

Minorities that Benefit Democracy
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Democracy is based on the free and fair election of majority rule. In autocracies, minorities rule: either a dictator or a minority party. However, another element of democracies is gradual change, usually proposed by a minority recognized over time as right. How else can we account for the changes that western civilization has experienced over time.

Slavery, for example, was considered a universal institution for centuries. Different civilizations practiced it in different ways. The ancient Hebrews limited slavery to seven years, after which all male slaves were to be freed (sabbatical).

In other cultures, slaves who were no different in appearance from masters, could either be freed by masters or could run away. But the system of slavery begun with slaves already in Africa became a major industry when the Black Death wiped out the usual white slaves. The New World needed labor, labor so horrific that wage workers and temporary bonded (debt) workers were scarce.

Black slaves were horribly punished if they ran away and were apprehended, yet over time, more and more slaves in America escaped to northern cities or Canada, where they were freed.

But something else was happening among a small group of educated Englishmen living with a Protestant sect of Christianity, the Quakers. Their faith found slavery evil, including the virtual slavery of women. The Quakers were the first westerners to oppose slavery, and initially in the New World, particularly New England, Quakers were punished and beaten. But over time, well-educated and upper-class Quakers began to influence others and in the early 19th century, their numbers and influence grew. Although a minority, they convinced a majority by 1860 to consider ending the institution. A powerful president, Abraham Lincoln, made it so, and his party, the new Republicans, supported him.

The same process took place with the emancipation of women. At first, only the Quakers granted equality of worship to their women. Protestantism had already mandated literacy for women, a process that was changing society. Gradually, a small minority of educated women began to demand the vote to women. Many were punished and reviled, both in America and Britain, but over time, they prevailed.

Movements such as this, begun by small and principled minorities, can prevail in a democratic society. Such movements include today homosexuals, trans-gendered people, the handicapped, and other minorities, have produced democracies with true equality under the law. Equality of marriage rights (including biracial marriages) now includes same sex marriages as well. This was a long time coming, with a great deal of violence and legal punishments as well.

We are also witnessing the meltdown of one of our two political parties. The Republicans are losing the possibility of winning elections without unlawful activity. They maintain majority status in states where they have succeeded in gerrymandering districts, giving rural areas more voting power than the urban majorities, and going through the process of trying to undo the equality programs of the past century.

In their death throes, the Republicans are trying to undo democracy altogether, to be replaced by autocracy (vote of the minority).

There is an obvious need for a new and principled conservative party that can cooperate and/or debate issues with the majority Democrats. The Democrats are not always right. They must always be vigilant against rashness and popular mob rule. They sometimes need a dose of common sense, which good conservatives have.

At the moment, however, the Republicans are in trouble. They have a very narrow majority in the House of Representatives, and that narrow minority has an even narrower minority of those who believe in chaos, not democracy. It is nearly impossible for their Speaker, if they can elect one, to wield authority. He is hampered by pendulum swings between doing what is right and what is opportune.

The Republican candidate for president, Donald Trump, has 91 indictments and he will probably lose the federal cases and face prison.

How could we have a president who is a felon, perhaps even in prison? Again, his primary supports are a melting minority. The tyranny of this bad minority must come to an end.

683 words

Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of "How Do You Know That? Contact her at Lfarhat102@gmail.com or www.globalthink.net.

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