

## LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IMPASSE IN THE TIMES OF CRISIS

### RAHMAN DAG

[rahman.dag@gmail.com](mailto:rahman.dag@gmail.com)

Associate professor in the Institute of Middle East and Islamic Countries at Marmara University (Turkey). He obtained his bachelor's degree from Istanbul Yeditepe University and then his master's degree from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. He was awarded a doctorate of philosophy from the University of Exeter's Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies. The core point of his thesis is the ideological roots of pro-Kurdish and pro-Islamist political movements determining the perceptions between them. In addition, he is now head of the CESRAN International Turkey desk and works as an associate professor at Adiyaman University in Turkey. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4198-2851>.

### OZGUR TUFEKCI

[ozgurtufekci@ktu.edu.tr](mailto:ozgurtufekci@ktu.edu.tr)

Associate professor of international relations at Karadeniz Technical University (Turkey). He is also the founder and director-general of CESRAN International, a UK-based think tank ([www.cesran.org](http://www.cesran.org)). He holds a master's degree in International Studies from the University of Sheffield and a PhD in Sociology and International Relations from Coventry University. His primary research interests are (Turkish) Eurasianism, nation-building, theories of nationalism, geopolitical studies, rising powers, and regionalism. He published a monograph titled *The Foreign Policy of Modern Turkey: Power and the Ideology of Eurasianism* (2017) and co-edited *Domestic and Regional Uncertainties in the New Turkey* (2017), *Eurasian Politics and Society: Issues and Challenges* (2017), and *Politics of Conflict and Cooperation in Eurasia* (2018). He is also the editor-in-chief of *The Rest: Journal of Politics and Development*. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4335-2909>.

### Abstract

Liberalism is theoretically based on a liberal way of thinking with ideas of individual sovereignty, property rights, and free trade. The sovereignty of the individual in question has transformed into a politically democratic form of government and economically a capitalist economic system. With the globalisation of trade and democracy (human rights), areas of freedom have become limiting state sovereignty and political decision-making. Civil society originated from liberalism, such as social movements and non-governmental organisations that have reached the capacity to directly affect domestic and foreign policies by using the areas of individual freedom. In this case, the political will that came to power through elections is at an impasse between implementing the policies that some electorate voted for and those against them. This paper will examine the dilemma of liberal democracy based on individual sovereignty/civil society and state sovereignty through three cases happening in liberal democracies: the raiding of the Congress building by the protesters in the USA, the COVID-19 policies, and the immigrant issue. Relying on these cases, the paper will argue that liberal democracy leads itself to an impasse in practice..

### Keywords

Liberal Democracy, Political Impasse, Individual Sovereignty, Civil Society, State Sovereignty.



## Resumo

O liberalismo baseia-se teoricamente numa forma de pensar liberal com ideias de soberania individual, direitos de propriedade e comércio livre. A soberania do indivíduo em questão transformou-se numa forma de governo politicamente democrática e economicamente num sistema económico capitalista. Com a globalização do comércio e da democracia (direitos humanos), os espaços de liberdade passaram a limitar a soberania do Estado e a tomada de decisões políticas. A sociedade civil originária do liberalismo, como os movimentos sociais e as organizações não governamentais, alcançou a capacidade de afetar diretamente as políticas internas e externas, utilizando os espaços de liberdade individual. Neste caso, a vontade política que chegou ao poder através de eleições encontra-se num impasse entre a implementação das políticas que alguns eleitores votaram a favor e as que lhes são contrárias. O presente documento analisará o dilema da democracia liberal baseada na soberania individual/sociedade civil e na soberania do Estado através de três casos ocorridos em democracias liberais: a invasão do edifício do Congresso pelos manifestantes nos EUA, as políticas contra a COVID-19 e a questão dos imigrantes. Com base nestes casos, o artigo argumentará que a democracia liberal conduz a si própria a um impasse na prática.

## Palavras-chave

Democracia Liberal, Impasse Político, Soberania Individual, Sociedade Civil, Soberania do Estado.

## How to cite this article

Dag, Rahman & Tufekci, Ozgur (2025). Liberal Democracy Impasse in the Times of Crisis. *Janus.net, e-journal of international relations*. VOL. 16, Nº. 1. May-October 2025, pp. 3-19. DOI <https://doi.org/10.26619/1647-7251.16.1.1>.

**Article submitted on 30th July 2024 and accepted for publication on 3rd October de 2024.**





## LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IMPASSE IN THE TIMES OF CRISIS

RAHMAN DAG

OZGUR TUFEKCI

### 1. Introduction

The distribution of authority between the rulers and the ruled ones has changed throughout the history of humanity. The times that the rulers were too strong and the ruled ones were too weak shaped the social, political, and economic structure of the power balance in a state administration. The evolution of this power balance has been apparent in developed Western countries (Fukuyama, 1991). Therefore, the political, economic, and social transformation, especially in Western European countries, has built a new model for almost all countries worldwide. Based on that experience, liberal democracy is considered the best form of government humankind has created (Plattner, 1999).

The form of political administration and ideology known as liberal democracy is a way of thinking that eliminates the areas of sovereignty other than the individual's own free will and puts the individual's choice in the centre (Golston, 2018). Therefore, the individual who gains freedom from everything is competent to make decisions regarding himself. The source of this competence is rationality (Myers, 1998). The rational individual is the essential subject of liberalism. The individual's property, political, and economic rights in the emergence of liberalism resulted in an individual-centred political ideology and bodied itself with liberal democracy. Therefore, liberal democracy is a political system that puts individual sovereignty<sup>1</sup> in the centre, and the government chosen by the rational individual voluntarily comes to power. In this context, it is necessary to seek the source of legitimacy of liberal democracy in the sovereignty of the individual (Prokhovnik, 1999, p. 70). Individual sovereignty comes first and is essential in liberal understanding and democracy. As in every aspect, individuals have the right to choose by whom they will be ruled via elections. In other words, rulers get their legitimacy to rule through individual sovereignty. Other sources of domination or legitimacy are regarded as illegitimate, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Individual sovereignty is defined by Nikola Lj. Ilievski, after a comprehensive theoretical explanation, as "individual sovereignty could be defined as a concept which gives an ultimate primacy of the will of the individual, limited by other individual's life, property and liberty; inviolable individual's physical integrity and property; politically manifested in *minimal government or private protective agency* and socially manifested in *spontaneous order*." (2015, p. 32).



their effectiveness in influencing the behaviour and decisions of individuals has decreased (von Hayek & Çetin, 2012). Under these conditions, the legitimate way to get power is through elections in which individuals reveal their preferences. It cannot be expected in a liberal democracy that any factor other than individual will (citizens) be effective in a systemic sense. However, liberal democracy has created a government that is obliged to go beyond the election results and meet every individual's different demands and expectations. Once it is elected, regardless of what percentage a political party gets, established governments have to serve every individual (citizens or electorates). In this case, a dilemma is inevitable if there is a contesting ideological or status distinctions among individuals.

Even if a government comes to power with the free will of individuals, it must act within the framework of specific responsibilities. Failure to fulfil these responsibilities may mean its legitimacy is shaken, and there is again a vicious circle in this dilemma. Although individuals shape their own lifestyles and political power with their own free will, the sum represents a lifestyle, a political view and a way of life (Çetin, 2001), mostly referring to the dominant identity shared by the majority. Therefore, the government's responsibility to meet the demands of those who voted for it and the obligation to act according to the expectations of the voters might conflict with the demands of other groups, which think differently. Will it act according to the voters it has taken responsibility for, or will it choose policies according to individuals with different demands since liberal democracy is based on individual sovereignty? This difference revealed by these demands and the majority of voters will significantly explain the changes and transformations in social, political and economic policies. In fact, this is the point that liberal democracy tries to make when advocating for a pluralistic democracy compared to majoritarian democracy. The protection of minority and marginalised groups is shown in the dynamics of liberal democracy (Kymlicka, 2018), but the dilemma between pluralist and majoritarian democracy has not been resolved yet. There is a situation where a political party cannot come to power via election if it implements certain policies against the majority of the electorate. Under these circumstances, it seems far from rational for any government to follow procedures that would sacrifice its own power for liberal democracy. To avoid such a situation and increase social support, a political party that comes to power must convince its own electoral base to meet the minority demands.

This paper delves theoretically into this impasse that liberal democracy is in now and practically examines three cases to substantiate its main argument. To do that, after a short historical background on the evolution of liberalism, the paper presents the relations between liberal democracy, civil society, and politics. Followingly, the main theoretical argument will be applied in three cases (the raiding of the Congress building by the protesters in the USA, the Covid 19 policies, and the immigrant issue), specifically in the liberal democratic political systems.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Evolution of Liberalism and Liberal Democracy Impasse**

The basis of liberal thought relies on the instinct to protect the individual's property right against religious and constitutional governments. The bourgeois, or new merchants, who took action against the absolute dominance of the dynasties, especially in England,



started to raise their claims for commercial freedom to protect their economic activities and the wealth they obtained from these activities (Thompson, 2017, pp. 48-49). The struggle to eliminate the restrictions that started in the economic field was later reflected in the political and intellectual fields, causing the Industrial Revolution and then Western European countries' rapid and unstoppable rise. The struggle for emancipation in the economic field has evolved to limit the areas in which the Monarchs would intervene in the economy. The limitation of monarchical governments' decision-making power in the economic sphere was later reflected in the political sphere and turned into a struggle for greater involvement of the people (primarily the bourgeois and merchants) in the decision-making mechanisms. After long political movements, the emergence of written texts in which the powers of monarchical governments were restricted led to the rise of constitutional movements (Küçük, 2015). This direction caused absolute monarchies to turn into constitutional monarchies over time.

At the end of the 18th century, with the French Revolution, the resonance of freedom, equality, and fraternity discourses in the European continent led to the expansion of the concept of the nation, which was kept in a narrow framework. Although the revolution in France and the attempt to politically eliminate the members of the monarchy and aristocracy by placing them on the target board caused populism and terrorism for a short time, it led to the establishment of an understanding based on the political, economic, and social equality of the people first and then each individual within the framework of the aforementioned concepts (Özkaya, 2021, pp. 51-52). The strengthening of European countries, which continue to grow and develop rapidly in economic, political, and military terms, has been identified with the understanding of the sovereignty of the people and the individual and has caused freedom to be perceived as the primary source of development and growth (Petersmann, 2006).

This process, which can be read as the emancipation history of the individual, has led to the emergence of liberal democracy as a political system that shapes European politics. Liberal democracy is a political system that advocates a limited understanding of the state and is based on the freedom of individuals (Çetin, 2001, pp. 228-229). Liberal core relies mainly on individuals, even if the sum of individuality creates a collective identity or preferences. In essence, individuals have the right to make decisions regarding himself/herself, which includes by whom he/she would be ruled. That leads us to elections. From a liberal perspective, election results cannot be taken as social groups or collectivity but should be taken as the collective sum of individuals' preferences<sup>2</sup>. Different preferences of individuals, in this manner, can be seen in election results, and the legitimacy of elections comes from rational individuals (Przeworski and Wallerstein, 1986, p. 217). That is why liberal democracy, which shows the characteristics of pluralistic democracy, does not limit the relationship between the rulers and the ruled ones only to elections but tries to close this gap with the concept of civil society and general will, which John Locke (Çetin, 2001, p. 221) and Rousseau laid the foundations for. Based on its European origins, Robert Cox (1999, p. 6) suggests that "In its European origins, civil society and the bourgeoisie were synonymous. Civil society signified the self-

---

<sup>2</sup> Conceptual clearance between individuality and collectivity is well discussed and presented by Alain Touraine (2005). He problematizes these concepts in the light of being "subject" which originates from individual sense but also accumulated with cultural and social norms.



conscious social group whose influence, if not necessarily its executive power, was expanding.”

Civil society is a social institution that operates to influence political decisions and the way of doing politics. This institution creates a vital area, especially for those with different demands. Associations, foundations, lobbyists, and elites in civil society play an active role in influencing political decisions. As Michael W. Foley and Bob Edwards emphasise, civil society is “the ability

of associations to mobilise citizens on behalf of public causes” (1996, p. 38), which can be interpreted as a group of individuals with common ideas. On this occasion, while acting not as a political party and not aiming to come to power, civil society is instrumental in expressing opinions about the economic and political structures of the society, influencing people in the social sense and continuing to exist as an actor that political decision-makers should pay attention to (De Clerck-Sachsse, 2012; Duncombe and Dunne, 2018). Although non-governmental organisations are not political parties, they play a very influential role in crucial times, especially in times of social and economic ruptures. When appropriate, they turn out to be more effective than a political party or a government. The fact that non-governmental institutions and organisations have an influence and power in shaping society economically, politically, culturally and socially without a political party is seen as a substantial gain for liberal democracy. However, the fact that its borders are not clear creates a handicap in terms of the operability of liberal democracy. The fact that non-governmental institutions and organisations can become decision-makers in influencing the public and politicians at critical times or significantly affecting decision-makers indicates a deadlock due to the lack of political response (Seckinelgin, 2002, pp. 362-363). It is because the essential factor in the establishment of liberal democracy is the sovereignty of individuals. On the other hand, the sovereignty of individuals is based on the decision of who will rule the individuals (Özkaya, 2021). Therefore, it may cause a political party that has come to power through elections to produce or make policies against the demands of the voters who voted for it through non-governmental institutions and organisations.

Civil society can also be considered as a different field of struggle between different institutions of a society or predominantly minority groups. For democracy to continue functioning, it is inevitable to draw a framework regarding civil society’s boundaries and to what extent it can/should be effective. The fact that the influence rates of non-governmental organisations vary poses a significant problem in determining these limits. For instance, a social movement<sup>3</sup> that can be considered a non-governmental organisation has been able to influence a political party or the political party in power, produce a policy and get what it wants, or ensure that its demands are met. What will happen if it conflicts with his request? Such a problem poses a significant problem because social movements or civil society can cause a change of power without a political party.

Especially with the Arab Spring, it is important to show the effectiveness of the social movement as a non-governmental organisation that they both fill the squares with the

---

<sup>3</sup> The concept of social movement and civil society is used interchangeably despite the fact that their conceptual backgrounds are different. It is because they both almost have similar functioning in times of crisis in liberal democracies.



social dynamism in world politics and go so far as to demand the resignation of political decision-makers. The situation in which a ruling political party comes to power through elections changes without an election as a result of social protest can be considered a revolution under normal conditions. On the other hand, the fact that the change of political power took place through the social movement or civil society (Touraine, 1992) is not considered a revolution but a search for democratic rights. A mechanism emerges when a social reaction based on accumulated or instantaneous responses causes a change of power. A limited number of communities, not the majority, are the decision-makers or politically cultivated. That a particular part of the society directs or shapes the government in such a way constitutes a great contradiction to the sovereignty of the individual and the election concepts that constitute the essence of liberal democracy. Therefore, the main problem in this section is that civil society or social movements gain such an excessive influence, which has a damaging effect on the legitimacy of elections.

As a result of an individuality-centred understanding of liberalism, citizens are protected against potential violations of their fundamental rights. This situation, which seems very meaningful and moral in theory, encounters problems in practice. In societies where opposing ideas or polarisations exist among citizens, individual rights (sovereignty) are legitimised through dominant identities and values, while opposing and minority ideas are not considered within the scope of individual rights. As Nootens emphasises, with minority rights and status, the minority cannot benefit from the principle of self-determination, or they have to maintain their existence in a fundamental contradiction with the sovereignty of the nation-state (2006, p. 39). The illegitimacy of marginalisation and opposition is discursively emphasised and removed from being a human rights issue and turned into a security issue. This is true not only for main identities but also for sects, political ideologies, religions, political parties, geographical divisions, and similar dualities.

The citizen profile, which consists of rational individuals freed from the bindingness of sociality and traditionalism in the centre of common values and understandings (Çetin, 2001, p. 222), is one of the important components of liberal democracy. Therefore, the fact that the individuals forming a nationality do not have a homogeneous profile can cause problems in implementing liberal democracy. Deepened ideological oppositions cause political and social upheavals, and such divisions find room for action through individual sovereignty and civil society conceptualised by liberalism.

Przeworski and Wallerstein illustrate the core issue of liberal democracy by suggesting ideal conditions in which liberal democracy can smoothly operate. They suggest that "In an ideal democracy—one in which all citizens are homogeneous, all are informed, and all vote: in which the voting procedure aggregates individual preferences uniquely and introduces no biases" (1986, p. 218). However, the places where political problems go to polarisation, political and social turmoil, and even civil war are more likely to be seen in political units that are in transition to democracy (democratisation process). Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Central and Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe are geographies that have experienced this transformation (Sørensen, 2018). In these countries where the democratisation process is in progress, "civil society, understood as the realm of private voluntary association, from neighbourhood committees to interest groups to philanthropic enterprises of all sorts, has come to be seen as an essential ingredient in both democratisation and the health of established democracies" (Foley and



Edwards, 1996, p. 38). In the case of resistance against democratisation, individual preferences, either within a civil society organisation or in voting for a political party, might make it quite difficult to maintain the process and cause social and political disorder. The politicisation of civil society is described by Foley and Edwards (1996, p. 46) as "civil society is treated as an autonomous sphere of social power within which citizens can pressure authoritarians for change, protect themselves from tyranny, and democratise from below." Such development seems to be a part of the democratisation process, but it is only applicable to smooth conditions. In the case of social, political, and economic crises, individual preferences (sovereignty) might get contradictory against one another.

However, the fact that liberal democracy is stuck between individual sovereignty and manageability, causing an impasse, can be seen in the countries and geographies included in the category of "others" but also Western Europe and North America, which are known as the cradle of liberal democracy (Galdston, 2018). The claim that the far-right and populist movements are on the rise in Europe (Rummens, 2017) weakens liberal democracy. To give some examples, Brexit, the rise of the National Front in France, the 2016 Presidential election in the United States (Inglehart and Norris, 2017), the entry of the far-right into the parliament in Germany, Austria, the rise of the far-right in the Hungarian and Czech Republic elections (Blokker, 2019) can be listed. These anti-liberal democracies, political parties or social groups are being operated on the grounds of the liberties that liberal democracy provides. Problematising liberal democracy in times of crisis in the Western spheres is actually quite expected. Alan Touraine, in this sense, suggests that "it has been very frequently observed that the idea of 'social movement' is more appropriate to countries that have experienced genuine capitalist development than to others" (1992, p. 134). This means that liberal democracy, in nature, might pave the way for anti-liberal social movements or civil society groups to challenge its core ontologic presence.

If it were claimed that liberal democracy was in a deadlock only in countries trying to democratise, it would not be possible to produce the counterargument because it would be expected that the transition to liberal democracy would be painful for countries that could not complete individual sovereignty, rational individual profile, and homogenisation process. However, the claim that liberal democracy is in a deadlock only makes sense if tested in countries where liberal democracy has been successfully practised. In this context, the sharpening of the Republican and Democrat separation in America, the raiding of the Congress building by the protesters, the actions against the Covid 19 policies, and the deadlocks of liberal democracy through immigration issues will be examined by looking at the limits of the individual sovereignty in relations with civil society and the state.

### **3. Liberal Democracy Impasse in the Times of Crisis**

"In today's conditions, it is impossible to claim that a state has unlimited and absolute sovereignty and is a democratic state of law. A democratic state that is also a state of the law is now limited; the rights of minorities are guaranteed against the will of the majority" (Küçük, 2015, p. 311; Kymlicka, 2018). Liberal democracies have given rise to the representation of sovereign individuals governed by the elected. The state is expected



to fulfil the obligation of ensuring the security of life and property of the individual and public order subject to the limitations of individual sovereignty. Under these conditions, a political structure governed by liberal democracy may encounter contradictions when practices such as developing policies for the individuals despite the individual or prioritising the social benefit over individuals.

### **3.1. The Capitol Raid and the Impasse of Liberal Democracy**

Liberal democracy has been a part of the political culture since the foundation of the United States of America (USA). It has become one of the best practice areas of liberal democracy over time. In the USA, which pioneered the ideas of political, social, and economic freedom (liberal democracy), political polarisation (Hsiao and Radnitz, 2021) peaked after the 2016 presidential election. Since Donald Trump won the presidential election for the first time as the Republican candidate, the polarisation was more evident in the following years.

Considering the issue in detail, we can state more clearly that liberal democracy drags itself into a dead-end with civil society consisting of sovereign individuals. Joe Biden emerged victorious from the legal and legitimate elections. Opening the election result discussion in a liberal democracy will bring along the legitimacy debates. The allegations that Donald Trump, who lost the election, interfered in the elections cast a shadow over the election results and caused uncertainties about whether he would leave the office (Luke, 2021, p. 4). On the day that the presidential election results would be confirmed by Congress, Donald Trump said on his X account, "The Great Protest in Washington on 6 January. Be there, and it will be wild -Big protest in DC on 6 January. Be there, will be wild!" he called a part of the public to protest, and the gathered protesters postponed the senate session (Holland et al., 2021). Theoretically, the fact that the above-mentioned political groups fight with each other outside the elections has shown how much damage can be done to the operability of the liberal democratic system (Oser, 2021). After these statements, for the first time in American political history, the people entered the Congress building to protest the Congress session, causing the admission and oath session to be postponed.

It is usual for people to use their sovereignty to protest the election results if it is considered within the scope of freedom of protest or assembly, regarded as one of the fundamental rights in liberal democracies. However, the realisation of this right to protest by entering public buildings is prohibited within the legal framework. As in this case, the solution found by liberal democracy to overcome this impasse is to determine the limits of the right to protest within the framework of existing laws and, in fact, the laws made by transferring the sovereignty rights of other individuals (Habermas, 1994). The will of individuals who do not want to cede their sovereignty, and the will of those who do, actually led to the emergence of social groups that think differently from each other and created polarisation between two different mentalities (Republican-Democrat, Populist-Democrat, nationalist-internationalist, pluralist-majoritarian). Therefore, the fact that additional and alternative ideas started to struggle for power, together with the polarisation, caused social movements to intervene in politics, even momentarily (Oklopcic, 2019). Even if the protesters had not entered the Congress building and continued to protest around it, it would have overshadowed the electoral results, which



are the source of legitimacy for liberal democracy. Under these conditions, the source of the election and the legal and social source of the protest demonstrations is, again, liberal democracy. What is meant here is not the idea that individual rights should be sacrificed for sociality or that individual rights should be ignored for the continuity of the state and political institutions. It is true that the democratic system of liberal democracy, shaped by the sovereignty of the individual, is valid if political orthodoxy is ensured. Political science literature explains this situation by examining whether the political culture is democratic. However, keeping the individual sovereignty and freedom areas as wide as possible in liberal democracy can lead to a political deadlock in case of political polarisation or tensions.

### **3.2 COVID-19 and the Structural Crisis of Liberal Democracy**

For liberal democracy to remain functional, the claim that an average level of welfare (economic development), short and long-term political routine and primarily democratic political culture is necessary has become undeniable. The reflexes of liberal democracy in the face of crisis are of the nature to support the claims in this direction (Norrlöf, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire functioning at the global level and has led to questioning individuality and sociality in economic, political, and cultural terms (Murshed, 2020; Greitens, 2020). It has shown that the global economic order, in which the whole world is economically interconnected, is ready to turn from internationalisation to nationalisation in case of crisis. This situation actually leads to the deterioration of all national economies' logistics and resource hierarchy. Therefore, the fact that the crises leave the states between economic nationalisation and internationalisation (Dag, 2020) and that the scientific approaches on which rationality is based are not followed by society (Hotez, 2020) show that the liberal economic system and the rational individual are in a deadlock. From a political point of view, the Western European states and the USA, where liberal democracy is established, have followed a policy that can be defined as a significant shutdown to protect the health of their citizens, which is their main responsibility. States that have implemented a policy of massive closure have closed their land, air, and sea borders to other countries and have made it mandatory for their own citizens to stay at home. The basic logic of such a policy is to fulfil the state's primary responsibility and protect its citizens from the contagiousness of the virus and possible deaths. However, the said policy can be evaluated as contrary to the essence of liberalism. The future of the individual, society or the state, which is one of the main problems of political ideologies, has come to the fore again. The state has suspended the right of the individual to go out, protect his own health, and make his own decisions rationally in terms of the health of both the individual and society. Later, the right to decide whether to vaccinate against Covid or not by narrowing the living spaces of those who do not have the vaccine can be evaluated in the same problematic category (Amon and Wurth, 2020).

In this context, if an elected government implements excessive closure policies, even for the sake of public health, it may result in both a loss of votes and an economic loss. At the same time, the fact that the state makes decisions about their own lives on behalf of individuals may mean taking away the sovereignty of the individual and the opportunity to participate in politics not only by-election but instantaneously (participatory



democracy). On the other hand, individuals who do not comply with the decisions and prohibitions endanger society, revealing another problem in the individual-society-state relationship. In this context, communities that protest against the state's curfews when curfews are relaxed or completely prohibited and do not comply with any social distancing and mask rules during the protest are a critical example (Lange and Monscheuer, 2021; Iacolla et al., 2021). It is not surprising that such demonstrations take place in states where liberal democracy or even partially liberal democracy is practised on the grounds of freedom of assembly and demonstration, and the promotion of active participation of civil society in politics is among the sine qua none of (liberal) democracies. As can be seen, the basic principles of liberal democracy present a deadlock in terms of manageability in times of crisis (Goetz and Martinsen, 2021). This claim itself can be considered illiberal because it evokes a more statist approach, but it does not change the fact that the decisions taken for the individual, despite the individual, create a deadlock in liberal democracies. Therefore, it would not be wrong to argue that active civil society and fundamental rights based on individual sovereignty bring more harm than good politically and socially, or in other words, reduce manageability, especially in times of crisis. The concern that the psychological effects of Covid 19 may lead to anti-system or political violence can be evaluated similarly (Bartusevicius, Bor, Jørgensen, & Bang, 2021). This situation may be valid for liberal democracies and all political systems and understandings. It will not change the fact that the basic principles of liberal democracy lead it to an impasse in some cases (Ogurlu and Dag, 2021).

### **3.3 Immigration and Liberal Democracy**

Finally, it is seen that the understanding of basic human rights, which is the most important indicator of individual sovereignty in liberal democracies, fails when faced with the problem of immigrants. Liberal democracy claims to be universal as a form of political government and with the idea of individual sovereignty. Based on the right to live, it is believed that a life with dignity is not only valid for the citizens of the states governed by liberal democracy but for all humanity, according to the liberal understanding. As a reflection of the claim of universality, fundamental human rights have been considered universal human rights. In this framework, discrimination against people based on their identity, religion, language or any other reason and violation of their right to live with dignity was strongly opposed. In liberal democracies, this situation has led to the production and implementation of policies in order to protect minorities and cultures with a pluralistic understanding of democracy (Kymlicka, 2018).

The ideal of liberal democracy and human rights, represented by Western European and North American states and protected almost globally, envisages the protection of those whose right to live is violated if they seek refuge in their own countries. When other states request extradition for political reasons, whether they are threatened by death or torture is very effective in deciding whether to return people to their own countries. Military interventions in order to protect the right to live of its citizens against the danger of terrorism from another country and because a country started to kill its own citizens did not cause the problems to be solved but deepened them. For example, interventions for the protection of their citizens and the ideal of human rights (as in the examples of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria) later revealed the significant refugee problem. In



countries where the political, social, and economic order has almost disappeared, protecting the right to live and a living standard worthy of human dignity is no longer possible. Therefore, there has been a wave of migration towards countries where these rights are guaranteed, where they do not have to worry about their right to live and where minimum living standards can be achieved (Castelli Gattinara, 2017).

The main aim of irregular migrants is to access fundamental rights, which they believe are universal and protected by Western states. Therefore, the countries of Western Europe and North America are the final destinations of all the routes they follow, despite all the difficulties and the long duration. The opportunities offered by liberal democracy to its citizens and asylum seekers (for political or humanitarian reasons) have begun to pose a problem in terms of economic and social integration (Stasiulis, 1997; Gibney, 1999). "The combination of economic upheaval, demographic change, and challenging traditional values is causing many less educated citizens to feel that their lives are beyond their control" (Galston, 2018, p. 8). The cost of accessing the fundamental rights protected by liberal democracy for immigrants who try to cross borders in an irregular and unregistered manner has become challenging.

At the same time, immigration acceptance agreements and numbers implemented by states in line with liberal principles face positive and negative reactions from the active civil society that liberal democracy has paved the way for. On the one hand, non-governmental organisations that work for the acceptance and protection of all with humanitarian reflexes; on the other hand, non-governmental organisations that demand immigrants not be accepted due to social integration, religious differences, cultural differences, and economic costs are laying the groundwork for social and political polarisation (Gibney, 1999). The emergence of political and social polarisations has an effect that undermines the operability of liberal democracies. Because liberal and pluralist democratic practices, such as individual sovereignty, freedom of thought, freedom of association and dynamic and active civil society (Çetin, 2001, p. 225), that enable liberal democracy to work cause the activities of anti-immigrant groups to be legitimate on the liberal level and the rise of populist discourses over immigrants. Political and social groups in liberal democracies are torn between the acceptance of immigrants on the grounds of universal human rights and the rejection of an influx of immigrants, which might shake the foundation of a state's political and social structure.

Under these conditions, as in the previous examples, the short and long-term policies determined by the state are supported by some of the citizens and not supported by others, causing political and social disintegration with the individual and organisational (civil society) activities that liberal democracy forms the legal basis for. Those who help immigrants at destinations or facilitate logistics to where immigrants want to go intensively are punished (Duarte, 2020), or those who treat immigrants in an inhumane way (even those who intervene physically) might not face any sanctions (Kalir, 2022; Idemudia and Boehnke, 2020; Kalpouzou and Mann, 2015) can be given as an example of political and social polarisation and is explanatory in terms of exemplifying the impasse of liberal democracy (Reggiardo, 2019).

These three empirical cases indicate that in times of crisis, weaknesses of liberal democracy surface and political, social, and even individual reactions to the crisis vary dramatically. As William A. Galston (2020) emphasises, there are several reasons why



the vulnerability of liberal democracy endures, and one of them is quite associated with the main argument of the paper. It is "The ambiguities of freedom and equality" (2020, p. 19) which suggests that times of crisis extend the social and political divisions and even deepen them. Therefore, ambiguities between individual sovereignty and state or popular sovereignty change the direction of liberties in illiberal ways. This can be applied to social cleavages and political or ideological cleavages, which turn socio-political-economic diversity in a peaceful way into survival in a verbal or physically violent way.

#### **4. Conclusion**

A political system, conceptualised as liberal democracy, is based on the free administration of individuals and the sovereignty to make policies on national and international issues is delegated to the administrators representatively (Thompson, 2017, pp. 48-49). Both individuals and society can control the delegation of authority in question. Although the main backbone of the supervisory mechanism is elections, by voting, individuals do not make the elected government absolute sovereign until the next election, and individuals can interfere with the continuous decision-making processes through civil society and social movements (Rucht, 2006; Dag et al., 2018). After the Cold War, liberal democracy declared its absolute victory. It has been presented to the world as the best form of political administration. Democratisation policy has been pursued in order to implement this form of government in other states, and voluntary or compulsory democratisation at the national and international level, and liberal democratisation, in particular, has been tried to be realised (Hobson, 2009; Galston, 2018, p. 5).

It is supported in the political arena that the concepts and principles of liberal democracy are human (individual) centred. Recent crises such as irregular immigrants, rising populism, Occupy Street movements, and the latest global pandemic are evaluated in different ways by the individual, the society and the state, and these differences have seemed to lead to a contradiction. The starting point of such differences stems from the political and social freedoms that liberal democracy brings to politics. The main reason for expressing liberal democracy in this context is not to claim that liberal democracy cannot solve its problems but to reveal the clues that liberal democracy has entered into a dead end. In particular, the fact that current issues cause social groupings and political polarisation leads to the damage of individual-centeredness, which is necessary for liberal democracy to continue its function. The global reflection of this situation can be sought in a transformation from liberal and openly political, social, and economic policies to restrictive and closed policies at the national and international levels (Colgan and Keohane, 2017). The essential opportunities provided by liberal democracy (such as participatory democracy, active citizenship, individual sovereignty, civil society, the rule of law, freedom of expression, and freedom of association) have become the means of voicing and socialising anti-liberal demands and then political and social polarisation. It is pretty standard for liberal democracies to go through troubles, and the search for solutions still continues. Perhaps it can evolve from a pluralistic and liberal democracy to a majoritarian and authoritarian democracy. In any case, it can maintain its democratic character, even if it is not liberal, as long as it does not become a violent and aggressive political crisis (Galston, 2018; Ignatieff, 2020).



## References

- Amon, J. J. and Wurth, M. (2020). A Virtual Roundtable on COVID-19 and Human Rights with Human Rights Watch Researchers. *Health and Human Rights*, 22(1), 399-414.
- Bartusevicius, H., Bor, A., Jørgensen, F. and Bang, M. (2021). The Psychological Burden of the COVID-19 Pandemic is Associated with Anti-systemic Attitudes and Political Violence.
- Blokker, P. (2019). Populism as a Constitutional Project. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 17(2), 536-553.
- Castelli Gattinara, P. (2017). The 'Refugee Crisis' in Italy as a Crisis of Legitimacy. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 9(3), 318-331.
- Çaha, Ö. (2001). The Inevitable Coexistence of Civil Society and Liberalism: The Case of Turkey. *Journal of Economic & Social Research*, 3(2), 35-50.
- Çetin, H. (2001). Liberalizmin Temel İlkeleri. *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi*, 2(1), 219-237.
- Colgan, J. D. and Keohane, R. O. (2017). The Liberal Order is Rigged: Fix It Now or Watch It Wither. *Foreign Affairs*, 96(3), 36-44.
- Cox, R. W. (1999). Civil society at the turn of the millennium: prospects for an alternative world order. *Review of international studies*, 25(1), 3-28.
- Dag, R. (2020). Reversal of Liberal International Order. *Political Reflection Magazine*, 6(2), 20-22.
- Dağ, R., Servi, T. and Şahin, F. (2018). Katılımcı Demokrasi ve Aktif Vatandaşlık: Adıyaman Örneği. *Dicle Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 10(20), 294-303.
- De Clerck-Sachsse, J. (2012). Civil Society and Democracy in the EU: The Paradox of the European Citizens' Initiative. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 13(3), 299-311.
- Duarte, M. (2020). The Ethical Consequences of Criminalizing Solidarity in the EU. *Theoria*, 86(1), 28-53.
- Duncombe, C. and Dunne, T. (2018). After Liberal World Order. *International Affairs*, 94(1), 25-42.
- Foley, M. W., & Edwards, B. (1996). The paradox of civil society. *Journal of Democracy*, 7(3), 38-52.
- Fukuyama F. (1991). Liberal Democracy as a Global Phenomenon. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 24(4):659-664. doi:10.2307/419399
- Galston, W. A. (2018). The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 29(2), 5-19.
- Galston, W. A. (2020). The Enduring Vulnerability of Liberal Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(3), 8-24.
- Gibney, M. J. (1999). Liberal Democratic States and Responsibilities to Refugees. *American Political Science Review*, 93(1), 169-181.



- Goetz, K. H. and Martinsen, D. S. (2021). COVID-19: A Dual Challenge to European Liberal Democracy. *West European Politics*, 44(5-6), 1003-1024.
- Greitens, S. C. (2020). Surveillance, Security, and Liberal Democracy in the Post-COVID World. *International Organization*, 74(S1), E169-E190.
- Habermas, J. (1994). Human Rights and Popular Sovereignty: The Liberal and Republican Versions. *Ratio Juris*, 7(1), 1-13.
- Hobson, C. (2009). The limits of liberal-democracy promotion. *Alternatives*, 34(4), 383-405.
- Holland, S., Mason, J. ve Landay, J. (6 January 2021). "Trump Summoned Supporters to "Wild" Protest, and Told Them to Fight. They Did". *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-protests-idUSKBN29B24S>
- Hotez, P. J. (2020). Anti-science Extremism in America: Escalating and Globalizing. *Microbes and Infection*, 22, 505-507.
- Hsiao, Y. and Radnitz, S. (2021). Allies or Agitators? How Partisan Identity Shapes Public Opinion about Violent or Nonviolent Protests. *Political Communication*, 38(4), 479-497.
- Iacoella, F., Justino, P. and Martorano, B. (2021). *Do Pandemics Lead to Rebellion? Policy Responses to COVID-19, Inequality, and Protests in the USA* (No. wp-2021-57). World Institute for Development Economic Research (UNU-WIDER).
- Idemudia, E. and Boehnke, K. (2020). Social Experiences of Migrants. In *Psychosocial Experiences of African Migrants in Six European Countries* (pp. 119-135). Springer, Cham.
- Ignatieff, M. (2020). Democracy Versus Democracy: The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy. *LSE Public Policy Review*, 1(1).
- Ilievski, N. L. (2015). The individual sovereignty: conceptualisation and manifestation. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 1(2), 23-36.
- Inglehart, R. and Norris, P. (2017). Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse. *Perspectives on Politics*, 15(2), 443-454.
- Kalir, B. (2022). Departheid: Re-politicising the Inhumane Treatment of Illegalised Migrants in So-called Liberal Democratic States. In *Handbook of Return Migration*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Kalpouzos, I. and Mann, I. (2015). Banal Crimes Against Humanity: The Case of Asylum Seekers in Greece. *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, 16(1), 1-28.
- Küçük, A. (2015). Egemenlik (hâkimiyet), Halk Egemenliği ve Milli Egemenlik Tartışmaları ve Egemenlik Anlayışında Esaslı Dönüşüm. *Uyuşmazlık Mahkemesi Dergisi*, (6), 311-361.
- Kymlicka, W. (2018). Liberal Multiculturalism as a Political Theory of State-Minority Relations. *Political Theory*, 46(1), 81-91.
- Lange, M. and Monscheuer, O. (2021). Spreading the Disease: Protest in Times of Pandemics. *ZEW-Centre for European Economic Research Discussion Paper*, (21-009).



- Luke, T. W. (2021). Democracy under Threat After 2020 National Elections in the USA: 'Stop the Steal' or 'Give More to the Grifter-in-Chief?', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 10.1080/00131857.2021.1889327
- Murshed, S. M. (2020). Capitalism and COVID-19: Crisis at the Crossroads. *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, 26(3), 1-8.
- Myers, P. C. (1998). *Our Only Star and Compass: Locke and the Struggle for Political Rationality*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Nootens, G. (2006). Liberal Nationalism and the Sovereign Territorial Ideal 1. *Nations and Nationalism*, 12(1), 35-50.
- Norrlöf, C. (2020). Is COVID-19 a Liberal Democratic Curse? Risks for Liberal International Order. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33(5), 799-813.
- Ogurlu, M. S. and Dag, R. (2021). Karar Alma Aşamasında Demokratik Yapı ve Sivil Toplum Çıkmazı: Hong Kong Protestoları Örneği. *Uluslararası İktisadi ve İdari İncelemeler Dergisi*, (33), 139-152.
- Oklopcic, Z. (2019). Imagined Ideologies: Populist Figures, Liberalist Projections, and the Horizons of Constitutionalism. *German Law Journal*, 20(2), 201-224.
- Oser, J. (2021). Protest as One Political Act in Individuals' Participation Repertoires: Latent Class Analysis and Political Participant Types. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 00027642211021633.
- Özkaya, Ö. (2021). Egemenlik Kavramının Gelişim Serüveni: Klasikten Küresele. *Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Diplomasi*, 4(1), 46-61.
- Petersmann, E. U. (2006). State Sovereignty, Popular Sovereignty and Individual Sovereignty: From Constitutional Nationalism to Multilevel Constitutionalism in International Economic Law?. EUI Working Papers, LAW No. 2006/45.
- Plattner, M. F. (1999). From liberalism to liberal democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 10(3), 121-134.
- Prokhovnik, R. (1999). The State of Liberal Sovereignty. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 1(1), 63-83.
- Przeworski, A., & Wallerstein, M. (1986). Popular sovereignty, State autonomy, and private property. *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 27(2), 215-259.
- Reggiardo, A. (2019). Distrust and Stigmatisation of NGOS and Volunteers at the time of the European Migrant "Crisis". Conflict and Implications on Social Solidarity. *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 12(2), 460-486.
- Rucht, D. (2006). Social Movements Challenging Neo-Liberal Globalization. *Civil society: Berlin Perspectives*, 2, 189.
- Rummens, S. (2017). Populism as a Threat to Liberal Democracy. In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.27
- Seckinelgin, H. (2002). Civil Society as a Metaphor for Western Liberalism. *Global Society*, 16(4), 357-376.



Sørensen, G. (2018). *Democracy and Democratisation: Processes and Prospects in a Changing World*. London: Routledge.

Stasiulis, D. K. (1997). International Migration, Rights, and the Decline of 'Actually Existing Liberal Democracy'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 23(2), 197-214.

Thompson, G. F. (2017). Populism and Liberal Democracy–Business as Usual?. *Economy and Society*, 46(1), 43-59.

Touraine, A. (1992). Beyond social movements? *Theory, Culture & Society*, 9(1), 125-145.

Touraine, A. (2005). The subject is coming back. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 18, 199-209.

Von Hayek, F. A. and Çetin, Ü. (2012). Liberalism. *Liberal Düşünce Dergisi*, (55), 197-224.