

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF  
INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

QUESTION 4

*“Fareed Zakaria contends that the US should promote liberalization but not democratization abroad. Do you agree with this argument?”*

Due: October 21, 2002

In “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”<sup>1</sup>, Fareed Zakaria contends that instead of promoting democracy abroad, US focus should shift to promoting liberalism. Zakaria is right in observing that emphasis placed on conducting “free and fair elections” has led to illiberal democracies that fail to achieve the desired ends of constitutional liberalism, that is, rule of law and protection of civil liberties. Central to the question of whether the US should pursue democratization or liberalization is the desired outcome of its policy. While democratization focuses on the means by which governments are chosen, liberalization and the consolidation of constitutional liberalism that Zakaria advocates addresses the duty of governments toward their people. Assuming that spreading democracy is aimed at good governance that will lead to economic development and peace and security, all of these goals would be better met by the proliferation of liberal ideals and internalization of ideals by both governments and populations around the world. Rather than promoting democratic governments in the developing world, the US should direct its resources towards building the capacity of institutions of governance within these states to adhere to liberal ideals.

According to Dahl “democratization is made up of the right to participate and public contestation”<sup>2</sup>. Dahl denotes the extension of the right to participation as increasing the inclusiveness of a regime whereas the degree to which a regime is open to public contestation refers to liberalization. When democratization is focussed on holding regular elections that are inclusive in terms of widespread electoral participation, neglecting liberalization of public contestation, and thus limiting the choice of government by a people, the result is often the propagation of a dynastic rule, by members of the same ruling family, or rule by the elites of a society. This lack of political choice can result in a democratically elected government that may not truly represent the will or interests of the larger population it serves. Liberalization

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<sup>1</sup> Sept. 30, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Sept. 30, 2002 (Robert A. Dahl, p. 1, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*)

in this sense relates to the greater toleration of opposition to an existing regime, or political pluralism, which is a vital aspect of what Dahl considers full democratization.

Beyond this liberalization within the democratic process however, lies the more important and relevant concept of constitutional liberalism, which according to Zakaria, is separate from democracy. The *liberal* democracy that has developed in the West consists of two distinct aspects, free and fair elections (democracy), and the rule of law, separation of powers and the protection of fundamental freedoms (constitutional liberalism). It is the constitutional liberalism that is key, and is the basis of the desirable attributes of Western democracy that are conducive to peace and prosperity.

Plattner, in his response to Zakaria, points to evidence that “on the whole, countries that hold free elections are overwhelmingly more liberal than those that do not”<sup>3</sup>, to refute the claim that democracy and liberalism are independent of one other. But this argument does not establish any causal relationship that democracy leads to constitutional liberalism. Indeed, the very act of holding elections requires some degree of liberalism within a regime, however above this minimal need to accept the right of people to determine their government, accepting democracy does not entail accepting the wider responsibility and accountability to the people inherent in constitutional liberalism. It is the latter that is essential to good governance, leading to economic development, and lacking such liberal fundamentals leads to corrupt and inefficient government in many developing countries who may embrace *illiberal* democracy.

In Heller’s article on the Labor of Development in Kerela, Heller notes that “Kerala’s democratic polity has developed a far greater capacity for aggregating interests and channelling lower class demands than has the fragmented, elite dominated and patronage-

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<sup>3</sup> Sept. 30, 2002 (Marc F. Plattner, p. 2, Liberalism and Democracy: Can’t have one without the other)

driven Indian democracy”<sup>4</sup>. Kerala is one of the religiously more diverse states in India and faces similar conditions of underdevelopment as the rest of India, however it has had greater success according to many indicators of development and has not suffered from as much civil strife compared to the rest of India and other states within India. Kerala’s unique position within India is intrinsically linked to the greater respect of individual rights to property and civil liberties within Kerala, which has then been expressed through a democratic system. It is the liberal principles embraced by the leaders and people of Kerala that has led to democracy achieving the ends of development and good governance.

Democracies have been lauded as being more pacific than non-democracies and the idea that a “democratic peace” exists has been proposed. However, the establishment of a democratic government alone will not serve the purpose of creating a peaceful society without the means of protection of individual rights that lay in constitutional liberalism. As Mill recognized, “The people who exercise power are not always the same people with those over whom it is exercised”<sup>5</sup>. Promoting democratization and thus the processes of establishing legitimate governance, does not take into account the effects underlying social stratification on the outcome of democratically elected governments. Where societies are divided along communal lines, such as religion or ethnicity, a lack of commitment to liberal values of toleration and respect for individual rights and freedoms, and liberal institutions like independent judiciaries to uphold the rule of law, democracy may well be used to legitimize majoritarian rule which suppresses the rights and liberties of minority communities. Zakaria points to the case of the former Yugoslavia, yet such illiberal tendencies can also be observed in relatively established democracies like India, where democracy over 50 plus years has

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<sup>4</sup> Sept. 23 (Patrick Heller, p.11, *The Labor of Development*)

<sup>5</sup> Sept. 30, (John Stuart Mill, p. 2, *On Liberty*)

evolved into a majority rule increasingly based on Hindu nationalism and away from principles of secularism as described by Locke<sup>6</sup>.

This danger of the “tyranny of the majority” mentioned by both Mill and Zakaria necessitates limits on the powers of government, even one that is democratically elected. As Zakaria notes, “what is distinctive about the American system is not how democratic it is but rather how undemocratic it is”<sup>7</sup>. Unchecked democracy does little towards the establishment of peace where societies are divided and toleration and respect for individual rights is not a peremptory norm. This is clearly recognized in US policy and practice to date towards nation-building in Afghanistan and in considering the future of Iraq. Before democracy can be established, if at all, the guiding principles of liberalism must be realized within these societies. Liberalism is the necessary foundation for any future peaceful democracy to succeed in these states. The choice of government rests not on a leader elected to represent the majority of the population, but rather one who is acceptable to all and accountable to the society as a whole.

Given that a state in which democracy has been established and relative peace exists, it does not instinctively follow that by virtue of being democratic, a state will not be a belligerent one. Sharing democracy as a common process of electing government is less likely to be a basis for peaceful relations than sharing common ideas of the role of government its and accountability to its citizens. For example a democratic India and a democratic Pakistan would not be more likely to resist fighting war because they are democratic states, but rather if their leaders shared liberal ideals and acted in accordance with such ideals towards their own and each others’ populations.

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<sup>6</sup> Sept. 30, 2002 (John Locke, *A letter concerning toleration*)

<sup>7</sup> Sept. 30, 2002 (Fareed Zakaria, p. 8, *The rise of illiberal democracy*)

Democratization as means towards achieving liberal governments and societies has thus far proved to produce mixed results, with the number of *illiberal* democracies growing. Where basic liberal values are wanting, introducing democracy will not consequently serve the purpose of liberalization, aimed at promoting civil liberties and the rule of law which are embodied in the constitutional liberalism that characterizes most Western democracies. Promoting a deeper understanding of the ideas of liberty and toleration that led to democracy flourishing in the West is the surest way to achieve greater co-operation, prosperity and stability among nations. The US should redirect its efforts at democratization towards building the liberal institutions of governance if it seeks to encourage lawful and equitable rule within developing nations. Planting the seeds of liberalism, and an ongoing commitment to their development is the most meaningful development assistance the US can provide to developing countries in growing organic systems of just governance.