

Post-democracy

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The term *post-democracy* was coined by Warwick University political scientist Colin Crouch in 2000 in his book *Coping with Post-Democracy*. It designates states that are conducted by fully operating democratic systems (elections are being held, governments fall and there is freedom of speech), but whose application is progressively limited. A small elite is taking the tough decisions and co-opts the democratic institutions. Crouch further developed the idea in an article called *Is there a liberalism beyond social democracy?*^[1] for the think tank Policy Network and in his subsequent book *The Strange Non-Death of Neo-Liberalism*.

This term appeared to define a running evolution within democracies during the 21st century. It is a polemical term because it calls attention to recognized democracies that are losing some of their foundations and evolving towards an aristocratic regime.

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Colin Crouch introduced the term *post-democracy* in 2000.

Causes

Crouch names the following reasons:

- **No common goals:** For people in the post-industrial society it is increasingly difficult, in particular for the underclass, to identify themselves as a group and therefore difficult to focus on political parties that represent them. For instance laborers, farmers or entrepreneurs no longer feel attracted to one political movement and this means that there is no common goal for them as a group to get united.
- **Globalization:** The effect of globalization makes it almost impossible for nations to work out their own economic policy. Therefore, large trade agreements and supranational unions (e.g., the European Union) are used to make policy but this level of politics is very hard to control with democratic instruments. Globalization additionally endows transnational corporations with more political leverage given their ability to avoid federal regulation and directly affect domestic economies.^[2]
- **Non-balanced debates:** In most democratic countries the positions of the political parties have become very much alike. This means that there is not much to choose from for its voters. The effect is that political campaigns are looking more like advertising to make the differences look bigger. Also the private lives of the politicians have become an important item in elections. Sometimes "sensitive" issues stay undiscussed. The English conservative journalist Peter Osborne presented a documentary of the 2005 general election, arguing that it had become anti-democratic because it targeted a number of floating voters with a narrow agenda.

- **Entanglement between public and private sector:** There is a big interest between politics and business. Through lobbying companies, especially multinational corporations, are able to enforce legislation more effective than the inhabitants of a country. Corporations and governments are in close relation because states are in need of corporations as they are great employers. But as much of the production is outsourced and the corporations have almost no difficulties to move to other countries labor-law becomes employee unfriendly and tax bites are moved from companies to individuals in order to make better conditions for corporations. It becomes more common for politicians and managers to switch jobs from government to business and vice versa.
- **Privatization:** Then there is the idea of new public management (neoliberalism) to privatize public services. However, privatized institutions are difficult to control by democratic means and they have no allegiance to human communities, unlike the government. Crouch uses the term “phantom firms” to describe the flexibility and elusive nature of firms which bend to the market. He concludes that private firms have incentive to make individual profit rather than better the welfare of the public. For example, he states that there is a problem with pharmaceuticals funding medical research.^[2]

Consequences

As a consequence:

- Fewer voters use their right to vote or they do vote but just don't expect much of it.
- Politicians can easily ignore an undesirable outcome of a referendum or opinion poll. For instance in 2005 when France and the Netherlands voted *No* at a referendum about the European Constitution these countries still ratified the treaty after only minor modifications were done.
- The rise of xenophobic parties who use the prevailing discontent.
- Foreign governments can influence the internal politics of a sovereign country. According to Crouch, the way the eurozone crisis was handled is the best example of how things work in a post-democracy. European leaders managed to enforce a new government to take office in Italy and in Greece far-reaching austerity measures were put in place.
- Private interest becomes increasingly influential in public policy.

Solutions

According to Crouch there is an important task for social media in which voters can participate more actively in public debates. In addition, these voters would have to join advocacy groups for specific interests. The citizens have to reclaim their place in decision making. He calls this post-post-democracy.

The Occupy movement was a form of more or less disorganized opposition that grew out of the dissatisfaction regarding to the power of the banking industry.

References

1. Is there a liberalism beyond social democracy? (http://www.policy-network.net/pno_detail.aspx?ID=3997&title=Is+there+a+liberalism+beyond+social+democracy%3f) By Colin Crouch. Policy Network , 5 May 2011.
 2. Crouch (2004). *Post-Democracy*. pp. Chapter 2.
- Interview with Colin Crouch about post-democracy on YouTube (mainly in English) (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiTL_5Fs2fU)

See also

- Neonormalization

- Post-politics
- Policy Network

Further reading

- Colin Crouch: *Post Democracy*, 2004, ISBN 0-7456-3315-3
- Jenny Hocking & Colleen Lewis: *Counter-Terrorism and the Post-Democratic State*, 2008, ISBN 1-84542-917-6

External links

- On Coping with "Post Democracy" (<http://gadfly.igc.org/politics/postdemo.htm>). By Ernest Partridge. "The Online Gadfly", January, 2001.
- **(Spanish)** La emancipación según (<http://www.claveintelectual.com/index.php?cID=476>) Jacques Rancière.
- There is no Alternative (<http://www.aeonmagazine.com/living-together/henry-farrell-post-democracy/>) by Henry Farrell.
- Why We Need A More Substantive European Democracy (<https://www.socialeurope.eu/2014/08/european-democracy/>), by Colin Crouch. *Social Europe*, 20 August 2014.

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Categories: Political science | Legal systems | Democracy | Words coined in the 2000s

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