IS 101

Week 6: Democracy and the Global System

Tutorial questions

- Q1. On p. 15 of the Amartya Sen text, Sen says:
- “The monolithic interpretation of Asian values as hostile to democracy and political rights does not bear critical scrutiny. I should not, I suppose, be too critical of the lack of scholarship supporting these beliefs, since those who have made these claims are not scholars but political leaders, often official or unofficial spokesmen for authoritarian governments.”

- Q1 (a) Do you think cultural values can affect political systems?
- Q1 (b) Does your group’s answer to Q1 match the answer Sen provides?
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- Q2. Explain Sen’s argument about the relationship of famines to democracy. Please explain his argument in your own words. Draw on any one of the examples discussed in the text or in the lecture.

What is democracy?

Is democracy always a good system? Can you think about circumstances in which it is, as well as circumstances in which it may not be the best political option?

The video on the next slide, provides us with some examples.

Who is Amartya Sen (the author of your compulsory reading for this week?)

Indian economist awarded the Nobel prize in 1998.

2 major works which tell us how to analyze world's global problems while paying attention to the poorest and/or most vulnerable groups in society:

1. On the relationship between famine and dictatorship (this is also briefly discussed in your reading)

- Famines do not take place in well functioning democracies
- Caveat: this does not mean starvation or hunger are wiped out. In fact they continue in remote areas, but that democratic states respond well to highly visible crises like famine threats.

2. On the missing women: He used birth and death records as well as estimates of life span. In most of the world there were 98 men to every 100 women. Across Asia, there were 106 men for every 100 women leading him to conclude that, in 1990, there were "100 million "missing women" in Asia.

If you were to list the most important development of the last century, something that has fundamentally changed our lives, what would it be?

In your reading his main argument is that "democracy has worked well enough – even when it appears not to"

The reading begins by him listing some of the most important developments of the last century.

- Rise and fall of European empires
- World Wars
- increasing global importance of Asia

However, he says that the "preeminent development of the period [was] the rise of democracy"

Previously, he argues, countries in Asia and Africa had to argue whether or not they were “fit for democracy”

This is no longer the case now.

He then begins to discuss the case of India under the section heading: “The Indian Experience”.

After colonial rule ended (in 1947) the issue became about whether India, being as diverse as it is, was suited for democracy.

He then looks at examples from across Asia and says that economic growth and democracy are not necessarily related “in either direction”. **What does this mean? This sounds like an argument against democracy. Is it?

His argument is that “Since democracy and political liberty have importance in themselves, the case for them…remains untarnished”

The argument about the relationship between economic growth and democracy is an important one.

It is true that authoritarian governments have managed impressive growth (in some cases).

However, Sen points out that “helpful policies” (like open competition, high level of schooling etc.) are also known to push economic growth.

These measures, contrary to popular belief, can be enacted under democracy as well. They do not have to be pushed through under authoritarian governments.

Sen then moves to talk about his earlier work on the relationship between famines and dictatorship. Let us take a look at that through the case study he uses.

Winston Churchill in 1940. Britain's wartime leader has been quoted as blaming the famine on the fact Indians were 'breeding like rabbits'. Photograph: Cecil Beaton/IWM via Getty Images

The Rotary Club relief committee at a free kitchen in Kolkata in 1943. Photograph: Keystone/Getty Images

Bengal, India, 1943

Stage 1 of his argument: famines do not seem to be related to declining food production. Instead they seem to be related to declining incomes.

His focus was on the Bengal famine of 1943 in which three million people died. Sen himself was in Bengal and had been 9 years old at the time it took place and saw the devastation (he was born in Santiniketan in Bengal).

Causes of the famine that emerged from his research:

- Food production in Bengal had not declined. So the amount of food remained the same.
- Food prices rose rapidly (1943 was wartime so inflation was rampant).
- Farm wages declined. This meant ordinary farmers and agricultural workers had less money to buy food.

**But what does democracy have to do with this? This is where stage 2 (next slide) comes in…

Stage 2 of his argument: groups need to "sound the alarm" about what is going on in order to exert pressure for the government to intervene…

In studying the Great Famine in China (in which an estimated 30 million people starved to death) between 1958 and 1961 a group of economists found that the most deaths were produced in places that produced more food. *Food distribution and pricing were the problems*. In other words, the famine was man-made.

Sen studied this to argue that if people had been able to sound the alarm about what was happening, they would have been able to prevent it. So the censorship of the press under Mao and authoritarian government was responsible for the famine.

In sum - watch this video (below) from 19:41 to 22:37. Can you sum up the argument here?

So according to Sen, what is the reason for the food insecurity described below?

How the War in Ukraine Affects Food Security

by Walter Leal Filho [1,2,3], Marila Fedoruk [3,*], João Henrique Paulino Pires Eustachio [3], Jelena Barbir [3], Tetiana Lisovska [3], Alexandros Lingos [3] and Caterina Baars [3]

[1] European School of Sustainability Science and Research (ESSSR), Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, 21033 Hamburg, Germany
[2] Department of Natural Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester M1 5GD, UK
[3] Research and Transfer Centre Sustainability & Climate Change Management (FTZ-NK), Faculty of Life Sciences, Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, 21033 Hamburg, Germany
* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

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Abstract

The war in Ukraine has caused severe disruption to national and worldwide food supplies. Ukraine is a major exporter of wheat, maize, and oilseeds, staples that are now suffering a war-triggered supply risk. This paper describes the background of the problem and illustrates current trends by outlining some of the measures that may be deployed to mitigate the conflict's impacts on achieving SDG 2 (Zero hunger), especially focusing on ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture. In order to understand the main research strands in the literature that are related to food security in the context of wars, the authors adopted a bibliometric literature review based on the co-occurrence of terms technique, conducted with 631 peer-reviewed documents extracted from the Scopus database. To complement the bibliometric assessment, ten case studies were selected to narrow down the food insecurity aspects caused by the war in Ukraine. The co-occurrence analysis indicated four different thematic clusters. In the next stage, an assessment of the current situation on how war affects food security was carried out for each one of the clusters, and the reasons and possible solutions to food security were identified. Policy recommendations and theoretical implications for food security in the conflict context in Ukraine were also addressed.

Keywords: food security; Ukraine; war; agriculture; economics; public policies

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Sudan: Famine crisis worsens as children show physical signs of starvation

10/22/2024

Toronto, October 22, 2024 – Families in Sudan are eating grass to survive in an escalating hunger crisis, with famine-levels of malnutrition spreading across half of Sudan's 18 states, said Save the Children.

The extremely high rate of global acute malnutrition (GAM) among children under 5 across 19 localities in nine states is pushing communities into high risk of famine for the first time since the war began over 18 months ago [1].

Famine has already been declared in the Zamzam displacement camp in Sudan housing about 500,000 people, which is only the third time a formal famine determination has been made since the international famine monitoring system was created 20 years ago [2].

However, the crisis is now reaching a wider population, with at least three recent surveys showing GAM rates exceeding 30% of the under 5 population – which is a key measurement of the nutritional status of a population and is one of the basic indicators for assessing the severity of a humanitarian crisis [3].

Over 2 million people residing in these locations – or about 4% of the population – are in dire need of food to survive, said Save the Children, with each passing day pushing them closer to death from hunger and malnutrition related causes.

Save the Children analyzed nutrition surveys from Sudan's Nutrition Cluster – a partnership including the UN, the Federal Ministry of Health, and NGOs including Save the Children– across all 18 states, and found an alarming deterioration of the nutrition situation in 19 locations.

The Spectre of Race: How Discrimination Haunts Western Democracy

By Michael G. Hanchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. 272 pages. https://press.princeton.edu/titles/11270.html

By contrast, Hanchard argues

Political science was thus founded on explicit claims of a racial basis for national development. Nation-states were institutional expressions of "peoplehood," understood primarily in racial terms. This equation of government, territory, and "people" persists today, not only in political science but in the various nationalist ideologies that pervade all countries: consider your default conception of "the American people" whose implicit whiteness is now perceived as threatened by a trending demographic shift toward a "majority-minority" population. Similar processes shape other polities and ground political science around the world. Far from embodying democracy, the inclusion of "others" threatens it. Those immigrants, those dark people, those Muslims, those Jews, are seen as unqualified for voting, for citizenship, for access to the *polis*; they do not have "the right to have rights" (Arendt 1973).

also connected to democracy ? But the US is a democracy

The Flint Water Crisis: A Coordinated Public Health Emergency Response and Recovery Initiative

Perri Zeitz Ruckart [1], Adrienne S Ettinger [2], Mona Hanna-Attisha [3], Nicole Jones [4], Stephanie I Davis [5], Patrick N Breysse [6]

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The publisher's version of this article is available at J Public Health Manag Pract

Abstract

Context:

The City of Flint was already distressed because of decades of financial decline when an estimated 140 000 individuals were exposed to lead and other contaminants in drinking water. In April 2014, Flint's drinking water source was changed from Great Lakes' Lake Huron (which was provided by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department) to the Flint River without necessary corrosion control treatment to prevent lead release from pipes and plumbing. Lead exposure can damage children's brains and nervous systems, lead to slow growth and development, and result in learning, behavior, hearing, and speech problems. After the involvement of concerned residents and independent researchers, Flint was re-connected to the Detroit water system on October 16, 2015. A federal emergency was declared in January 2016.

If democracy is not something you can define, then, according to Sen it is a "freedom" something to actively work toward.

In the 1800s (the nineteenth century) theorists of democracy asked if a country was "fit for democracy". According to Sen this question itself was problematic. It changed to the belief that: "A country does not have to be deemed fit f*or* democracy; rather, it has to become fit *through* democracy."

The issue of universal values and cultural differences is something he then says he discussed earlier in his Morgenthau lecture. Part of this has been reproduced on the last slide for you.

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He identifies three components that make democracy a universal value

1. There has to be an intrinsic value for human life evidenced in all forms of political and social gathering and participation.
2. The democratic system must have instrumental value by providing a space/mechanism whereby people can have their demands heard.
3. The practice of democracy brings people together so that they hear one another's demands and learn from each other. This gives democracy constructive value (constructing understanding and empathy).

In the last two sections he discusses the argument that democracy is incompatible with certain cultural values. This is the section that Q1 (under “tutorial questions”) refers to.

- *Look at the following excerpt from Sen's Morgenthau Lecture:*

- https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/media/series/morgenthau/morgenthau-lectures-1981-2006-human-rights-and-asian-values

- "The so-called Asian values that are invoked to justify authoritarianism are not especially Asian in any significant sense. Nor is it easy to see how they could be made into an Asian cause against the West, by the mere force of rhetoric. The people whose rights are being disputed are Asians, and no matter what the West's guilt may be (there are many skeletons in many cupboards across the world), the rights of the Asians can scarcely be compromised on those grounds. The case for liberty and political rights turns ultimately on their basic importance and on their instrumental role. This case is as strong in Asia as it is elsewhere.

  I have disputed the usefulness of a grand contrast between Asian and European values. There is a lot we can learn from studies of values in Asia and Europe, but they do not support or sustain the thesis of a grand dichotomy. Contemporary ideas of political and personal liberty and rights have taken their present form relatively recently, and it is hard to see them as "traditional" commitments of Western cultures. There are important antecedents of those commitments in the form of the advocacy of tolerance and individual freedom, but those antecedents can be found plentifully in Asian as well as Western cultures.

  The recognition of diversity within different cultures is extremely important in the contemporary world, since we are constantly bombarded by oversimple generalizations about "Western civilization," "Asian values," "African cultures," and so on. These unfounded readings of history and civilization are not only intellectually shallow, they also add to the divisiveness of the world in which we live.

  Authoritarian readings of Asian values that are increasingly being championed in some quarters do not survive scrutiny. The thesis of a grand dichotomy between Asian values and European values adds little to our comprehension, and much to the confusion about the normative basis of freedom and democracy."