

The Postmodern Turn in Political Theory: Power, Discourse, and the Crisis of Democratic Legitimacy

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Abstract

The postmodern turn in political theory represents a seismic epistemological and normative change of the certainties of modernist structures in the face of fragmented, contingent and discursively constituted view of politics. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Francois Lyotard are also thinkers that undermine the conceptual grounding of universal truth, rationality and stable political subjectivity and thus reconfigure the conceptual landscape of power and legitimacy. This paper explores the ways in which postmodern political theory transforms the conceptualization of power into a diffuse, relational, and networked relationship between knowledge and discourse as opposed to being concentrated in a centralized position of the state or ruling elite. It also examines how discourse is involved in the production of political realities, identities and regimes of truth based on the discursive and hegemonic paradigm introduced by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

It is within this theoretical framework that the paper critically examines the new crisis with regard to democratic legitimacy in the modern societies. The weakening of the normative basis of the democratic consensus and public reason is due to the erosion of meta-narratives, the proliferation of rival truth claims, and the mediatization of politics. The legitimacy becomes volatile and disputed as democratic institutions are more and more likely to work in a terrain of fragmented identities, algorithmic communications and symbolic struggles. Postmodernism is a space that enables pluralism, marginal voices and critical resistance, but it is also a space that raises the threat of eroding the potential of shared norms and joint decision making. The article ends by suggesting a re-conceptualization of democratic legitimacy that balances postmodern lessons with the imperative to have normative foundations, participatory politics and institutional responsibility in a more complicated political order.

Keywords: Postmodernism; Political Theory; Power; Discourse; Democratic Legitimacy; Foucault; Hegemonic; Laclau & Mouffe.

Introduction

A radical change in the political thought began in the late twentieth century and is commonly referred to as the postmodern turn, which completely shifted the conceptual bases of politics, power and legitimacy. Developing in reaction to the perceived inadequacies of modernist paradigms including liberalism and Marxism, postmodern political theory questions the assertions of a universal truth, objective knowledge and stable political identities that had long been the foundation of Western political thought. This

intellectual movement was influenced by the writings of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard and anticipates contingency, plurality and discursive constructions of social and political realities. Consequently, the postmodern turn has not only changed the discourse on theories but also cast serious doubts on the nature and feasibility of democratic legitimacy in the modern society. The core of postmodern political theory is a profound mistrust of what is popularly described as meta-narratives of social order: broad, general explanations of social order like progress, reason and emancipation. These stories are gradually being perceived as tools of exclusion and subjugation as opposed to universal truths as they used to give the normative and epistemological foundation of the democratic systems. Postmodern thinkers, in denying these foundations, aim at revealing how knowledge and power are mixed in such a way that the separation between truth and ideology is brought into crisis. As an example, the concept of power/knowledge by Foucault indicates that regimes of truth are formed in institutional practices, disciplinary processes, and discursive practices, thus changing the emphasis to centralized power to widespread networks of power that exist in society.

Such redefinition of power is a major break with the classical theory of politics that has always situated the source of power in the state, law or the economy. Instead, postmodernism focuses on micro-physics of power, which is diffuse, relational, and productive in nature, and exists in everyday activities, cultural practices, and the formation of identities. Power ceases to be just repressive but constitutive, a subject, preference, and possibility of action. This kind of understanding expands the range of politics to the politics of language, politics of representation and politics of identity. Thus, the lines dividing the political and social are more than ever obscured, making traditional patterns of governance and democratic responsibility more complex. Intimately connected with this change is the centrality of discourse in the postmodern political analysis. Discourse, seen as structures of meaning which organize the way in which reality is perceived and expressed, is the main arena of political struggle. Developing this understanding, theorists such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe theorize politics as a discursive construction and struggle in which hegemonic constructions momentarily fix meaning in an otherwise unstable field. The identities in this paradigm are not pre-determined but contingent and relational and are developed through continuous struggles of representation and recognition. This change has far-reaching consequences on the theory of democracy because it undermines the notion of a common public sphere or a rational accord based on a common set of norms.

It is in this regard that the issue of the crisis of democratic legitimacy arises as a major issue. Rational deliberation, popular sovereignty and institutional representation are historical pillars of modern democratic systems which use them to justify their power. But the postmodern critique discredits these pillars by casting doubt on the existence of universal reason, stable identities and objective truth. With the further fragmentation of political discourse and its mediation by digital technologies, the prerequisites of a democratic participation and consensus-building are distorted considerably. The spread of rival discourses, development of identity politics, and the increasing power of media and algorithms governance all lead to the fact that legitimacy is no longer a given but a negotiated and disputed aspect that has to be established over and over again. Besides, the loss of trust in political institutions, as well as the development of populist movements all over the world, shows a further disenchantment with the representative forms of liberal democracy. In this respect, the postmodern turn is not only offering a theoretical perspective on the understanding of such developments but also points to the normative dilemmas they entail. Postmodernism is tolerant of pluralism, difference and the ability to include marginalized voices but at the same time it is worrying with issues of relativism, fragmentation and the

lack of collective standards to judge a political issue. The legitimacy of democracy is becoming weaker without a standardized system of determining what truth and justice is.

In this article, we aim to critically address these tensions by looking at how the postmodern re-theorization of power and discourse plays into the crisis of democratic legitimacy. It holds that although postmodern political theory can be quite useful in its contribution to the study of the nature of power and how to create a political reality, it also requires the reconsideration of democratic norms and institutions as a way to overcome the problem of fragmentation and instability. Placing the analysis in the wider discussions between post-structuralist and deliberative methods, especially in terms of such thinkers as Juergen Habermas, the article is also intended to discuss the opportunities of reconciling pluralism and normative grounding of the modern theory of democracy. By doing so, the paper would be adding to the current debates surrounding the future of democracy in a time of epistemic uncertainty, discursive contestation and changing relations of power. Instead of marking the death of the political theory, the postmodern turn brings about a critical re-evaluation of its foundational assumptions and introduces new potential approaches to the complexities of the power, discourse and legitimacy in the twenty first century.

Theoretical Framework: Postmodern Political Thought

The conceptual basis of the given work is premised in postmodern political theory which signifies a radical departure of the epistemological and normative certainties of the contemporary political theory. Postmodernism is not a coherent doctrine, but more a critical stance which challenges the beliefs of objectivity, universality, and rationality underpinning Enlightenment-based political systems. This paradigm is based on the writings of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Francois Lyotard, who stressed the contingent, fragmented and discursively constructed character of political reality. Fundamentally, the postmodern theory of politics is marked by anti-foundationalism, the denial of the presence of universal or objective knowledge and political judgment grounds. Postmodernism doubts the existence of such solid grounding, unlike modernist theories (liberalism or Marxism) which are based upon some general principle like reason or progress or class struggle. Of great importance in this respect is the critique of Lyotard concerning the so-called meta-narratives which reveals the tendency of the grand theories to act as legitimizing machine that helps to obscure the power relations and to marginalize the other points of view. As a result, knowledge is not perceived as a mirror of a definite reality but as a creation of discourses in a certain period of time.

The second important aspect of this framework is the reformulation of power. Unlike the conventional conceptions of power as being concentrated in the state, sovereign power or economic systems, Foucault views power as diffuse, relational and ubiquitous. Power works via daily practices, institutionalized norms and knowledge structures and results in the production of subjects and the formation of their action abilities. This concept of power/knowledge brings to light the indistinguishability of epistemology and politics, which implies that the belief in what can be considered to be true is always tied to regimes of power. Consequently, political analysis should take a step further and not be confined in institutional frames but rather explore the micro-processes by which power is exerted and resisted. Intimately connected with this is the centrality of discourse of the theory of postmodernity. Discourse is the systematic patterns of meaning that stipulate the way reality is perceived and expressed. Riding on the works of Foucault, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe create a discursive theory of politics where social identities and political orders are formed in hegemonic struggles over meanings. To them, society does not exist with a predetermined nature but it is a flexible and open arena where various discourses struggle

to achieve a temporal superiority. In this view, the essentialist conceptualizations of identity are questioned and the political nature of representation and signification is emphasized.

The other significant feature of the postmodern political thought is that it focuses on pluralism and difference. Postmodernism anticipates the unity, multiplicity, and coexistence of opposing points of view that the modernist vision of unity and consensus had tried to deny. This has far reached consequences to the democratic theory whereby, instead of attaining rational consensus, conflict and disagreement is managed. Indeed, Mouffe, in his idea of agonic democracy, such as, acknowledges that there is no way to avoid political confrontation and attempts to turn hostility into a more productive way of challenging. Postmodernism, in this context, reinvents democracy as a dynamic and conflicted process as opposed to a well-ordered one. But normative issues are also raised in the postmodern approach. Its rejection of universal truth and objective norms results in the relativism anxiety and undermining of normative foundation. When everything is contingent and discursively constructed it will be hard to have criteria of assessing political assertions or being able to legitimize authority. This point is especially noticeable in arguments with deliberative theorists like Juergen Habermas who believes the possibility of rational dialog and agreement on the basis of common norms. In this sense, postmodernism is a threat to the very principles of democratic legitimacy since it dissolves the basis of mutual understanding and reaching a collective decision.

In spite of these criticisms, postmodern political theory also presents useful analytical instruments in making sense of the modern-day politics. Its discourse, power, and contingency are especially pertinent in a time of media saturation, identity politics and the spread of competing truth claims. The postmodern system allows viewing the world of politics through the prism of the constructed political reality, and thus the ability to critically analyze the process of legitimacy creation, struggle, and transformation, which lives in complex and rapidly developing societies. This article uses the postmodern theoretical framework as a prism through which the power discourse and democratic legitimacy relationship are examined. It gives the theoretical ground on which to examine the role of erosion of meta-narratives, decentralization of power and discourse in the current crisis of democracy. Concurrently, it creates options of reconceptualizing democratic politics to become more inclusive, reflexive and responsive to the many-sidedness of modern social life.

Power in Postmodern Political Theory

The notion of power is occupied by the center of the postmodern political theory and it has undergone tremendous metamorphosis as compared to classical formulations of power. The conventional political thought, whether liberal, Marxist or Weberian has tended to view power in terms of possession, centralization and exercise by certain actors, that is, by the state, ruling elites or dominant classes. Postmodern theorists, led by Michel Foucault, on the contrary, question this interpretation by reconstituting the concept of power as diffuse, relational and woven into the very fabric of everyday life. This redefinition does not only broaden the area of political analysis, but also has a fundamental change in the understanding of power, resistance and legitimacy in the modern societies. The concept of power brought about by Foucault does not follow the concept of power as an element of repression, or coercion. Rather, he theorizes power as productive, i.e. that it is actively a social reality, identity and knowledge. Power is not merely a limitation to people, but it influences their wants, inclinations and subjectivities. This can be seen in the analysis of Foucault of the disciplinary institutions, which include prisons, schools, hospitals and bureaucracies, in which power is exercised through a series of subtle mechanisms of

surveillance, normalization and regulation. These institutions generate docile bodies, which embrace norms and regulate themselves, demonstrating the role of power as based on consent as well as coercion. An important characteristic of the postmodern conceptualizations on power is that it is decentralized and capillary. The power does not exist in one center and is distributed in networks and exercised in various levels of the society. This micro-physics of power changes the analysis of power to concentrate on the macro-structures such as the state to the everyday practices and interactions in which power is practiced. Indicatively, the power dynamic works in language, cultural practices, gender relations and knowledge systems, thus making the line between the political and the social blurred. This has led to politics not being in any formal institution but rather it is in every aspect of life.

Intertwined with this is the notion of power/knowledge by Foucault who emphasizes on the fact that power and knowledge cannot be separated in the production of truth. In this view, knowledge is not neutral, objective and both are constructed by power relations and reinforce the same. Scientific discourses, legal frameworks and administrative practices are some of the different contributors towards the construction of what is viewed as true or normal. This understanding has far reached consequences on the political theory, since it subverts the Enlightenment assumption of objective knowledge as a basis of rational government and democratic legitimacy. Rather, the truth itself is a place of political conflict. One more aspect that postmodern theorists underline is that as long as there is power, there is always a chance of opposition. Nevertheless, power does not exist without resistance but rather exists in the same networks. Due to the dispersal of power, the resistance is also localized, fragmented and multiple. This puts into question revolutionary models of change which are designed to topple a central authority and replace it with another. Rather, postmodernism recommends a more subtle perspective on political struggle that involves an ongoing contestation and negotiation of different levels of the society. The consequences of this redefinition of power to the theory of democracy are major. On the one hand, it allows getting a more inclusive view of politics as it acknowledges the role of marginalized voices and daily resistance. Problems of gender, race, sexuality and identity, which are traditionally overlooked in traditional political theory are the focus of the analysis of power relations. In contrast, diffuse nature of power makes the issue of accountability difficult. When power is ubiquitous, it is hard to tell who makes political decisions and achieves political results, making it challenging to have a democratic government.

Moreover, the postmodern concept of power is a contributor to the crisis of the democratic legitimacy as it throws the grounds on which the authority is substantiated. The legitimacy is sometimes based on the consent of the governed, rational deliberation or universal principles in the contemporary political theory. But, when power is a hidden and diffused process, and knowledge is influenced by power, then the prerequisites of informed consent and rational decision-making are undermined. The resultant outcome is a scenario whereby democratic institutions might be on paper but they are not substantively legitimate to citizens. These processes are now enhanced in the modern-day by the emergence of digital technologies and algorithmic governance where power is enacted through data, surveillance and control of information. The capacity to influence the masses, shape their behavior and shape political narratives using digital media is the postmodern understanding that power is contained in the web of communication and knowledge. This does not only strengthen the existing inequalities, but also establishes new types of domination which are usually not visible, but are hard to challenge. The postmodern reconceptualization of power in terms of diffuse, relational and productive presents an influential model to comprehend the intricacies of modern politics. Although it undermines the traditional concept of authority and legitimacy it also provides new opportunities to study the resistance, identity and influence of discourse in the

formation of political realities. Nevertheless, this broad concept of power also poses important challenges regarding accountability, normativity, and the future of a democratic government which are discussed in the following sections.

Discourse and the Construction of Political Reality

The discourse is central in the postmodern political theory in creating and defining political reality. The postmodern approach, unlike the traditional ones, pays attention to the fact that social and political phenomena lack predetermined or intrinsic meanings. Rather they are constructed using language, representation and interpretation systems. The production of reality, then, is based predominantly on discourse as the main way of understanding, structuring and opposing the reality in the society. Discourse may be thought of as a form of structured meaning that defines what can be said, thought and accepted to be valid knowledge in a particular context. It goes beyond the field of language to encompass the institutional practices, media discourses, cultural icons and the daily communication processes. These processes allow the legitimization of some ideas as truth, and marginalization or exclusion of others. Political reality is therefore not an objective and neutral space but rather a creation of historically concrete tendencies of meaning that represent implicit power relations. In this model, politics is understood as a struggle of meaning, as opposed to a struggle of control of the institutions of the state. Democracy, justice, development and rights are concepts that lack universal or fixed definitions, their definitions are continually negotiated and redefined in discursive contestation. Various political players strive to give their own meanings and make them dominant, although it can always be short-lived and can be challenged. This points to the contingency and instability of political reality, in which none of the narratives can establish a long-term claim to authority.

One of the major implications of such a view is that political identities are not pre-determined or fixed but they are produced through discourse. Groups like citizen, nation, minority or people are not natural components, they are created by some forms of representation and articulation in particular social-political relations. These identities are dynamic and can be changed, based on conflicting stories and struggles over acknowledgment. As a result, the notion of a unified and stable political community becomes problematic, with various groups having different and usually conflicting interpretations and definitions of their identities. Discourse has become more and more prominent in the framework of modern media and online communication. Due to the growth of mass media, social media, and information systems that follow algorithms, the character of political communication has received a new look and become more fragmented, fast, and decentralized. Images, symbols and stories are commonly used to communicate political messages that can influence behavior and shape perceptions among the populace. The fact and opinion lines are easily obscured, and often emotions are more appealing than serious thinking occurs in this setting. The construction of political reality is therefore based on symbolic struggles where narratives control is a very important source of power. There are important implications of this transformation on the issue of democratic legitimacy. The classical democratic theory presupposes the presence of rational public space where the citizens obtain a rational debate and reach a collective decision with references to common standards. The postmodern focus on discourse, however, shows that this cohesive type of a public is hard to maintain in a society that is marked with numerous and competing stories. The fractured nature of communication, emergence of echo chambers, and dissemination of conflicting truth claims work against the prospect of agreement. Consequently, the democratic legitimacy is even more contingent and unstable since various groups subscribe to conflicting interpretations of political reality.

Meanwhile, the discursive character of politics opens the chances of inclusion and change as well. By identifying the fact that meanings are not predetermined, marginalized groups will be able to challenge the dominant narratives and present different points of view. The existing discourses can be interrupted by social movements and identity-based politics and introduce new issues into politics. In that regard, discourse is not just a control mechanism, but also a resistance and change site, which will allow increasing democratic involvement. Nevertheless, there are crucial challenges related to this potential. The lack of fixed meanings and common structures makes one doubt the possibility of making decisions collectively and the cohesiveness of political structures. When all interpretations are as contingent, it is hard to find shared norms of measuring political claims or of conflict resolution. This plurality/coherence contradiction is the heart of the postmodern critique and helps to fuel the greater crisis of democratic legitimacy. The post-modern emphasis on discourse changes the perception of political reality fundamentally, reminding it of its constructed, contingent and disputable character. It emphasizes the interrelation between meaning, identity and power and the way politics are influenced by the battles over representation and interpretation. Although such a view is essential in understanding the dynamics of contemporary politics, it also poses some important questions on the stability and legitimacy of the democratic systems in the world that is becoming more fragmented and driven by media.

Crisis of Democratic Legitimacy

The postmodern revolution of political theory has added fresh interest to the issue of democratic legitimacy especially in the face of the fast-evolving social, technological and communicative landscape. Democratic legitimacy, which has historically been based on the principles of popular sovereignty, rational deliberation and institutional accountability is facing a challenging period that is shaking its normative and practical principles. Such instability of these foundations is shown in the postmodern focus on fragmentation, contingency and discursive construction which in turn leads to what may be termed as a crisis of legitimacy in modern democracies. Destruction of common normative structures is one of the key contributors to this crisis. Historically, modern democratic systems have been based on a set of shared values, including reason, progress, equality and justice, to legitimize political power and steer common decision-making. The postmodern critique, however, raises doubts about the universality and neutrality of these values and reveals them as contingent and often exclusionary values. Consequently, the potential of having a single moral or epistemological basis of democracy becomes more dubious. Without generally agreed standards, legitimacy will not be based on any universal principles and will have to be bargained in a disintegrated and pluralistic social environment. Intimately connected with this one is the disintegration of the public sphere. The democratic theory has always been based on the premise that there is a common ground where people can enter into a rational discourse, and come up with mutual decisions. In modern situations, though, this space has become more and more polarized as a result of the spread of various and sometimes competing accounts. The development of communication technologies, in particular, the digital and social media has exacerbated this disintegration by allowing the creation of closed informational spaces. In such spaces, people are subjected to the main exposure to the views that strengthen their preexisting notions, which causes polarization and a loss of a common understanding. This compromises the circumstances that require meaningful deliberation and consensus upon which democratic legitimacy is based.

The other important aspect of the crisis that is critical is the alteration of political representation. The representative institutions which used to be regarded as the main mechanism in the expression of the will

of the people are being viewed more and more distant, unresponsive and controlled by the elite interests. This view has helped foster an increasing lack of trust in political institutions such as legislatures, political parties and the administrative institutions. The distance between the citizens and the decision-makers is further bred by the fact that in a globalized and technologically advanced world; decisions are usually made using complex processes that are not easily understood or manipulated by ordinary citizens. This brings into question the validity of representative democracy since citizens do not feel connected to the institutions that purport to represent them. The emergence of identity-based politics complicates the aspect of legitimacy even more. With the mobilization of social groups around the issues of culture, ethnicity, gender and religion, political demands are becoming more and more particularistic and context specific. Although this change has the potential to make the marginalized voices more visible and included, it questions the notion of a single political community. Competing claims to identity may result into a conflict of recognition and resources so that finding a common ground on which a joint decision can be made is hard. In this regard, legitimacy depends on how the political systems are able to accommodate diversity as well as retaining a feeling of cohesion and purpose. Moreover, the increasing power of the media and information systems has altered the legitimacy dynamics. The control and circulation of information no longer alone determine the establishment of political authority but are becoming more and more influential. The extent to which media discourses, visual images and symbolic representations are constructed is significant in creating the perception of legitimacy among the masses. Nevertheless, mass misinformation and public opinion manipulation, as well as the loss of the distinct line between fact and fiction, have resulted in a situation where the sense of trust is hard to maintain. In this aspect, legitimacy is exposed to corruption and abuse, a further undermining of the principles of democratic rule.

Another aspect of this crisis is the emergence of data-driven and algorithmic forms of governance. Increasingly, decision-making processes are made more driven by data analytics, automated systems, and predictive technologies which are not directly under the scrutiny of citizens. As much as these developments might make improvements on efficiency, they also cast doubt on transparency, accountability, and fairness. Such systems are opaque and thus it is hard to determine how the decisions are made hence compromising the principle of informed consent that is core to democratic legitimacy. Furthermore, the formation of informational power in the hands of several actors increases the already existing inequities and reduces the ability to practice democratic scrutiny. It is necessary to note, in spite of these difficulties, that the crisis of democratic legitimacy is not only the state of decline but it is also the state of transition. The undermining of traditional pillars creates a vacuum whereby the re-evaluation and restructuring of the democratic practices towards more responsive forms can be undertaken in response to the current realities. This can be through the creation of new forms of participation, increased openness and more inclusive and pluralistic ways of engagement. Nevertheless, these attempts have to resolve the dilemma of diversity versus unity in the sense that the multiplication of voices does not create the disintegration of the political community to the extent where it can govern itself. The crisis of democratic legitimacy during the postmodern era is an indication of a complicated combination of epistemological uncertainty, societal fragmentation and technological change. The loss of common standards, the disintegration of the mass media, the problem of representation and the impact of media and information-based systems all lead to the fact that the legitimacy is becoming more fragile and disputed. It is not only that institutional reforms are necessary to address this crisis but also that there is a need to reconsider the principles and practices that inform democratic life in an ever more complicated and interconnected world.

Postmodern Democracy: Possibilities and Limits

Postmodern revolution of the political theory which brings a crisis of democratic legitimacy as well as offers new ways of rethinking the democratic politics in more inclusive, pluralistic and dynamic forms. The postmodern outlook offers critical means to overcome the constraints of conventional democratic patterns by problematizing predetermined meanings, universal standards, and central government. Meanwhile, though, these very characteristics pose considerable limitations that make the operation and stability of democratic regimes difficult. In this way, the postmodern democracy should be viewed as the sphere of both possibility and contradiction, with the chances of change and the threats of disintegration and turmoil. Pluralism and diversity are one of the greatest contributions of the postmodern perspective. It denying the existence of one and universal political truth opens up the possibility of having various voices, views, and experiences acknowledged in the democratic process. This is especially significant in relation to historically marginalized groups whose interests have typically been left out of mainstream political discourses. Difference is acknowledged to facilitate a more inclusive conceptualization of citizenship, in which a variety of identities and participation are recognized and respected. In this respect, democracy is more open and malleable system which can embrace a broad spectrum of social needs. Intimately connected with this is the growth of participatory politics. The postmodern commentary on centralized power and hierarchical forms of organization promotes alternative forms of political participation other than the traditional representative bodies. It places more emphasis on grassroots movements, local efforts and network-based forms of organization as places of democracy action. Such types of participations may improve the accountability and responsiveness of political systems by inviting decision-making processes to the people and allowing more direct participation in the political affairs. This has led to the democratization of not just periodical elections but also carried into the day-to-day activities and social relationships.

The other significant prospect is critical questioning of power and domination. The postmodern approach can help to better comprehend inequality and exclusion by uncovering the covert processes by which power works. It emphasizes the fact that domination can be ingrained in culture, language, and knowledge regimes, and thus broadens the political critique. The awareness enables identification and challenge of subtle forms of oppression that might not be apparent in a traditional framework. In turn, postmodern democracy can promote increased reflexivity and self-critique in political institutions and practices. Nevertheless, in addition to these prospects, there are also major drawbacks to the postmodern approach. The issue of normative relativism is one of the most burning ones. Postmodernism undermines universal norms of truth and justice and therefore it is hard to set up common elements that would be used to assess political arguments or inform collective action. In the absence of a common normative framework, a democratic decision-making process would become arbitrary or irrational since various groups stick to the values and views that are mutually incompatible. This compromises the ability of democracy to operate as a coherent system of governance and it casts doubt on the question of the long-term stability of democracy.

The other significant constraint is the issue of consensus-building. Conventional democratic theory stresses on deliberation and agreement in conflict resolution and in making collective decisions. Conversely, consensus is harder to reach because of the postmodern focus on difference and contestation. Although the conflict and disagreement are known to be the part and parcel of the political sphere, the lack of the means to solve this problem may result in ongoing splits and polarization. This is especially clear in modern societies, where conflicting accounts and identity-based assertions tend to create

discontinuous political spaces with few chances of reaching a compromise. The problem of institutional coherence also becomes one of the crucial issues. Democracies need some form of stability and coordination to be operable. Nevertheless, institutional structures may become weakened and unable to govern through the postmodern emphasis on decentralization and fluidity. The spread of heterogeneous actors and interests, as well as the strengthening of inclusiveness, may also pose problems with regards to policy implementation and administrative efficiency. This can cause a scenario whereby, in extreme situations, democratic institutions will lack the ability to effectively respond to complex social and economic issues.

Moreover, the growing role of the media and digital technologies intensifies opportunities and constraints of postmodern democracy. On the one hand, these technologies allow increasing access to information and making new participation and mobilization possible. Conversely, they are leading to the disintegration of the public sphere, misinformation and further polarization in politics. The fast proliferation of rival discourses complicates the achievement of mutual perceptions of reality and thus the democracy deliberation and decision-making process. Lastly, the conflict between inclusivity and coherence is the core of the postmodern project of democracy. Although it is crucial to have the diversity of voices involved in the fair and fair political system, it should be compensated with the necessity of making decisions collectively and maintaining the stability of the institution. One of the main problems of the modern democracies is the need to balance this. It involves the creation of new structures that will be able to support plurality without compromising the ability to act and govern in a coordinated manner. Postmodern democracy is an opportunity and challenge. It widens the horizons of democratic politics through embracing diversity, participation and reflection but also poses basic questions of normativity, consensus and effectiveness of institutions. The challenge is not, then, to dismiss the lessons of postmodernism but to incorporate them within a larger context that is capable of both endorsing democratic legitimacy and mitigating the challenge of dealing with the realities of modern politics.

Critical Engagement

Although the postmodern turn in political theory offers an effective critique of conventional beliefs regarding power, knowledge and legitimacy, it has been a topic of intense criticism. The main concerns of these critiques are the normative restrictions, practical and theoretical tensions of the postmodern framework. Interacting with these criticisms is critical to know the strengths as well as the flaws of the postmodern approaches to democracy, and to find potential ways to move towards a more balanced and sustainable political theory. The other most notable criticism is related to the problem of normative grounding. Postmodernism has been dismissed by some as subverting the very foundations on which political judgments can be made by denying the existence of objective standards of truth and by denying the existence of universal principles. In the absence of common norms of judging of what is just, fair, or legitimate, the democratic decision-making process may turn out to be fractured and disjointed. This brings a basic point, which is how can political systems be effective when there is no unifying system of resolving conflict or acting in concert? Those who criticize this are of the view that the lack of normative grounds undermines the ability of democracy to bring about stable and consistent governance. The issue of relativism is closely connected with this. This pluralist focus and contingency of knowledge may give rise to the belief that there is no better or worse perspective, no matter whether it is based on ethical or empirical grounds. Although this method encourages inclusivity, openness, it also causes challenges in differentiating legitimate and illegitimate claims. To the worst, relativism can facilitate the dissemination

of false news, manipulation, and politically-driven stories that interfere with democracy. The issue, then, is how to strike a balance between the appreciation of the variety of viewpoints, and the necessity to exercise critical thinking and responsibility.

The other critical critic is the issue of political fragmentation. Postmodern focus on difference and identity has helped to increase a variety of various and even competing political claims. Although this has helped to make the marginalized groups more visible, the collective political goals and identities have been eroded. This leads to the fragmentation of the political environment and it is hard to form broad based coalitions and reach a consensus on critical matters. This disintegration may impede good governance and lead to political instability, especially in the societies that are already characterized by social and economic differences. Important issues are also concerned with the problem of the democratic practice and institutional viability. The decentralization, fluidity, and contestation, which are the priorities of the postmodern approaches, can question the stability and coherence of political institutions. Democracies need some form of order, predictability and coordination to be effective. Nevertheless, continuous focus on change and contestation can destabilize the institutions and their ability to adapt to complex issues. Critics say that in the absence of robust and steady institutions, democracy stands to be useless or even dysfunctional. Moreover, it has a criticism of overemphasis on discourse to the detriment of material realities. Although the emphasis on language, representation, and meaning can be very insightful in understanding how political reality is constructed, it might not be valid in terms of economic structures, material inequalities, and institutional power. The problems of poverty, resource allocation and economic exploitation cannot be conceptualized entirely using discourse. The purely discursive approach might thus not endeavor to solve the structural aspects of power and inequality that persist to inform political life.

The issues are compounded by the fact that the digital era has transformed political communication. The postmodern focus on discontinuous and competing stories conforms to the facts of the modern media landscape, where information is quickly generated, disseminated, and argued over. Nevertheless, it is also in this environment where misinformation spreads, people sway, and trust in institutions are eroded. Critics have suggested that by promoting the instability of truth, the postmodern framework can be a source of these issues, by undermining the ability to differentiate between credible sources of information and contradictory assertions. In spite of these attacks, it is worth noting that postmodern approach has some good contributions which cannot be easily ignored. Its focus on criticism, plurality and the revelation of power relations concealed offers valuable resources to comprehend and contest domination in its different manifestations. Instead of dismissing postmodernism as problematic, most researchers espouse a mixed method solution that incorporates its ideas into more normative and institutional viewpoints. The approach would still maintain the much-needed sense of power and discourse and would also restore some of the elements of stability, accountability and shared norms that are required in the running of a democratic state. The contemporary political theory has the responsibility of walking the fine line between pluralism and coherence, contingency and stability, and critique and normativity in this sense. This necessitates the creation of structures that can embrace diversity and contestation without giving up the likelihood of collective decision making and institutional legitimacy. This is not just a theoretical but also an actual dilemma because democratic societies need solutions to resolve these tensions in political processes in the real world.

To summarize, the postmodern political theory has been critically engaged with and examined to demonstrate its potential as transformative as well as having limitations. Although it effectively questions the premises of the old political thinking and broadens the boundaries of the democratic analysis, it also

casts significant doubts on the normativity, consistency, and applicability. These issues need to be addressed in order to create more detailed and strong vision of democracy in the modern world.

Conclusion

Postmodern turn in political theory signifies a tremendous intellectual twist that has made a radical transformation in the understanding of power and discourse as well as democratic legitimacy. It has brought new possibilities of understanding the dynamics of contemporary politics by questioning the underlying assumptions of the modern political thought, in particular, the conviction in universal truth, objective knowledge and fixed political identities. Not only has this change broadened the analytical focus of the theory of politics, it has also revealed the shortcomings and inconsistencies of the classical forms of democracy. One of the main contributions of the postmodern perspective is that it redefines power as diffuse, relational and embedded in the everyday practices. Instead of power being tied to formal institutions or centralized sources, it is perceived as working in networks of knowledge, norms and social interactions. This broad perspective exposes the influence of power on identities, behaviors and perceptions, which influence political outcomes in ways that tend to be indirect and subtle. Simultaneously, it points out the existence of various points of resistance, which implies that political change may be developed through various and decentralized sources of action. It is also important that the discourse is emphasized as a constitutive aspect of political reality. The understanding of the construction of meanings, identities and social categories, through language and representation, highlights the contested nature of politics. The political ideas of democracy, justice and rights are not absolute and universal but is constantly being reformulated by a struggle over meaning. This approach is no longer concerned with seeking objective truths but regards the process of narratives and representations that can influence political life, especially in the time of the blistering technological change and the development of media platforms. But these theoretical innovations also lead to the tremendous crisis of democratic legitimacy. The undermining of common normative structures, the disintegration of the public space, and the growing power of media and information systems have undermined the classical roots that the democratic power is grounded on. The more the political discourse has been polarized and challenged, the more unpredictable the opportunity to reach consensus or collective agreement. Loss of faith in institutions and the increasing distance between citizens and decision-makers only exacerbate the development of this crisis, casting serious doubts on the sustainability of the current systems of democracy.

Meanwhile, the postmodern worldview refers to the opportunities as well as constraints of the modern democracy. On the one hand, it enhances inclusiveness, diversity, and acknowledgment of the marginalized voices, thus enriching the democratic process and increasing the level of political participation. Conversely, it poses difficulties pertaining to relativism, fragmentation and absence of coherent normative bases. The antagonism between plurality and unity, openness and stability are the most crucial element of the modern democratic dilemma. The postmodern political theory has been greatly criticized, and this is why it is important to take a balanced approach that may incorporate the findings of the postmodern political theory and at the same time mitigate its drawbacks. Although the critique of universalism and the accentuation of contingency are of great use in comprehending the power and exclusion, these approaches should be integrated with frameworks that guarantee accountability, integrity, and the potential of a shared decision-making process. This demands a re-examination of democratic institutions and practices in a manner that is responsive to diversity and complexity without giving up the values that are required to have an effective government. The political theoretical challenge is to find a

way of creating a hybrid structure that will balance the insights of postmodernism with the normative and institutional demands of democracy. Such a structure would acknowledge the significance of discourse, identity, and plurality as well as put up a system of coordination, deliberation, and accountability. The future of democracy in an ever more interconnected and technologically mediated world lies in its capacity to keep up with these new realities and retain its fundamental principles of participation, equality and justice.

Finally, the postmodern turn does not mean the death of the democratic theory, it means its reformation. It forces the re-evaluation of the assumptions that formerly have been the basis of the political thinking and it opens new possibilities of perceiving and acting democracy in the complex and uncertain world. The crisis of democratic legitimacy thus cannot be viewed as the problem to be solved but rather as the chance to reconsider and re-energize the democratic ideals in the perspective of the modern challenges.

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