Constitutional liberalism and Democracy

Tasha White

Political Science 303

April 5, 2017

Peace, freedom, and longevity are aspired after by almost all governments. The struggle to achieve this is not so straight forward. Through Western globalization, democracy has become the most sought after form of governing regime, supposedly producing the most desirable characteristics for authority. However, what exactly does a democracy do that other forms of government do not? Who is to say that it is the best regime, or the ideal form of governance? Democratic countries produce freedom, safety, and successful economics. Many people would agree with this statement; this does not mean it is true. Democratic countries exert free and fair elections within their borders. It is not democracy, but liberal constitutionalism that bring rights and liberties to citizens. There are many democratic countries that do not use liberalist constitutionalism that run barrenly. Often democratic countries, mostly Western, practise liberal constitutionalism but these terms are definitely not one and the same. Authoritarian regimes seem to be viewed as less than simply because they are not a democracy. Authoritarianism governments are based on equality while democracies mostly strive for fair elections. From simple explanations these regimes have no opportunity to be better or worse than one another. It is the actual act of running the government that either benefits or hinders how these regimes turn out. Similarly, it is the characteristics adopted by each regime that determine if they prosper or hinder. The goal of this paper is to take away the emphasis of the perfect government being a democracy and instead attempt to focus on instilling more constitutional liberalist characteristics in order to mould a successful government.

A democracy is a governmental regime which contains certain characteristics: Effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda, and inclusion of adults. It may not be realistic that all governments meet this criteria or even that they should. There are many people who live in democratic countries that do not understand their system and do not participate at all. While there is voting equality, many individuals choose to not vote at all, thus creating bitter feelings of being unrepresented. Unfortunately, this encourages them further not to participate, as they assume it will make no difference as they are one in many. Individuals do have the opportunity to vote and participate in politics but due to lack of knowledge or feelings of inclusion, many choose not to. A democracy is not the perfect regime. It absolutely can be a beneficial aspect of a well running authority, however, it is not the direct cause of a proficient government. Liberal democracy, on the other hand, is a conjoined descriptor for democratic principles and liberal guidelines. Free elections and the presence of civil liberties are very liberal qualities. The general acceptance of basic liberties and rights present a feeling of safety for all individuals involved, encouraging progression and risk taking for beneficial outcomes. Similarly, the freedom for individuals or groups to participate in political activity encourages continuous improvement due to an array of opinions and compromises. Another notable characteristic of liberalism is upholding the rule of law. This is stating the equal rights of every person under the law, regardless of one’s hierarchal place in the world. This is an important aspect of liberalism as it is absent in authoritarian regimes. The provision of basic health, education, and social services allows for individuals to achieve their potential and further the progression of their political systems, and their countries as a whole. A liberal democracy seemingly contains almost every solution for potential conflict, which is not the case. Liberal democratic countries still contain issues and there are other regimes which display successful governing systems, without the label of being liberal or democratic.

Authoritarianism includes both dictatorships and totalitarianisms. These regimes each contain an official ideology which is run by a single mass party. The members of this party run the country and place themselves at the top of the hierarchal structure. This is meant to create equality for all, unfortunately it actually eliminates the impartiality, as the elites are treated far better than the average citizens. Fear and order are instilled upon citizens through secret police who go to great lengths to accomplish this. No amount of force is too much. The ruling party has control over all media, political institutions, and the economy. They control what the citizens’ see, shape their opinions, and limit their abilities for opportunity. The citizens are only exposed to what their ruling party allows. These parties rule through coercion and fear. Authoritarian regimes may sound worse than they are. Though they have the ability to be easily corrupted, the goals of this form of government are not adverse. One type of dictatorship regime is communism, which is based on equality, harmony, and cooperation. It creates a communal ethos for everyone living under the communist government, giving everyone equal treatment for everything they do. This regime has the ability to achieve goals and objectives through joint efforts among citizens. It can be well run and effective in governance. The discontent appears for authoritarian regimes in terms of who gets to be the elite in power. Though it promotes equality for everyone within it, the leaders and party members get treated as royalty. This eliminates the feeling of unitedness among the citizens and instead puts them lowest on the hierarchal scale.

Liberal constitutionalism does not concern itself with procedures of determining government but instead works to attain governmental goals. It perseveres on the idea of good governance and will continually strive to allow citizens their rights and freedoms. Democratic liberalism ensures fair elections and the right people in government. Liberal constitutionalism ensures that under the law, individuals are treated with the respect, rights, and liberties that they expect and deserve. This liberalism ensures complete egalitarianism for all individuals under its regime. Combining both these terms and forming a governmental regime based on the values they represent would allow for the closest form of fair government. Giving liberties and rights to the people, while maintaining equality with rule of law would allow for satisfied citizens in terms of feelings of equality. It will also encourage progression and opportunities for individuals under its government. This regime would focus on protecting individuals while still allowing them to grow to and achieve their potential. It would protect from ruling through coercion and fear and instead prioritize safety and advancement. The presence of both negative and positive freedoms would be displayed for all individuals to use. This will not only continuously enhance the structure of government but also improve citizens’ abilities and performances. The combination of liberal democracy and constitutional liberalism may seem like the best regime to turn to, however, there are still benefits provided for authoritarian countries. There must be a thorough distinction between democracy and constitutional liberalism in order to allow the dictatorships and totalitarian regimes to advance on their own terms, with this concept in mind. Constitutional liberalism could create the egalitarianism that all individuals strive for, and that most governments would enjoy giving to their people.

There seems to be many brilliant aspects within different regimes and in order to get the best of all of them, there needs to be a merging of the best qualities of each. Unfortunately, this may be easier said than done. As mentioned, the emphasis on successful government should shift from being democratic to being constitutional liberalist. Again, the presence of liberal democratic characteristics would not be a bad thing but this is not entirely necessary if there is a progressive government already in place. This would encourage fair elections and strive in attempt to achieve goals and objectives. Democracies do not create well run governments. Though many democratic countries do have these features, it is important to recognize what is accomplishing the successful government; this is constitutional liberalism features. Through this, countries under failing regimes can make a lucrative switch. They can adopt constitutional liberalist characteristics and, with time, shift to being whichever type of regime suites them. Adopting these features could even allow for new options to be made in terms of governance. It is not necessary for a government to be democratic to be free. If a communist government were to adopt constitutional liberalist features, it could potentially be a favoured form of governing. Fairness among citizens and the former elites as a whole. It may be difficult to say exactly how that would turn out but the important thing is the ability to make an attempt. Until it is tried, there is no way to tell how much it would benefit or perhaps hinder the current system. The most important thing to note is that adopting a certain regime or a certain characteristic of a successful government does not ensure a prosperous authority. There are many things to take into consideration, and there are many different types of regimes that can be the basis of a successful government. There is no perfect answer to what the right way to govern is; there is no perfect governance to resolve all the issues in the world. There is, however, an option for advancement and for opportunities for many countries to strengthen their authority while still protecting their citizens. While there is no direct way to ensure a successful government, there is a definite way to enhance individuals’ happiness and opportunities in their own lives. Constitutional liberalism allows them the room to advance and create better conditions for themselves and their countries.

There are many different forms of governing regimes. The appearance of these regimes have been around a long time. There are always going to be different issues and different ways to improve them. In order to find and adopt these new ways, there must be continuously improving structures to be able to determine the new issues. Democratic countries have many things going for them but they do not have the rights and liberties necessary for a united, appreciative commune. Authoritarian regimes may have effective ideals but they do not seem to put them to practise as they should. The way one thinks about governmental regimes needs to change to be able to collectively use each one for its best qualities. Constitutional liberalism is a must for peoples’ egalitarianism. The citizens deserve this and no government should have the ability to take it away from them, but rather they should be able to give it to them. The distinction of what creates a good government should not wholly be placed upon one regime but it should be known to be a combination of many. There is so much information to receive from different types of governing, and though all have their flaws, they all contain an important contribution to what we call ‘good government.’ The ability for a government to uphold peace, freedom and longevity of its regime and its people should be a constant, continuously improving aspect of itself. There is no regime without its citizens and there are no citizens without some form of governance. This paper has attempted to explore the importance of constitutional liberalism as an aspect of any and all governing regimes. After all, rights and liberties of the people should be the most desired action for all governments.

**References**

Møller, J. (2008). A Critical Note on 'The Rise of Illiberal Democracy'. Australian Journal Of Political Science, 43(3), 555-561. doi:10.1080/10361140802267316.

Lacharite, Jason. Political Science 303 Lecture Material.

Plattner, M. F. (1998). Liberalism and Democracy. Foreign Affairs, 77(2), 171-180.

Shattuck, J., & Atwood, F. B. (1998). Defending Democracy. Foreign Affairs, 77(2), 167-170.

Zakaria, F. (2007). The future of freedom: illiberal democracy at home and abroad. New York: W.W. Norton.

Zakaria, F. (2004). Islam, Democracy, and Constitutional Liberalism. Political Science Quarterly (Academy Of Political Science), 119(1), 1-20.

Zakaria, F. (1997). The Rise of Illiberal Democracy. Foreign Affairs, 76(6), 22-43.