

# The Crisis of Democracy

*The Crisis of Democracy: On the Governability of Democracies* was initially a 1975 report written by Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki for the Trilateral Commission and later published as a book.

The report observed the political state of the United States, Europe and Japan and says that in the United States the problems of governance “stem from an excess of democracy” and thus advocates “to restore the prestige and authority of central government institutions.”<sup>[1]</sup> The report serves as an important point of reference for studies focusing on the contemporary crisis of democracies.<sup>[2]</sup>

## 1 Overview

### 1.1 Europe

The report outlines that in 1960s Western Europe the governments are “overloaded with participants and demands” which the highly bureaucratic political systems are unable to handle and thus is becoming ungovernable. It points to a political decision made by France that was made in “semisecret, without open political debate, but with a tremendous amount of lobbying and intrabureaucratic conflict”.

### 1.2 United States

The vitality of democracy in the United States in the 1960s produced a substantial increase in governmental activity and a substantial decrease in governmental authority.

—Samuel P. Huntington

The report says the problems of the United States in the 1960s was the “impulse of democracy is to make government less powerful and more active, to increase its functions, and to decrease its authority” and concludes these demands are contradictory. The impulse for the undermining of legitimacy was said to be done by new activism, an adversarial news media while the increase in government was said to be due to the Cold War defense budget and Great Society programs. Thus what is said to be needed is a “balance is to be restored between governmental activity and governmental authority”. The effects of this “excess of democracy” if not fixed are said to be

an inability to maintain international trade, balanced budgets and “hegemonic power” in the world.

## 2 Reception

It has been observed by critics that many members of the Trilateral Commission had roles in the Carter Administration and have been influenced by the report.<sup>[3]</sup> Specifically, Zbigniew Brzezinski stated the conclusions of the report in an op-ed for the *St. Petersburg Times*.<sup>[4]</sup> Noam Chomsky has cited the report as an example of reactionary policies coming from “the 'liberal' wing of the state capitalist ruling elite”.<sup>[3]</sup>

## 3 New Crisis of Democracy

In 2013 Fareed Zakaria wrote that the United States is facing a new crisis of democracy in which there is low approval of political institutions, political paralysis and poor democratically made decisions (such as low taxes and high government spending).<sup>[5]</sup>

## 4 See also

- *Political Order in Changing Societies*
- *The Limits to Growth*
- Powell Memorandum

## 5 References

[1] *The Crisis of Democracy* Trilateral Commission Report, pg. 123, 179

[2] Ercan, S.A and Gagnon J-P. (2014) *The Crisis of Democracy: Which Crisis? Which Democracy?*, *Democratic Theory*, Volume 1, Number 2, Winter 2014, pp. 1-10(10). Abstract: The introductory article to this special issue highlights three fundamental yet often neglected questions related to the current diagnosis of a crisis of democracy: What is meant by the term “crisis”? Which democracy is in crisis? And what, if anything, is “new” about the current crisis of democracy? We answer these questions by considering the multi-vocal contribution of purposefully curated short articles in this special issue. We argue that when engaging with the “crisis of democracy”

diagnosis, it is important to unpack not only the normative presumptions one has in relation to what democracy is and should be, but also the recent transformations in the way politics is understood and practiced in contemporary societies.

- [3] "The Carter Administration: Myth and Reality", Noam Chomsky
- [4] "Examining the crisis of democracy" Aug 2, 1974, St. Petersburg Times
- [5] "Can America Be Fixed? The New Crisis of Democracy," Fareed Zakaria.

## 6 External links

- *The Crisis of Democracy*, Trilateral Commission Report, New York University Press
- *Downsize Democracy for 40 Years and Here's What You Get*, MURRAY DOBBIN, *CounterPunch*

## 7 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses

### 7.1 Text

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