

Participation and Corruption in the Democratic Regime
-Student-Led Sessions plan-

Case 1: Political corruption in Chile

Case presentation :

- **Fighting political corruption in Chile**

Historically, South America has been a continent where corruption is a major problem. Many democratizing Latin American countries have failed to cope with organised crime and social marginalisation – both of which are important drivers of violence and corruption. In comparison to the other countries, Chile has consistently had a low level of corruption. After major corruption scandals arose in the 90s, Chile took action by creating a national prosecutor, new legislation and increased transparency by, for example, making government information accessible for the public. The tolerance for corruption in Chile is low, and Chileans seem unified in condemning it.

- **Moving forward**

Despite Chile's anti-corruption work, the country still faces corruption. However, the increase of transparency and awareness gave rise to a higher number of corruption cases reported and people in power were prosecuted. International anti-corruption organizations also play an important role in the fight against corruption. The emphasis on the fact that no one, including politicians or other people in power, is above the law, aids in struggle of corruption and may lead the country to a more sustainable state.

- **Discussion and question**

1. People & privilege :

How do you think corruption in Chile hurts society? Give 3 examples.

2. Technology:

Are social networks an aid to curb corruption? If so, why are there still countries with high levels of corruption?

3. Global justice:

Discuss the 3 most important characteristics that a country must have to face corruption.

4. Status quo or change?:

Do you think that society, unconsciously, accepts low levels of corruption today? Is there "zero corruption"?

5. Power:

Thinking about the future, how can we prevent some politicians from being corrupt and not empathic with society?

Case 2: US, participation, prisoners.

Case presentation :

- **The voting rights of former prisoners in America**

The United States is the world leader when it comes to incarceration. There are 2.2 million people in the nation's prisons and jails—a 500% increase over the last 40 years. Changes in law and policy, but not changes in crime rates, explain most of this increase. Statistics published by the sentencing project show that the United States is one of the world's strictest nations when it comes to denying the right to vote to citizens convicted of crimes. The reason is that most states curb a person's voting rights when they are prosecuted. As a consequence are six million people nationwide estimated to be barred from participating in the American elections, and a lot of them are African Americans. This prohibits a minority of the population from participating and influencing the decisions that will affect their future as individuals and their community.

- **Moving forward : fighting for a more inclusive democracy**

In 2011, Steve Huerta, a community organizer in San Antonio, began to campaign to encourage former felons, who often feel powerless, to vote. Testifying to his own experience, he has already managed to convince dozens of households from poor neighborhoods to vote, giving them the opportunity to express their needs. He is part of the FICPFM (The Formerly Incarcerated & Convicted People and Families Movement), a national movement pushing to politically empower former prisoners by encouraging them to vote if they are eligible, and pushing to restore their rights if they are not. A number of states are now considering getting rid of the disenfranchisement laws that block felons from the polls.

However, a problem is the people's mindset when it comes to convicts. Some believe that people with a criminal background should have to prove that they are "honest citizens". This debate is also between the Democrat and Republican leaders, the former being in favor of more inclusive voting rights, while the latter are against. There is much at stake : giving the right to vote to former felons is very likely to favor the Democrats, especially in suburbs. Uncertainty regarding their eligibility and fear of the sentences in case of illegal voting explain the relatively low turnout of former prisoners.

- **Discussion Questions.**

1. People & privilege :

In the United States, the justice system is biased : "the people of color make up 37% of the population but 67% of the prison population. Overall, African Americans are more likely than white Americans to be arrested; once arrested, they are more likely to be convicted; and once convicted, they are more likely to face stiff sentences"(The Sentencing Project, 2016). These inequalities, along with the fact that people convicted of a crime lose their right to vote in several states, contribute to silence a whole part of the population. What should politicians do to stop that vicious circle ?

2. Technology :

A broader issue is the decreasing turnout and the lack of interest in politics of marginalized, poorly qualified segments of the population. Could technology be a remedy to help these people reappropriate democracy, and how?

3. Global justice :

Is democracy the best political regime to achieve a sustainable future ?

4. Status quo & change :

The US voting system is slowly evolving towards a more inclusive model, but a lot of changes still need to be implemented. In your opinion, what should tomorrow's sustainable democracy look like ?

5. Power:

How can we make people realize that their vote is a powerful tool to make a change ?

Literature :

Case 1

- Jonathan Franklin, "Chilean president rocked by corruption allegations against family members" , April 8 2015
Available at
<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/08/chilean-president-michelle-bachelet-corruption-charges-sebastian-davalos>>[Accessed 10 October 2018]
- Sabine Kurtenbach, Detlef Nolte, "Latin Americas fight against corruption: The end of impunity", June 2017.
Available at
<https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/52149/ssoar-2017-kurtenbach_et_al-Latin_Americas_Fight_against_Corruption.pdf?sequence=1> (page 6-7 are of most relevance) [Accessed October 8 2018]

Case 2

- Richard A. Webster (2016), "6 million people denied voting rights due to felony convictions : report". [Online]. Available at :<
https://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2016/10/historic_high_of_6_million_peo.html> [Accessed 10 october 2018].
- Farah Stockman (2018) "They Served Their Time. Now They're Fighting for Other Ex-Felons to Vote." *The New York Times*. [Online]. Available at :<
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/11/us/voting-rights-felons.html>> [Accessed 10 october 2018].
- The Sentencing Project, "The US is the world's leader in incarceration" [Online] Available at :<
<https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>> [Accessed 10 october 2018].

Outline of Student-Lead Session:

Goals and aims

- Investigate what is corruption and participation, how it affects the political systems and the ability of the individuals to participate in political life;
 - Debate about what makes a political system sustainable.
- 5 minutes: Brief overview of the topic, brainstorm about the idea of democracy (divide into groups of 4 or 5 people), then showing one video about each case.
 - 25 minutes: Groups of 4 or 5 people will discuss both cases but will focus on one particular lens (15 minutes). They will be asked to take notes. Each group will be asked to summarize what they have discussed and share their thought with the rest of the class (10 minutes).
 - Last 10 minutes:
Game about transparency and voting rate in different countries. Ask people about quality of democracy in their own countries.

