society is threatened throughout the world where the erosion of democracy is deepening, despite the effort to reform the non-democratic practices. Furthermore, Vircoulon (2011) claims that "Distrust, intimidation, and corruption are already shaping the electoral climate" (203). Suffrage is one of the key elements of democracy where citizens are encouraged to exercise their right to vote. Unfair and not transparent elections harm the freedom of people as it will be difficult for them to fully and freely participate in voting and to be aware of the election process. Also, in a state where the

citizens do not trust the results of the elections, the quality of democracy in the state can easily be reduced. Above all, it proves that global freedom has been downgraded as “the countries experiencing deterioration outnumbered those with improvements by the largest margin recorded since the negative trend began in 2006” (Repucci and Slipowitz 2021). For these reasons, abusing people’s rights and freedom damages the fundamental attributes of democracy.

The other factor that causes democratic regimes to crumble is the rise in authoritarianism. Since the governing body holds absolute power in an authoritarian regime, the prevalence of authoritarianism in the world undermines democracy. According to Heldt and Schmidtke (2019), authoritarianism disturbs International Organizations (IO) as “the rise of authoritarian powers not only contributes to a decline of democracy on the domestic level, but it also seems to result in less democratically controlled IO s” (249). International institutions strengthen democracy and stand up for anti-communism by promoting democratic values and encouraging non-democratic countries to implement democracy. International Organizations advocate democracy and stand for anti-communism as they fight against non-democratic regimes. However, the authoritarian form of government pushes their illiberal governance through seizing the international stage, which hinders other regimes’ performance of democratic practices. As Kirsch and Welzel (2019) have noted, “...authoritarian notions of democracy blossom and lend a principled form of legitimacy to autocratic rule, disguised under lip service to democracy” (87). Authoritarian democracy is a detrimental problem because an authoritarian ruler in a democratic state can result in the transition to an authoritarian regime. Posing monopolized power to other unstable democratic regimes and influencing them weakens the democratic values of participation, competition, and liberty. Here, autocracy that attempts to shift the global power towards authoritarianism contributes to the democratic backsliding. In the words of Plattner (2015), China is a country “...whose ability to make enormous economic strides without introducing democratic reforms has cast doubt on the notion that democracy is the only appropriate political system for wealthy countries” (8). This disproves the modernization theory as China as an example denotes that countries do not need to be democratic to be wealthy. Furthermore, authoritarian regimes like China seek to have control over and politically dominate the world, making it difficult for other fragile, democratic governments that are vulnerable to authoritarian reform, such as illiberal regimes, to prevent the transition from happening. These factors illustrate that democracy has been continuously declining and is further proven, by the

Economist Intelligence Unit's Democratic Index (2020), which demonstrates that in Sub-Saharan Africa, "...the number of 'authoritarian regimes' in the region increased to 24, more than half (55%) of the 44 countries" (27). Regarding all of the research suggested above, an authoritarian form of government that has a ruling power on the international level damages the value of democracy.

Since democracy has been declining, scholars have posed a question on how to strengthen democracy. Each of the three different forms of power in democracy, participation, competition, and liberty, plays an important role to help democracy recover from its recession. First, participation needs to be vitalized. Power should not come from a few elites of society as most of the weak democracies do. Rather, power must originate from the people. Therefore, allowing citizens to actively participate in politics and enjoy their civic life is important. Also, a state must encourage its citizens to be politically engaged and ensure their political choices have an effect on the governance of the state. Second, consolidating competition is important. According to Schattschneider (1960), "Democracy is a competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision-making process" (141). Hence, true and fair elections must be fortified with effective oversight of electoral processes so that competing candidates for elections will advocate better policies to pursue democracy in a state. Third, increasing the quality of liberty is critical. Empowering citizens' right to freely voice and report their opposition to corruption and violence will help tackle the decline in democracy. Through access to justice, the government should execute its constitutional duty of liberty and protect its citizens' freedom. To strengthen democracy, it is important to avoid power being dominated by elites. One example that illustrates monopolized power in nondemocratic regimes is using natural resources to stay in power. Brooks and Kurtz (2016) noted that "...decades of oil revenue had failed to encourage effective state-building, growth, or sustained improvements in the non-oil sectors of these economies" (279). As the case of resource-rich countries demonstrates, reinforcing the flow of power acquired by natural resources prevents democracy from growing. Instead, people that already have power desire more and more resources because they know the resources allow them to maintain power and enjoy wealth. Freedom House (2021) declared that the most important thing to remember is that "Democratic governments will have to work in solidarity with one another, and with democracy advocates and human rights defenders in more

repressive settings, if we are to reverse 15 years of accumulated declines and build a more free and peaceful world.” Attempts to bring good governance in a country by improving different forms of democracy and resisting harmful progression of power will enhance democracy.

The recession of democracy can be explained by two factors. First, diminished freedom throughout the world leads to a democratic deficit. Second, a rise in authoritarianism jeopardizes global democracy, influencing weakly-institutionalized democratic states. The acknowledgment of the core features and elements of a democratic regime is the key to making improvements to democracy and putting democracy back on the right track to liberalize the globe. In addition to these two factors, there is a multitude of other variables that have destabilized and threatened the implementation of democracy around the world. Therefore, to truly understand the best way to prevent the decline of democracy, these variables and their unique combinations require further study.

Bibliography

- Brooks, Sarah M, and Marcus J Kurtz. "Oil and Democracy: Endogenous Natural Resources and the Political 'Resource Curse.'" *International organization* 70, no. 2 (2016): 279–311.
- Freedom House. 2021. "New Report: The Global Decline in Democracy Has Accelerated." Freedom House. March 3, 2021. <https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-global-decline-democracy-has-accelerated>.
- Heldt, Eugenia C, and Henning Schmidtke. "Global Democracy in Decline? How Rising Authoritarianism Limits Democratic Control over International Institutions." *Global governance* 25, no. 2 (2019): 231–254.
- Kirsch, Helen, and Christian Welzel. "Democracy Misunderstood: Authoritarian Notions of Democracy Around the Globe." *Social forces* 98, no. 1 (2019): 59–91.
- Plattner, Marc. "Is Democracy in Decline?" *Journal of democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 5–10.
- Repucci, Sarah, and Amy Slipowitz. 2021. "Democracy under Siege." Freedom House. 2021. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>.
- Schattschneider, Elmer E. (1960). *The Semisovereign People*.
- The Economist Intelligence Unit. 2021. "Democracy Index 2020 in Sickness and in Health?" https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf?mkt_tok=NzUzLVJJUS00MzgAAAGA4KsHFxsq23IKdQC7qEC-tMKFMXCKJMduSMDDJP0D3mSILbo5iUDYOmTRQvnBZM6yt7LrGMAjms0ftyNESlgTzlcYUca6asV_dXTqe3PIPdmmmw.
- Van Leeuwen, Lianne. "The Recent Decline in Press Freedom in South Africa." *Global media journal (African ed.)* 6, no. 1 (2012): 67–92.
- Vircoulon, Thierry. "Unfair and Dangerous Elections." *Peace review (Palo Alto, Calif.)* 23, no. 2 (2011): 199–204.
- Williams, Jill M, and Kate Coddington. "Feminist Periscoping in Research on Border Enforcement and Human Rights." *Journal of human rights* 20, no. 1 (2021): 143–150.