

WHEN DEMOCRACIES ARE AT RISK: THE WARNING SIGNS

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Democracies are a fragile form of government. They must be continuously kept in tact through the checks and balances of the country's constitution. The checks and balances of democracies are based on the powers of the executive branch, the judicial branch, the legislative branch and the constitutional control of the military. All four branches should operate for the good of the population, and the adherence of the country's constitution. Throughout history, there has been the fall and rise of democracies. To date, many democracies are on the decline. Democracies can arise due to the fall of colonial leadership peacefully through the granting of independence, abruptly through military coups, the overthrow of an authoritarian leadership, or other civil disturbance of kingdoms. Democracies can fall through military coups, the election of an authoritative leader, and the gradual erosion of internal powers.

There are conditions that determine when democracies are at risk and there are warning signs. Democracies are at risk when:

1. There is a disrespect or abuse of constitutional powers or the rule of law in a country.
2. When there is an overreach of the constitutional powers by any branch of government.
3. If the executive through its powers subvert other branches of government.
4. Extreme polarization by political parties that disturb the political process, and could lead to political unrest and subsequently riots, and to a lesser extent a massive increase in demonstrations.
5. When any party or parties show the inclination that they want to rule forever.
6. When there is the use of laws by any party or parties to severely enhance their chances of winning elections undermining a voting section of the country.
7. When there is the subversion of the electoral process-voters rights.
8. When there is the denial in the outcome of political elections.
9. When members of political parties use their position to enrich themselves, friends and party members at the expense of other members of the population.
10. When after the electoral process is complete the population does not become united, but there is continued polarization.
11. When the judiciary is adjudicating the law through party lines and not on the basis of the constitution.
12. When the military is too aligned to the decisions or will of the executive and not its constitutional duties.
13. When one party or parties rule all branches of government and only their political agendas are established even against the popular will of the population.
14. When opposing opinions are deemed as unpatriotic, misleading or demagogic.
15. When there is a mood of vengeance among political parties.
16. When political maneuvering enhances the ability of one party or the other to achieve political ends, including winning elections.
17. When the legislative, judicial and military powers in any democracy all unite behind the powers of the executive without adherence to their constitutional responsibility.

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18. When political parties do not include members of the opposing party or parties with good qualifications, and progressive intentions into their leadership, or retaining efficient workers.

19. There is the subversion of the freedom of speech.

20. When there is an alignment of the democratic party or parties with the success, control of the population and progress of authoritarian regimes.

21. When the military through the actions of the population becomes very opposed to the ruling party or parties.

22. The decline in the trust of the population of the democratic process.

Before any democracy collapses there are warning signs. These warning signs are normally slow and progressive. Warning signs may go unnoticed to the population but can be perceived by the studentship of government. Popular warning signs are;

1. The extreme activism and disturbances due to the democratic process and the decisions of the Democratic parties.

2. The rise in the democracy of a party with alternative views-authoritarian- which can become popular enough and win elections.

3. The gradual determination and pursuit of the idea that one party continuously rule at the expense of the other.

4. When one party rules for many years without opposition. This can be perceived by some that there is no need for elections and that the will of the population is automatic.

5. The continuous expression on social media the mistrust of the leadership of one party as opposed to the other.

6. There is a situation that the executive believes and shows that there should be no opposition to its desires.

7. When the military is aligned to a political party and the military leader gains favor to the electorate at the demise of the democratic leaders.

8. When the electorate is so against the democratic parties that the vast majority of the electorate refuse to vote- take part in the electoral process.

9. The continuous undermining of the free press by political parties.

10. The subversion of peaceful demonstrations.

11. Disregard for the political process.

12. When the democratic rules of the various branches of government are rejected or continuously modified to please the leading political party or parties.

13. When there are continuous attempts to subvert the opposition.

14. The selection of the judiciary who are loyal followers.

15. The abuse and excessive use of emergency powers, thus by passing the judiciary and legislative powers.

16. The continuous acts by politicians not to accept the outcomes of elections-some comment that the elections were not fair.

17. When voters perceive that the democratic party or parties are not operating ethically.

18. The targeting of political rivals with increase threats to their lives.

19. The encouragement of violence against political opponents and the toleration of such violence.

20. The encouragement and toleration of political polarization among the population.

21. Blaming sectors of the population for all the problems that occur in the democracy based on their minority status, ethnicity, age and race etc.

22. The ability of the opposition to become a challenge to the governing party declines.

23. The decreasing ability of individuals to congregate-assemble

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24. When the members of the opposition party or parties are being arrested for supporting the populace in their demands. This is done under the disguise that they are creating unrest or destabilizing the country.

Presently, there seems to be a decreasing enthusiasm for the democratic form of government. The deterioration of the standard of living in democracies maybe a discernible cause. When the spread of wealth in a democracy is such that the general population is seemingly becoming poorer or living pay check to paycheck without any affordable amenities and a select few are increasing their wealth enormously, it creates an alarm in the population. This alarm can lead to military coups, or the election of a popular individual who promise a better allocation of wealth, and improve standard of living. Such an individual might perceived his/her election as having the mandate to pursue a different form of government.

For a democratic government to remain in continual existence there should be strict adherence to the rule of law and the constitution. Each branch of the government must use its constitutional power for the up keep of the democracy. influential individuals should not be afraid to expose the warning signs and the current risks that the democracy is at the crosswords. Although there might be acts of deterrence to the risks of the fall of the democracy, brave and courageous individuals should use all media to explain to the public the position of the democratic status of the country. In the case where the democracy is slowly in decline there must be the passing of information regarding the importance of the democratic process and the signs and risks of collapse of the democracy from generation to generation. The young people in all democracies should be encouraged to be involved in the democratic process by the elderly. Also the elder statesmen of all political parties should teach the young the constitutionality of each branch of government.

The population should be cautious of the leaders their elect to govern. As Plato said, " If you do not take an interest in the affairs of your government, then you are doomed to live under the rule of fools." That sentiment is true in modern times also, hence it is necessary for all able individuals to be aware of whom they will elect as leaders. According to Ronald Reagan, " Trust, but verify." Such sentiments should be used as guidelines by the general population when they have the opportunity to vote for elected members in all democracies, and they should be made clear to the population by influential individuals who have integrity.

There is a stability risk to a democracy when one party controls all sectors of governance and the only condition of ruling is loyalty to one another. It is not in the best interest of a democracy for one ruling party to control all branches of government, including the military for long periods of time. It is expected in a democracy that the ruling of a country will be done by a different party or parties throughout time. It is essential that the constitution be such that the most powerful branches of government be given term limits, although some continuity is important for the stability of the democracy.

It is evident now-a-days that in many countries of the world the leadership of the military are also members of political parties. This should not be the case, since the concept of political loyalty might lead to an easier overthrow of the democracy. Although the philosophical agendas of political parties might be different in a democracy their must be such that they address and have great emphasis on the desires of the general population. Slogans used by political parties should be fully explained and not be misleading to gain political victory. Be aware that some politicians use misleading information to gain electoral victories. This can occur in the executive, legislative, or judicial branches of government. A democracy is highly at risk when the desires of the general population are not addressed even with the changes of political party or parties.

Even in situations where there is no elected opposition the desires of the population must be addressed and there should be no acts to suggest dictatorship. On a cautionary note, According to John Stuart Mill, "a country can never become developed if its people blindly follow political parties". Outside influence can hinder the development of a country for economic, personal or strategic gains.