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### **Decentralization and Liberty**

In the historical period of roughly the last 2000 years, decentralization of power provided the necessary institutional arrangements that granted more western citizens the benefits of political and economic participation. The gradual trend towards democratization thoroughly describes the trend of liberalization, and more specifically the granting of liberty to individuals. On the whole, power that was centralized in the hands of a few religious and political elites, such as popes and kings, became more dispersed among larger groups of aristocracy, bourgeois, and eventually masses of citizens. Fareed Zakaria depicts the relationship between four distinct groups in major historical conflicts; they are the church and state, lords and kings, Protestants and Catholics, and business and state. To reiterate, each historical event led to a further decentralization than that of the former event.

### **The Church and State**

Decentralization and the development of liberty started 50 years after Constantine moved the capital of Rome. This began the process of separating the church and state; since Constantine was unable to monitor every action of the Church, Roman Catholicism developed as a major political actor. For example, as Theodosius succeeded Constantine, Theodosius committed homicide against the Thessalonians during a dispute. He protested the church receiving a harsh response from the archbishop. Forced to dress as a beggar for forgiveness, even the successor to the most powerful civilization on Earth was at the mercy of the Roman Church. The development of liberty is clearly portrayed in the balancing between the church, which could act as a check, and the state.

### **Lords and Kings**

Similarly, lords had the ability to check the power of kings across Europe. And, in 1154, British lords found themselves in a dispute with the British monarchy. Henry II attempted to strip the Lords of

their power; however, the Magna Carta was created in 1215 as a truce between the aristocracy and the monarchy. Liberty developed from a constitutional document that restrained the absolute power of monarchy. Serving as a model for the future, the Magna Carta served as an important precedent; it gave more liberty to the lords of a region and ensured monarchs' obligation to hearing the voice of nobility. Additionally, democratization movements in later parts of history referred to the Magna Carta as a way of attaining more rights and freedom from oppression – even without intentionally decentralizing power in the west. To put this political change in context with history, revenue needed to fund wars between states in Europe was often taxed from lords and their land. Due to the constant competition between states, a ratcheting of increased taxes was necessary for preserving the nation-state. The signing of the Magna Carta signified the aristocracy successfully limiting the power of the King – a precedent which established that kings could no longer make ultimate demands on their lords.

### **Protestants and Catholics**

Founded on decentralization of power between aristocracy and monarchy, religious freedom also became decentralized during the Protestant Reformation; it limited the hegemonic control of the catholic church in Europe. In 1517, Martin Luther publishes his ninety-five theses. Leading to individuals with a fundamental ability to think critically, education was soon to come along with literacy. Individual citizenry later would develop a civic society that could further decentralize authority and disperse it across a greater number of people. Ultimately, the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 resulted as settlement from reformative wars between Catholics and Protestants. A unified Europe in 1648 existed under the banner of general Christendom; however, religious liberties increased due to the decentralized decision making each ruler had in Europe. Rulers could choose the specific denomination of their specific lands within Europe without fear of being ostracized by the Church.

### **Business and States**

Last, because of the rise of capitalism and the decline of feudalism, a bourgeois class was

guaranteed a voice in political and economic decision making. Economic Liberties were not granted solely by the state, but rather could be acquired through economic activity in markets through industrial activity. The Industrial Revolution provided the necessary industrial output for an innovative and creative class of people; the middle class attained political and economic freedom, and decentralized power in their acquisition of liberty. Development of commerce expanded liberty, which cyclically expanded commerce. A new group of powerful and wealthy men was created as a direct consequence. In fact, the tradition of a decentralized government was established, and the tradition of decentralized government with checks and balances began forming in the United States as of 1776.

### **Implications**

The overall impact of democracy implies that a society is decentralized in as far as power constraints. If decentralization does exist, then it is impossible to fully guarantee the rights of citizenship and the fundamental liberties that are associated with that citizenship. Yet, the level of decentralized governance appears to show as power becomes more dispersed, liberty and freedom increases, and in turn democracy also increases. In relationships between the church and the state, the development of liberty is clearly portrayed in rudimentary balancing. Aristocracy and monarchy formalized these institutions through the development of documents like the Magna Carta. The Peace of Westphalia guaranteed religious freedom, and decentralized power to a greater extent across Europe. And, the United States Revolution fully implicated the middle class in the process of democracy.

In the next century, with the development of new technologies, democracy, liberty, and decentralized power should increase if the historical trend continues. In my opinion, technology like the Internet will aid this process because the Internet has a highly expressive and innovative institutional characteristic of freedom; other technologies which empower the more oppressed classes in society will also increase the amount of liberty that exists in the world.