

# DEMOCRACY WITHOUT GENERALIZED TRUST MAY LEAD TO VIOLENCE

FINN TSCHUDI, JON LUND HANSEN AND MAGNI MARTENS

A widely shared assumption in Western countries is that democracy is the road to a prosperous and well functioning society. A major purpose of this article is to question this assumption. We will show that democracy is not sufficient for a “good society,” and that it may not even be necessary. Furthermore, attempts to introduce a constitutional democracy may under certain circumstances lead to human and social disaster. Democracy will here simply refer to a system where there are free and fair elections, and there are contesting parties each with some chance of getting into a power position. We will specifically explore the role of "generalized trust" as one core factor in the process of constituting democracy, and in the development of a good society and a good governance. We will use "generalized trust" or "trusting" on the one hand as a core concept and on the other hand as a more general and sometimes peripheral concept.

## **Indicators for a "good society" and "good governance"**

There are several indicators of “a good society” By and large these indicators are correlated and most of them are usually included in research projects on the topic. An appropriate starting point can be found in Wilkinson and Pickett (2009, 18):

... almost all problems which are more common at the bottom of the social ladder are more common in more unequal societies. It is not just ill-health and violence, but also ... a host of other social problems ... The list we ended up with included: level of trust, mental illness (including drug and alcohol addiction), life expectancy, infant mortality, obesity, children’s educational performance, teenage births, homicides, imprisonment rates, social mobility ...

(Please note that the list contains both units where *more* indicates a better society, i.e. level of trust, life expectancy, children's educational performance, social mobility, and units where *less* indicates a better one, i.e. mental illness, infant mortality, obesity, teenage births, homicides, imprison rates.) Results for given societies may be combined into an "Index of Health and Social Problems" for each country, or for short the "society index" (on which a society may score as "good" or "bad").

When we take a closer look at the ten factors listed above, we see that "level of trust" stands out as different from the other nine. Whereas "trusting" ("level of trust") is a definite psychological/cultural factor, which may only be measured indirectly, all the other nine components are social factors which are available for direct measurement in units of numbers, weight, duration, etc. Whether this psychological/cultural factor should be regarded as a causal factor, or as a result of the other social factors, is a question of current debate. Does a high level of trusting causally lead to "a good society," or does "a good society" lead to higher levels of trusting? As is so often the case when it comes to psycho-social interdependencies, it is reasonable to think more in systemic concepts than in simple causative ones. It would be simplistic to regard one factor as causing the nine others, and it would be reasonable to regard any factor as to some degree causative to the others. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) see "equality" as the most basic concept, the major road to a "good society," and they have good empirical evidence for this. In the following, for the sake of brevity, we will refer to "equality" as representing all the factors except "trust." We will rather disentangle and explore the "trusting" indicator as a psychological/cultural causative factor of its own.

One major alternative to Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) is Rothstein (2011), who emphasizes "quality of government" when it comes to aspects of a "good society." His major indicators are: lack of corruption, impartial application of rules and procedures, and laws commanding general respect. We will use "governance" (which may be "good" or "bad") as a useful superordinate concept here. Supplementary to Rothstein, Hawksley (2009) lists as other central aspects of governance: efficient public services, disciplined police, education, health and transport organizations, all of which can be held to account.

So far we have listed some central indicators of "a good society," all of them having some causative strength, all of them to some degree interdependent and influencing each other through feedback loops. They encompass

psychological/cultural, social and structural (governance) factors. The basic question here is how governance, trust and equality relate to democracy. Does more democracy lead to better governance, higher trust and more equality? If not, under what circumstances is there a correlation, and which causations could we suggest? Rothstein (2011), among others, points to highly ambiguous relations between (degree of) democracy and the “governance index.”

### **Belonging and democracy**

For our topic here, we need another and additional perspective. Griffin (2015) writes about “The need to belong,” which signifies “... an innate need to feel an integral part of something greater than themselves,” but this need may under certain circumstances be turned into “demonization and even war against ‘the other’ (malignant belonging)” (p. 3). What Griffin here pinpoints is the Janus-face of belonging. It carries the potential for loving relations and solidarity on the one hand, but on the other hand a potential for community built on hatred against the other - belonging to an in-group based on hatred. This “malignant belonging” brings to mind Kelly’s (1955, 1174-1175) critique of “highly specific role relationships,” reminding him of early stages of group psychotherapy ruled by “... pre-emptive and constellatory constructions ... If so and so is a bourgeois-capitalist-imperialist, he is *nothing but* a bourgeois-capitalist-imperialist ... He cannot discriminate between liberalism, democracy, Stalinism, Trotskyism ...” The difference between this type of construction and “that which we perceive as producing a healthy society ... lies in whether we can be loyal to *certain persons only*, or whether [we] can be loyal to *humanity* ...” The loyalty to principles ... in contrast to loyalty only to facts, is the basis of that much prized quality of personality – personal integrity”, or in Griffin’s terminology, a mark of “benign belonging.” As we shall see, the question, "belonging to what and on which basis" turns out to be a crucial one in our context here.

### **Democratization without trust – post-war Iraq**

Let us, as an example, apply this question to the early elections in Iraq after the war in 2003. As described by Hawksley (2009, 60-61): "When the results came in, arguments spread like wildfire. Delegates stood up hurling abuse at each other with accusations of cheating and fraud." This implies loyalty only to some persons (those belonging to one's own party). What is lacking here is the general etiquette of showing *magnanimity* in victory, for instance by a conciliatory phone call between political rivals. In Iraq, the practice was more like the "winner takes all scenario," and this stands in sharp contrast to the Kellian concept of "being loyal to humanity" (which implies magnanimity).

In Iraq Nouri al-Malaki (a Shia) served as president from 2006 to 2014. While the Sunnis are a minority in Iraq, under Saddam Hussein they got a relatively large share of leading positions in the army and government. Today there are about 45,000 Sunnis in the army versus 210,000 in 2003, while there are now about 120,000 Shias. After Saddam's death Malaki not only turned against the Sunnis, but according to some sources also participated in having several leading Sunni persons killed, and instead appointed Shias. The facts about all details here are not crucial for our argument: the humiliations the Sunnis suffered definitely should be seen as a major source of the present civil war. An attempt was made to improve this state of affairs in October 2014 when Haider al-Abadi (also a Shia) was elected president. While he promised to select the most able persons as ministers, in practice he broke his promises and mainly chose corrupt Shias (Hawksley 2009).

In an interview with the Norwegian newspaper Klassekampen (Klassekampen 2014), Matthew Hoh (a former US officer and diplomat) claims that US policy in Iraq is making things worse by helping one side in a civil war while both sides are performing atrocious actions. From this perspective ISIL (Islamic State) can be seen as a Frankenstein monster created by the United States. The worst problem has been to use persons from other tribes and ethnicities to manage local communities they were not acquainted with. This led to large problems with corruption, in which officers sold equipment, and were out to make money and not to serve as leaders. Iraqi forces "take revenge with beheadings, mutilations and brutal executions by throwing people from buildings," according to the Daily Mail (2016). Kidnappings and extraction of large amounts of ransom payments have turned into a major industry. For example, Patrick Cockburn (2003 Independent Digital (UK) Ltd) reports : "Col Ali, the head of the anti-kidnap unit of the Iraqi police - which has 17 officers and 15 men - said that kidnapping really got under way in June ... He said: "Before the war, kidnapping made up only about 1 per cent of serious crime, but now it is 70 per cent."

Supporting one side led to further polarizations between groups, and Shia Muslim troops have terrorized people in Sunni areas. While the government in Baghdad basically needs support from Sunnis in the fight against ISIL, many Sunnis feel that the government in Baghdad may be a greater threat than ISIL. This undoubtedly has strengthened Sunni support for ISIL. It is clear that the Iraq army is very insufficient in fighting ISIL.

In short, the Western intervention in Iraq has not done much to create trust between different groups but has rather increased distrust. According to our hypothesis that "trusting" is crucial for "a good society" and for democracy to function well, post-war Iraq serves as an interesting and frightening example. The mixture of bad governance, low trust, and low equality has been shown to be a fatal foundation for the introduction of "democracy." It also illustrates a situation with lack of Kellian "loyalty to humanity." But is it illustrative of a more general law, which is also valid in situations less chaotic than the post war society of Iraq? May the introduction of "a ballot for all" be more deadly than continuation of a dictatorship, especially when there is a rapid rate of transition, and little or no preparation of the population? And if so, which are the crucial indicators to warn us of possible exacerbations of the situation? Obviously, everything is *not* better than a dictatorship.

### **Democratization, latent and manifest factors**

The introduction of a constitutional democracy then is no guarantee for the development of a good society. Both the process of establishment and the framework for a democracy are crucial. Let us now look more specifically at the process, the path to democracy. To illustrate a perspective on the difference between healthy and unhealthy ways to democratic rule, Laquente and Rothstein (2014) chose to compare serious class conflicts in Spain and Sweden in the early 1930's. Rothstein (2011, 211-218) has an extensive treatment of changes leading from "corruption and particularism to impartiality and universalism" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Sweden. The "social democratic" victory in 1932 was preceded by violent labor disputes in which troops had opened fire on sawmill workers. The eminent prime minister Per Albin Hansson could rely on a meritocratic autonomous bureaucracy and managed to realize his aim of making Sweden a more classless society (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). In Spain class conflicts led to a devastating civil war (1936-1939). A major factor was that Spanish citizens who were not republicans had every reason to fear that the Republican government would use the state machinery

against them and that they would lack protection of their civil rights, personal safety and property, unlike Sweden, where there was no reason to fear violation of equal protection under the laws and universal protection of civil liberties (Laquente and Rothstein, 2014). The differences in levels of trusting must have been huge under these conditions.

In Tschudi's (2009) research, a major theme has been to get close to real events which he likes to think of as underlying, *latent*, causes (dispositional properties), and not be trapped by what is on the surface, *manifest* data. Due to this perspective, it represents a misunderstanding when we are trapped by surface events and fail to see the latent level. Democracy/dictatorship here epitomizes the manifest level and being trapped by this implies not being aware of the decisive (latent) underlying factors. Any simplistic, generalized conclusion in line with the general wisdom, saying that "democracy is always better than dictatorship," is simply untrue and represents a misunderstanding - a lack of distinguishing the latent from the manifest, and not taking the latent into consideration.

In a recent article, Bauman (2016) shows how French president François Hollande's reactions to the terror in Paris 13th November 2015 were based solely on an understanding at the manifest level. He declared a state of emergency, military troops were mobilized, police broke into private homes, people were kept under house arrest, legal meetings were broken up, etc. This was to prevent more terror and to catch the wrong-doers. At a latent level, only two of the terrorists came from outside the EU, and 50,000 ISIS soldiers are citizens of the EU. They are sufferers of the economic recession and victims of social exclusion. Hollande's actions aim at the manifest level, miss the target, and create more uncertainty and less trusting. They contribute to a further cycle of violence instead of building the necessary trust between people with actions at the latent level. (According to Bauman, Hollande himself did however profit from the actions: in November 28 % of the French people said he was doing a good job, whereas 50 % thought so in December.)

**Can we have a good society without democracy?**

While democracy (in the sense of having elections) is no guarantee for a good society, on the other hand – as we shall see now - a society may be fairly well functioning without democracy. Rothstein (2011) points to Singapore as a prominent example of how a "benevolent dictatorship" (first under Lee Kuan Yew, the first prime minister of independent Singapore from 1959 to 1990, later under followers in peaceful takeovers) with a lack of fundamental democratic rights may be compatible with a basically good society, and contrasts this country with Jamaica. (Singapore has since 2006 opened the door for several seats to oppositional parties, thereby showing a slow development towards a democracy in the Western sense.) Both Singapore and Jamaica are small states which before the 1960s were British colonies. Singapore may be characterized by repression of individual freedom, but since independence Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita has increased more than six times, and GDP is higher than in most countries in the European union.

On the other hand Jamaica was constituted as a full democracy in the Western sense already in 1962. It started out as a country slightly higher in resources than Singapore, just to mention one out of many differences in the countries' situation and history. But the fact remains: While Jamaica scores high on "democracy" there are still staggering differences in population health. Mortality rates have steadily decreased in Singapore, but increased in Jamaica, likewise for infant mortality rates. Furthermore, homicide rates are about the highest in the world in Jamaica while Singapore has one of the lowest rates in the world. These differences are among other things associated with "good governance" in the sense Rothstein (2011) defines it. For instance, there is practically no corruption in Singapore, but this is excessive in Jamaica. Generally, many of the social conditions for Jamaican citizens in fact seem rather similar to those of post war Iraq. Extreme expressions of these similarities are the fact that the currently leading parties are killing opponents, and using criminal gangs to increase their own power (Rothstein 2011). It turns out that a constitutional democracy with long traditions, like Jamaica since 1962, can end up so low on the good society indicators that it to some extent resembles post war Iraq. On the other hand the "benevolent dictatorship" of Singapore has "good society" indicators resembling Western societies.

Similar examples to the above are easy to find. Just make the comparison between China (authoritarian rule) and India (democratic). The average income in China is twice that of India. Or look at Haiti versus Cuba. Haitians elect their own government but their average life expectancy is twenty years less than that in dictatorial Cuba (Hawksley, 2009). (For more examples see Hawksley's book.) It should be added that these kind of comparisons of course cannot be taken as "proof" of dictatorships creating better societies than democracies! The examples,

though, are illustrative of the fact that there are certain preconditions for a democracy to work well, and that under certain circumstances a dictatorship might even be preferable to a constitutional democracy.

What is typical for the example countries is generally very low scores on what we earlier referred to as indices for "good society" and "good governance." Put otherwise, the latent factors are severely inadequate. Finally, of course, there is a low degree of trusting.

### **Trust vs. distrust**

In international research about trust, "generalized trust" is a prime topic, and is sometimes seen as an evaluation of the moral standard in a society. A favorite example is being alone at a beach during summer, and wishing to take a swim. It is then natural for us to ask a neighbor resting close by to look after our belongings. None of us have ever been disappointed in this display of trust, and the interchange ends with a "thanks" from the swimmer and (usually) a warm smile from the "guardian." Being trusted will usually be a good event, and may be part of a larger social arena characterized by "trust leading to further trust."

There is a deep feeling that the beach neighbor is willing to help. In Kellian terms (cf. Rossotti, Winter and Watts, 2006, 165) our trust is equivalent to "expectation of validation of my core construing," adding from Rowe (1983) "accepting uncertainty," and from Løgstrup (1956) "... when you relate to another person, you leave part of your life in the hand of this person." Sometimes one of us (Finn) has been careless while walking and has fallen. In every case the person closest to him has given him a hand in getting up and asked whether he needs any further help. Hopefully this has made him more alert to go giving other persons a hand.

This brings to mind the African concept *Ubuntu*, a many-faceted concept difficult to explicate in English. (Ubuntu was a guiding inspiration for the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.) Our favorite definition of Ubuntu is "I am because you are," whereas Bishop Tutu (1999) prefers to underline that our humanity is intrinsically related to that of other persons. He also states that we are human because we belong.

Trusting may thus be seen as part of a larger belonging; feeling at home even when surrounded by strangers. "Social solidarity" may be the Western term most similar to Ubuntu. In the wake of great trust extensive

cooperation is a likely byproduct. Furthermore, business deals are simpler. Distrust may sometimes require large investments in lawyers writing careful contracts as opposed to a simple handshake. At a societal level social solidarity makes for greater economic growth and less corruption. High social solidarity is not, however, a universal phenomenon. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) report large differences in level of trusting in their sample of most Western countries. Interestingly, the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden and Denmark) top the list, with about 65% reporting “trusting,” while Portugal is at the bottom, with a mere 10%. This is similar to the level in Turkey, Brazil and the Philippines (as reported by Rothstein, 2011). According to our hypothesis here, the level of trusting is low in states where the necessary latent factors for a well functioning democracy and a good society are lacking. The mean level in the U.S.A. (across states) is about 35%. When bicycling in shabby environments in large US cities, one of us (Finn) is careful not to step down but will just be rushing by. There are, however, large interstate differences; from North Dakota topping the “trust” list with 67% to Mississippi at the bottom with a low level of 17%, close to Louisiana. New Orleans is one of the most unequal large cities in the U.S.A. When the hurricane Katarina hit the city in 2005, it left more than 80% of the city under water. This disaster was however followed by a new one, a breakdown of civil order in the city. The city saw arrests, shoot-outs and troops armed with automatic weapons hunting looters. New Orleans epitomizes the tragedy of a society of huge differences of race and class, a society without trust, and the human tragedies this led to in the wake of a natural disaster. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) contrast these events with the unarmed troops coming to the rescue after the earthquake in China in 2008. The differences in degrees of trusting became manifest.

## **Conclusions**

So what leads to trusting, and what does trusting lead to? Both equality and governance are highly relevant as factors in vicious and virtuous circles together with level of trust. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) have argued well that "good society" indices are highly dependent on equality as a core factor, whereas Rothstein (2011) has strongly argued that government factors are decisive. Concerning equality, it is well known from social psychology that we prefer to relate to those we see as our equals. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) describe in detail how workplaces where status differences are minimal function better than more hierarchical institutions. In the latter it is much more difficult to voice complaints against leaders, since this might easily backfire. Rothstein (2011) tends to make governance the basic concept, but he also points out that governance and equality are

highly correlated and may be seen as parts of chains of mutual causality. In this article we have tried to shed light on "trusting" as an independent psychological/cultural factor in the system .

We have referred to breakdown of democracy when there is bad governance, lack of equality, and insufficient trust. Our question then was: how do these factors influence the outcome of processes of democratization? Iraq and Haiti have been used to illustrate bad outcomes. The basic point is that our Western idea of "democracy" leading to a "good society" is superficial since it ignores necessary "latent" factors that must be present for democracy to work. Without sufficient trust, processes of democratization may even lead to disaster, as we see today with the flood of refugees from civil war and nameless atrocities in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Furthermore, countries with little democracy can be superior to countries with more democracy on important indices like GDP, for example China versus India and Singapore versus Jamaica. The positive developments (in certain periods) of Singapore, China, Sweden and Cuba, as opposed to certain negative/less positive though comparable periods in Iraq, Jamaica, India, Spain and Haiti, can only be well understood at the latent level. Both when we consider democratization and the state of affairs in dictatorships and democracies, we misunderstand situations when we limit ourselves to considering the manifest level. Presumably most people prefer to live well in a benevolent dictatorship rather than being killed with a ballot in hand!

### **A brief endnote on Kelly and equality**

We would like to end this paper with a brief return to equality and Kelly. Since equality/inequality is basic in any society it is of interest to look at Kelly's (1962/1996, 51-53) impressions from a European trip. One construct dimension standing out was the appraisal of international affairs in the USA which was prominent in the Scandinavian countries. "A Scandinavian might carry away a sickening image of the abject hopelessness of the less privileged fourth of the population, the sick and the helpless being stripped of their dignity the moment they are driven to seek aid ... There are few Scandinavians who do not think of America as the grand contemporary example of extremes of poverty."

Kelly recognizes that this is not a prominent construct in America but he states that because life is so different in Scandinavia (much more equality) the difference is made very salient. A comparative international perspective has (in our minds) been sorely lacking in PCP. Hopefully the Kellian quote above will serve as a reminder to personal construct theory to pay more attention to inequality!

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