

3.2.2.3.2.64 Politics as entertainment: voting for change, anyway

A weakness of direct democracy is that it overemphasizes change.

An idealistic view of democracy is that people evaluate various options and then vote for what they consider most beneficial.

However, in reality, most people have a poor judgment, or no idea at all, of what is beneficial for them. If they are not captivated by populist politicians who exploit their envies and hatreds, then there is a good chance that they treat politics as entertainment. This is all the more pronounced the poorer a country, and the lower the level of general education. Entertainment, the opposite of boredom, is when there is variety, or change.

This is why in any direct democracy, the opposition always has an edge. People are bored, apart from being dissatisfied, and they vote for change just to have something new. To have value as entertainment, the opposition's proposals must not be better. They only have to be different.

Change, even when as total as in revolutions, often doesn't result in more freedom, certainly not personal freedom.

The French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions are historic examples. Personal freedom only increased after the revolutionary regimes had experienced continuity over a certain period of time. For continuity is more likely to allow people to carve out their spaces of personal freedom in a society. The rules are generally known, and people have adapted to them, and safety has been established for both the government and those governed.

That non-democratic regimes would, when they are in power long enough, allow people a higher degree of personal freedom than new democracies, or even revolutionary democracies, appears to most people to be an anachronism.

While democratic change usually isn't as violent as revolutionary change, and accompanied by fewer intrusions into personal freedom, democracy nevertheless is a conflict-oriented political system. And in order to be workable (and allow the continuity necessary not only for personal freedom, but also for economic progress), the political parties contesting democratic elections must not differ on fundamental issues, so that indeed, a change of power doesn't mean too much change in the society.

In the US, democracy is workable precisely because the main political parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, differ so little from each other that for the country's political ideology, it doesn't really matter who is in power.

Even in France, Britain, and Germany, there is so much political consensus between all "democratic" parties that by and large, it makes no difference who rules.

In "mature" democracies, there are numerous safeguards that political movements that advocate too much change will be muffled. This stretches from constitutional requirements on their programs to the gerrymandering of voting districts.

But when the US model of democracy was transferred to the Balkan, or, for that matter, the former Soviet Union, or to countries in Africa, or when it is transferred to Afghanistan, or Iraq, and even just to Indonesia, the political forces that appear will not just differ on formalities.

The political parties in newly democratic countries split, or will likely split, along much more fundamental fault lines (ethnicity, religion, regional independence).

However, the psychological mechanism by which people in democracies have a preference for change (just for its entertainment value), is at work as much in new democracies without safeguards against too much change as it is in established ones where change is a formality. The fact that people, when given the democratic choice, have, as a matter of human nature, an affinity for change, doesn't mean that change would be beneficial for them. People often realize this later. Even in countries that had such lousy governments

as did many of the Eastern European and Soviet republics, you typically get, after a few years, an increasing number of people that would happily revert their previous vote for change. And, even more starkly, if you would, and could, offer people who voted in referendums for national independence the return to a previous colonial or occupied status, many would pick it.

Time and again, democratization has led to quick disintegration of what previously were powerful players on the world stage, or at least within their regions. Reunification, on the other hand, is a tedious process (as exemplified by the slow progress by which the European Union is formed).

But the formation of ever small states, as they result from Third World democratization, usually is bad news for both political and personal freedom.

They are bad news for political freedom because the smaller a state the easier it is to invade for the world's current superpower when it does not agree with the political direction taken. Think Grenada.

Smaller countries are also often bad news for personal freedom. A national government that spans a wide area typically will have to integrate a large number of different lifestyles. It therefore is restricted by a large country's heterogeneity to declare local standards of one region the national law.

A partially Muslim, partially non-Muslim country is always more likely to have a more tolerant government than a country that is 100 percent Muslim. A government that rules over a population of mixed ethnicity will have to try to strike a balance, and impose it if it is truly a national government, or see ethnic strife, civil war, and disintegration.

While one can always find samples of small countries and large countries granting their citizens more or less personal freedom, it is important for a political ideology to have a position on whether it is in favor of large countries that encompass many different ethnicities, religions, and lifestyles, or in favor of an ever increasing number of small countries, resulting from the division of larger countries along ethnic or religious lines, or just reflecting zones of military might.

Even the granting of regional autonomy often is counterproductive for personal freedom.

For all the above reasons, when the question is of whether large countries or small countries are more likely to grant an optimum of personal freedom, the bet of public male strategies of Kreutz Ideology is on large countries.

And when the question is of whether direct democracy or less democracy (which still is some democracy) is better for an optimum of personal freedom, the bet of public male strategies of Kreutz Ideology is on less democracy.

The best alternative to US-style democracy is a system of indirect democracy which spans several layers.