

Democratic Deficit within the Champion of Democracy:

How the United States Congress is experiencing similar democratic
failures as the European Union

Abstract

This bachelor thesis seeks to find out if the Congress, the legislative power of the United States of America, is suffering from the phenomenon of democratic deficit and what the causes of that may be. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's democracy index for 2021, the U.S. is no longer considered a full democracy but instead a flawed democracy. The U.S. Congress has been notorious for some of its democratic flaws such as the two-party system, lobbying, filibustering, etc. In order to identify the main causes of this deficit, European theories that have been used to analyze how the EU suffers from democratic deficit will be applied to the U.S. and its legislative branch. This theory using case study came to a few conclusions of how the Congress is undermining democracy. One of the more crucial claims are that Congress has become inefficient due to aspects such as the party system, the voting patterns and the increasing power of the executive branch.

Key words: Congress, Democratic deficit, USA, Legislative branch, EU

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

The European Union has for many years been accused of suffering from the phenomenon of democratic deficit. Democratic deficit means that a democratic political system lacks legitimacy and does not accurately represent its large populace. This concept has mainly been used to analyze how the EU and its institutions such as the parliament, commission or the central bank deviates from the will of the member states and its people in their decision-making procedures and policy-making. The United States can be argued to suffer from similar flaws with their federal government. The Economists Intelligence Unit which measures the democracy index of every country in the world, bases it on five factors: electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, democratic political culture and civil liberties (Economist 2022). The United States is by these standards considered a flawed democracy and has been since 2017 (Fleck 2022). This downfall from being considered a full democracy has been partially blamed by former President Trump due to him criticizing the press and openly condemning the electoral process and the results of the 2020 presidential election among many other political actions.

This thesis will focus on how Congress, the legislative power of the federal government is actively diminishing the state of American democracy and suffers from democratic deficit. This will be analyzed through the lens of mainly European perspectives and theories due to several reasons. One of the reasons is that American theories of democratic deficit are not as established and researched, especially not about legislative powers as the ones used in the field of European integration and should therefore not be used solely. Another reason to primarily use European theories is to find out if they are actually applicable as there are significant differences between the two political systems.

There are different interpretations and operationalizations of the concept which will be addressed and discussed. The U.S. and its democratic institutions have also been analyzed and accused of suffering from similar democratic deficits as the EU. This will not be a comparative case study of the EU and the U.S. as it will focus on the U.S. Congress and its internal structures, actions and the perception of them. This is meant to analyze how democratic deficits may occur and derive from this democratic institution and how this institution functions and is structured in a liberal democratic system. The assumption is that both the U.S. and the EU have suffered some kind of democratic deficit in the last decades despite them being considered one of the greatest proponents of democracy and that it can be explained by the powers and structures of the elected legislative branches. The purpose of this thesis is to understand how the European theories of democratic deficit are applicable on the United States as it is a larger liberal democratic system with similar supposed flaws such as the two-party system, lobbying and low voter turnout in midterm elections. This thesis will analyze through both the American and European perspectives what can be considered the greatest causes to democratic deficit within Congress and where within it that it can be attributed.

1.1.1 Case Selection

The selection of analyzing the United States and its legislative branch within the scopes of European studies needs to be extensively argued for as it may not seem readily apparent but there are interesting reasons for it that will become evident throughout the thesis.

The European Union is a mixed intergovernmental parliamentary system with 27 different culturally distinct sovereign nation states and limited power of how they can manage and control the member states. The United States of America which is a national federal republic and presidential system that has much greater power and control over its 50 states and is generally considered to be part of the same culture. The U.S. political system is so extensive that it can be analyzed in the same manner as a continental system as they both have similarly sized member states with varying degrees of sovereignty and independence such as the power of taxation or foreign policy.

There are considerable similarities to these two political entities as they share similar population, economic and geographical size and they both claim to believe in the values of liberal democracy and the free market which is why the application of European theories is acceptable. The legislative powers in the EU and US have stark differences too but the most important aspect is that they both consist of elected representatives with similar legislative duties. Democratic deficits can occur in every part of a government but the only parts that are elected and are supposed to uphold democracy are the legislative powers. The United States Congress consists of two chambers: The House of Representatives and the Senate. These two houses illuminate several issues on how democratic deficit has become a larger issue. These institutions consist of publicly elected politicians that may not live up to the standards of the populace as phenomena such as lobbying, filibustering, corruption and other activities that are counterproductive to democracy.

1.1.2 Democratic Deficit

The most important concept in this thesis is ‘‘democratic deficit’’ which needs to be clarified, defined and operationalized. The concept of democratic deficit can be a very simple and concrete term for the lack of democratic elements within a country and its political institutions. As an example, if the judicial branch in the U.S. were to have limited power and influence or if the executive branch would have the power to declare war at any time without the consent of the legislative branch, that would generally be considered a democratic deficit. It can include the extensive centralization of the Federal Government, the lack of influence of member states in the European Union or the European Parliament’s lack of power in the Union’s decision-making processes (Britannica 2016). It can also include more abstract ideas such as the lack of political participation by certain nations and groups or more controversial ones such as the lack of referendums. There may be problems in operationalizing the concept of democratic deficit in this case with both the EU and the U.S. and how to actually measure it and how much to rely on theorists as the essay should try to balance between the empirical and theoretical.

Both theories that will be used will have their own interpretation and perspective of the concept and the reality of modern politics. The point of using and analyzing the theories of Moravcsik and Hix is to identify and specify the most crucial elements of what causes democratic deficit in the EU and apply it to the U.S. and its Congress. Democratic deficit is a relatively new concept from the 1970s that has been mainly used on international organizations such as the EU and the UN that are not national democracies with traditional democratic institutions. This is to explain how these institutions are being perceived as democratically weak and lack legitimate representation and popular support. In the case of the U.S. for example it can be about how the voting system and the electoral college causes a misrepresentation in the house of representatives and the senate. It is equally important to understand how the populace perceive the democratic functions of the powers as it is to understand how it actually functions. The research on the democratic deficit within the EU and its institutions is well documented from the last decades. It has been applied to the U.S.A. but not to the same extent because it is precisely a traditional national democracy. That does not imply that they are not experiencing the same problems as the EU as they both struggle with the popular perception of their democratic flaws (EUR-Lex 2022).

1.2 Purpose & Scope

The primary purpose of this thesis is to find the causes of democratic deficit within the U.S. Congress by applying theories based on studies of the European Union. The reason for applying these theories is to experiment and find out whether they can actually contribute to the research about American democracy and the state of it. If this thesis can appropriately apply European theories and come to a sensible conclusion, it could prove that there might be a general negative trend of greater liberal democracies declining and beginning to suffer from democratic deficit. It is important to first identify the similar democratic flaws between the U.S. and the EU and then analyze the main causes of why the Congress is suffering from democratic deficit.

As previously stated, this will not be a comparative study because the focus will be on the Congress and its democratic deficits. The research for the U.S. and its political institutions is not as established when it comes to this subject as the European Parliament is where there is enough empiricism to build on. This thesis and its findings will have relevance and significance within the academic world and the field of European Integration due to its contribution to and application of the theories of Hix and Moravcsik even if it may be minimal. It could also have some relevance to the popular debate about the general state of liberal democracies and how the U.S. can improve its democratic institutions.

1.3 Research Question

This is a study of how modern liberal democracies are failing and not living up to the expectations of the populace, specifically the Congress of the United States of America and how they can actually be analyzed through the same theoretical framework as the EU. This thesis will analyze what causes within the legislative branch might be the most prominent. There is no clear way of structuring and formulating this kind of research problem without making it too narrow or too broad. The broader research question that should be asked regarding this though is:

Is the U.S. and its Congress suffering from a similar democratic deficit to the European Union? What are the main causes for this democratic deficit within the Congress?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The two great global powers of the United States of America and the European Union are often compared when analyzing their economic systems or their political cultures but this will be a case study of the U.S. Congress that merely attempts to analyze this democratic institution through the same theoretical framework as the EU and use those theories.

This thesis will be a theory using case study that primarily applies the theories of Andrew Moravcsik and Hix and Føllesdal on the democratic deficits of Congress. It is important for his theories to be tested in real life and developed through other cases. The objective is as previously stated to find and identify similar democratic flaws between the U.S. and the EU and then to analyze the probable causes to what causes democratic deficit within the Congress. This will be done through a deductive method where there are several variables that can cause democratic deficit and by using the theories, they will be able to determine which are the most relevant (Teorell & Svensson 2007, pp. 49-50).

There might occur minimal problems of validity and reliability as the problems and concepts of the research are very complex and broad. To measure democratic and institutional efficiency can lead to all sorts of problems and miscalculations unless there are clear guidelines on how to proceed with operationalization which will be a lengthy process of the thesis writing. It could be argued that a normative analysis of these institutions would be in place as the issue of democratic deficit is highly opinionated and there is a multi-faceted debate about it that goes beyond the binary thinking of dictatorships versus democracies. The purpose of this essay is to empirically analyze how the legislative power functions and might be flawed to cause democratic deficit within the system. There are no suitable normative analytical methods that can accurately answer the research question as it is inherently based on finding empirical evidence rather than solely the subtext of congressional documents.

2.2 Material & Previous Research

A lot of the material besides the theories will be official state documents that explain the structures and actions of the institutions alongside research about democracy in the countries and other case studies of them. Both theoretical approaches that will be applied derive from studies of EU and European Integration with the likes of Hix and Moravcsik and their work. There are a few studies that aim to analyze the differences and similarities between the two legislative powers but the aim of this thesis is to focus on the Congress and what aspects of it are at the cause of the democratic deficit. The most important although is Kreppel's "Understanding the European Parliament from a Federalist Perspective: The Legislatures of the USA and EU Compared" (2006) which makes a direct comparison between the two legislative powers which will be elaborated further in the results section. There are several comparative case studies about the U.S. and Europe such as Huntington's "Political Modernization: Europe vs America" (1966) which compares the political cultures of both regions but can be considered rather outdated in the 21st century.

The European Parliament has also published its own research comparing EU and US approaches to human rights in external relations (2014) which is essential to understand the EU's own perspective. Official documents from the Congress will be prominently used as they are usually objective, factual and non-ideological to a certain level. In order to find the less known facts about the institutions, journalistic articles that dive down on a deeper level are to be used together with these documents to form a clear view of how the legislative powers function. Research about democracy index and how the populace perceive the strengths and flaws of the democracies will be vital too as they can determine whether the systems actually suffer from democratic deficit as well as statistics describing the approval ratings of government institutions and the public perception of them and how they are upholding their duties. To clarify, there are three types of empirical material that will be used to analyze the Congress' democratic deficit with the application of the theories which are: state documents, independent statistics and a comparative study of the U.S. and the EU's legislative powers. The latter can be considered empirical as the study is based on empirical findings and its theoretical approach does not interfere with theories of Hix or Moravcsik.

3. Theory

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theories that will be used are Moravcsik's theory about democratic deficit from many of his articles that have been written since the 1990s. These are the most prominent theories when analyzing democratic deficit within the European Union and they can be further tested and developed as they have not been used as prominently in the case of the U.S. Moravcsik's theories will be the primary theory used in analysis of the Congress to make the case that the U.S. does not suffer from a democratic deficit alongside Hix as an opposing theory but also to compliment each other and find common grounds.

3.1.1 Moravcsik and the Democratic Deficit

The American political scientist Andrew Moravcsik is most commonly known for developing the theory of Liberal Intergovernmentalism and its ideas of how the EU actually functions and how the process of European integration has developed from the 1990s and onward. It is one of the most popular, prominent and well used theoretical approaches used to describe and analyze the structures, interests and actions of the Union and its member states alongside Neo-Functionalism, Historical Institutionalism and Post-Functionalism (Moravcsik 2018). His main belief is that the EU is at the same time a strong and effective political system but also a democratically legitimate one. The EU and its policy-making has become a very complex and unique system which has no actual counterpart and they should not have the same expectations as more established national governments like the U.S. (Moravcsik 2002). He means that the EU should not be judged against the U.S. as it has a clear disadvantage of being a relatively new intergovernmental system, but the U.S. and its Congress should be judged against its younger and less established ally.

It is Moravcsik's studies of democratic deficit within the European Union that will be essential for this case of analyzing the U.S. congress. Articles such as "Reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union" (2002), "Is there a 'Democratic Deficit' in World Politics? A Framework for Analysis" (2004) and "' Preferences, Power and Institutions in 21st century Europe" (2018) will primarily be used to describe and analyze Moravcsik's theories about democracy and world politics and not just about European integration. His articles do not primarily and explicitly analyze the U.S. Government but instead his theories about the EU will be applied to this thesis' findings about the Congress.

Moravcsik states that there are multiple factors and causes to how the EU works and that it is difficult to just utilize one theory for the Union as it is too extensive and complex of an organization. The main belief of the theory is that the EU is a relatively effective institution with strong democratic legitimacy. (Moravcsik 2018). This can most likely be applied to the U.S. also as it is a very broad theory and the similarities with the EU are strong enough to use it on the specific political institutions of the United States.

In his earlier works (Moravcsik 2004), he applies the theory of democratic deficit on world organizations and states that international organizations should not be compared to democratic systems and should instead analyze whether they approximate the strengths and advances of national democracies. To compare the EU and the U.S. would be a challenge but it could also turn out to suffer from invalidity when making a final analysis. The question that can be asked by Moravcsik in this case is: What aspects within the EU and its parliament that makes them democratically legitimate can we find within the U.S. Congress?

The greatest difference between the Congress and the European Parliament which Moravcsik points out is that the Parliament is only one out of four policy-making actors within the Union (Moravcsik 2002). This is in stark contrast to Congress that is the only actor within the Federal Government that can pass laws with the exception of the President who in certain cases can issue executive orders. Moravcsik states that the three crucial factors that make the EU effective and legitimate are "'constitutional checks and balances, indirect democratic control via national governments, and the increasing powers of the European Parliament"' (Moravcsik 2002).

He also believes that the EU's policy-making is still effective compared to how other modern liberal democracies work. This can be argued to be similar to how the Federal Government operates as they officially have checks and balances between the three branches and the legislative branch have sufficient powers even if there are a few differences. What could be argued to not be comparable is the way the national governments in the EU and the state governments in the U.S. function and how much democratic control they have. Moravcsik bases his ideas on that the larger member states such as Germany and France have enormous influence on the Union's policy-making and therefore its interests (Moravcsik 2018).

Whether US states like California and New York have similar influence within Congress and the Federal Government will be discussed and analyzed later on in this thesis.

According to Moravcsik, when people criticize the EU for suffering from a democratic deficit, their concept of what constitutes a democracy arrives from populist notions. He means that the popular and salient notion that a system becomes more democratic, the more power the people and the majority have is inherently flawed and unrealistic. The belief that more referendums and popular votes will solve the issue of a political system suffering from democratic deficit is also problematic as the specific issues being voted on mainly leads to ignorant and short-sighted debates by the populace such as Brexit (Moravcsik 2018). This kind of direct democracy such as referendums operates more efficiently at smaller scales such as local and state governments and even some national governments but is almost inefficient within international systems and in larger domestic systems (Moravcsik 2004).

What truly makes a government truly democratic is if it has responsive, effective and deliberate policy-making with well-developed and legitimate institutions. The government should generally adhere to the will of the people and respect individual and human rights but without appealing to populism or alarmism.

The populace can not always be active in politics and devote their time to all political issues that are being brought up in the Congress or the Parliament and they are instead unaware of the majority of issues or simply disregard them (Moravcsik 2004). This is why larger governments and constitutional systems and their executive and legislative branches need to delegate their powers and decision-making to for example bureaucracies. The EU much like the U.S. has clear constitutional constraints that prevent the governments and its institutions from becoming tyrannical and undemocratic which can be trusted to a greater extent.

The institutions that are direct threats to both democratic systems are the central banks that have extensive independence while controlling the monetary systems of two of the largest economies in the world (Moravcsik 2004). The national governments in the EU still have a stronger role than the American state governments in their legislative branches and policy-making. These systems should not simply aspire to become direct democracies but instead strengthen their democratic legitimacy by letting the member states have significant powers while also increasing the effectiveness of their political institutions. It should be observed that Moravcsik's articles that this section is based on are from 2002-2018 which may be problematic as there have been significant changes in European, US and World politics but his ideas and theories remain consistent over time.

3.1.2 Hix and Why There is a Democratic Deficit

Simon Hix is a British political scientist and an expert within European Union politics and the field of European Integration. Hix is one of the most popular proponents of the idea that the EU is suffering from a democratic deficit and has especially criticized Moravcsik who are denying such claims. His theories and ideas will be primarily based on his articles "Why There is a Democratic Deficit in Europe: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik" (Hix & Føllesdal 2006) and "When Optimism Fails: Liberal Intergovernmentalism and Citizen Representation" (Hix 2018) to discuss how democratic deficit occurs in a larger liberal democracy and how it can be applicable on the U.S.

Hix describes that the most crucial disagreement with Moravcsik about the democratic deficit is if a liberal democratic system needs contestation for political leadership and policy-making. These two political scientists are not opponents but are rather two theorists who build on each other's works and who disagree on certain issues in European and Global politics. Hix counters the idea of the European Union maximizing its democratic strengths and abilities. He also clarifies that there is no single concrete definition of the concept democratic deficit and that Moravcsik's definition became more prominent in the early 2000s (Hix & Føllesdal 2006).

One of his more significant claims is that the rise and expansion of the EU has led to the strengthening of the executive powers and the weakening of the legislative powers within the member states which is also adding to the democratic deficit. This means that the politicians that were elected by the people have lost power due to the nature of the EU where the executive powers have more control and the prime ministers and presidents have their own Council of Ministers (Hix & Føllesdal 2006).

Hix also emphasizes a crucial statistic that shows how the EU has lost significant support since the 1990s and especially after the Great Recession and the Eurozone Crisis in the late 2000s going from 68% to a bottom low 13% in a timespan of 25 years (Hix 2018). He explains this phenomenon with the politicization of the European Union and its politics in national elections which has led to a move away from a ‘permissive consensus’ to a ‘constraining dissensus’. This simply means that the majority European people of the member states have for long seen the EU as a harmless, necessary and benevolent institution that has given the Union legitimacy and liberty to expand and integrate.

This has changed in the last 15 years where the majority of people now see the EU in a more negative image and they no longer have the same legitimacy or support to act as expansive and freely politically (Hix 2018). This end to permissive consensus has had a few positive consequences as the Union’s institutions were now held responsible for their political actions and events such as the refugee crisis of 2015 got largely blamed on them. The issue of the EU getting too expansive became a salient debate within the national elections unlike before when only the far-right parties were the only ones bringing up the issue. This has also led to the overall rise of populism and nationalism in Europe in both national and European parliamentary elections. Hix believes that Moravcsik’s ideas of the democratic deficit are too optimistic when there has obviously been significant dissatisfaction with the Union and the Parliament. He also dismisses the idea of how much influence the national governments have on the Parliament and the Commission as there are more compromises and trade-offs that need to be made in order for the political system to function (Hix 2018).

4. Empiricism

4.1 Empirical Evidence

In order to analyze how the Congress might be causing democratic deficit, there are several ways to approach it empirically. It is important to first explain how the Congress functions and operates and how it is internally structured. After that, there is statistical information that needs to be clarified about for example how the voters view their elected officials and representatives as the opinion of the populace is essential to determine whether an institution is suffering from a democratic deficit. Lastly, there is a previously mentioned comparative study by Kreppel (2006) of the U.S. and the EU and their legislative powers which will be needed to operationalize the European theories. This is supposed to cover the most important aspects of what can cause and indicate democratic deficit in the Congress such as voter turnout, constitutional flaws, term-limits, lobbyism, etc.

4.2 Congress Background

The United States Congress has since the ratification of the Constitution in 1789 been the sole legislative power of the nation. It was written after the Articles of Confederation which was written during the Revolutionary War in 1777 but due to the weakness and lack of powers allocated to the central government it was replaced by the Constitution that gave clear and direct powers and structures to it such as judiciary and executive branches and a revenue system (H.R. 2023). The Congress was subsequently divided into two houses; the House of Representatives and the Senate. The lower chamber H.R. consists of elected public officials who represent each state and their congressional district with the number of seats allocated to them dependent on the population of the state. Since its foundation, the number of seats in the house have increased from 65 voting members in 1790 to 435 voting members in 2022. In order to prevent the larger states from gaining too much control during the beginning in 1789, a compromise was made and an upper chamber called the Senate with an equal number of representatives was created.

The Senate and the House of Representatives together form the United States Congress, the legislative branch of the Federal Government that has the sole responsibility and power of enacting legislation. The Congress is essential for the separation of powers of the U.S. government and is alongside the Supreme Court (judicial branch) and the Presidency (executive branch) one of three branches that constitutes the Federal Government of the United States of America. The separation of powers is one of the most important elements of the Federal Government and its democratic status. All three branches of the government have uniquely different responsibilities and authorities in order to prevent overlapping powers and for preventing one entity from becoming too powerful. All branches have the responsibility of controlling the other which is known as checks and balances.

The president and the executive branch can in certain cases issue directives or what is known as executive orders that surpass the Congress and can make any decision regarding the country come to reality with the exception of declaring war (ABA 2021). All members of Congress are elected in direct elections every two years with no term limits meaning that a member of Congress can be in office for as long as possible if they continue to win elections for either the House of Representatives or the Senate compared to the Presidency where there is a term limit of two and a maximum of eight years of service in the White House (Congress 2023).

The Congress has consisted of only primarily two parties in the last century which has been the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. These two parties have complete control over the country and the entire Federal Government without any legitimate threat from a third party such as the Libertarian Party or the Green Party. Both parties are funded by major actors such as large corporations to represent their interests but have some ideological differences often simplified as the Republican Party being conservative and the Democratic Party being liberal. The two parties will often switch power in the two houses of Congress depending on what party the president belongs to (Britannica 2022).

4.3 Statistics Congress

In a very recent study researching the public's opinion about the U.S. Congress by the D.C.-based analytics company Gallup (2022), there were significant discoveries in how there has been a general negative trend in the trust and confidence of the Congress since 2000. 54% of Americans in 2022 consider themselves to have very little confidence in Congress and 36% consider themselves to have some confidence while a minority has either a great deal, quite a lot or none at all. Just 20 years earlier, there were only 16% of the populace who had very little confidence while 53% had some and 20% had quite a lot. Another interesting discovery was how only 21% of people during the 2022 midterm elections believed that most members of Congress deserve to be reelected compared to 57% during the 2002 midterm elections. This differs heavily from their opinion about the representatives from their congressional district which they elected themselves where 53% in 2022 believe they should be reelected even though the support was higher in 2002 at 67% (Gallup 2022). It is important to note the negative trend hasn't been consistently linear but has fluctuated during the years but with relatively low deviation.

4.4 Comparing Legislatures

Amie Kreppel is an American political scientist who specializes in European studies. In 2006, she published "Understanding the European Parliament from a Federalist Perspective: The Legislatures of the USA and EU Compared" which will be the basis for the empirical findings of this thesis' analysis. This comparative study of the U.S. Congress and the European Parliament is based on comparative federalism meaning it derives from an American perspective as the U.S. is a federal system where there is a balance between the powers of the federal government and their states in contrast to the European Union which can be defined as an intergovernmental political system (Kreppel 2006, pp. 1).

Kreppel explains that the European Parliament has certain similarities to the house of representatives when it comes to voting patterns, policy-making roles and size but it is important to be careful when making these comparisons. She states that the three characteristics that should be analyzed are: *policy-making power, internal organizational structure and member voting patterns* (Kreppel 2006, pp. 1-2). The EU has become more federalist like the U.S. with time and has gone through similar historical processes due to it being in the best interest of the European nations but also because they believe that their system has been the most successful. The EU has adopted several more American institutional features such as separation of powers, independence between the executive and legislative branches and decentralized political parties. It can still not be considered a federal system due to it still consisting of distinct nations and the lack of centralization (Kreppel 2006, pp. 2).

The U.S. Government has a clear structure between their branches and what authorities and responsibilities they have but also how they are connected and positioned with each other. The legislative branch of the U.S. is set in stone as there are two houses with equal power and with sole legislative power within the government unlike the EU and its complex legislative processes. The Congress also has committees that handle specific duties such as agriculture or education that can be seen as ‘miniature legislatures’ where most issues are being taken care of due to higher expertise which has led to more compromise between the two major parties and bi-partisan voting. Both legislatures have similar types of committees with underestimated influence and they are still growing and becoming more powerful. The EPs powers and influence have been miscalculated as its responsibilities have only increased over the years such as being able to veto legislation more similar to Congress (Kreppel 2006, pp. 3-4).

The most significant difference between the two legislatures is in how the party system works. The U.S. which has a two-party system experiences bi-partisan voting and lack of party loyalty when voting in congress all the time due to several reasons such as the executive being independent from the legislative which will not affect the presidential power unlike in the parliamentary systems where they are integrated. There are also no strict requirements for voting for your own party and as there are only two parties unlike the seven party groups of the EU, one party would have absolute power for two years.

The diversity between member states in the EU is also far more significant than in the U.S. which also creates division within the parties. The national governments of the EU have a long history of conflict and have significantly more power while the U.S. states that have less sovereignty and authority have been at peace with each other for over 150 years (Kreppel 2006, pp. 6-7). These two legislative powers are ultimately two drastically different institutions with varying degrees of powers and responsibilities but have surprisingly many similarities that could possibly justify the application of European theories to the Congress.

5. Discussion

5.1 Application of Theories

This discussion will attempt to identify the main causes of democratic deficit within Congress with the assistance of the theories of Hix and Moravcsik. It is obvious that the state of American democracy is at a low-point in modern history. Both the president and the Congress have become increasingly unpopular and the American people are growing disgruntled over how the Federal Government is run. The notion of the U.S. becoming more undemocratic is also popularizing as they are now considered to be a flawed democracy by the EIU instead of a full democracy (Economist 2022). There are a vast amount of theories about what exactly is causing this former champion of democracy to have declined and begun to suffer from democratic deficit. This thesis is set to identify these causes by looking at how the EU suffers from a similar phenomenon of democratic deficit and to utilize the European theories that have been well-established for decades.

5.2 Application of Moravcsik

Moravcsik firmly believes that the European Union does not suffer from a democratic deficit which can be understood throughout his texts but when it comes to the U.S. Congress, there are certain aspects of it that would likely make him believe otherwise of them. He believes that national governments should not be compared to international organizations due to, in this case, the U.S. having an unfair advantage of being an established federal government and has been a liberal democracy for centuries. The U.S. should already have well-functioning democratic institutions with strong democratic legitimacy that can prevent any kind of major inefficiencies. Congress should not suffer from not being able to pass laws or political gridlocks. Moravcsik would most likely criticize the lack of power from the state governments compared to the national governments in the EU. They should be essential for driving the interests of the Federal Government but due to the larger number of states and their restricted sovereignty, the centralization of the government is dangerous and could indicate that they suffer from a democratic deficit.

The structure of the two houses of Congress is something that actually benefits the state of their democracy as it opposes the populist notion of simply letting the popular majority rule, whereas instead the Senate with its equal number of seats for each state alongside the House of Representatives' population based seating is far more fair and accurately represents the will of all people. Moravcsik believes that the U.S. has a much clearer constitution that describes and structures all the branches of the government which significantly strengthens the effectiveness of the democracy even though it has not been a perfect system. The executive branch undoubtedly has the most power as it can surpass Congress as long as the judicial branch does not deem it unconstitutional. The President of the United States is the most powerful position in the world and has the ability to make the Congress practically useless.

The Congress is not as influential as people tend to believe due to the massive amounts of delegation that is taking place to committees and bureaucracies. The constitutional structure of the Federal Government has the ability to make the U.S. a democratically legitimate and efficient state but there are internal flaws that cause it to suffer from democratic deficit. The populace is obviously disillusioned with the poor performance of the Congress and they only support the members of Congress that they elected in their local elections. The federal system is extremely well-made but the centralization of the federal government has gone too far and the states no longer have the same influence as they did before. When applying the theories of Moravcsik, it can be stated that the people of the U.S. no longer feel represented in Congress and it seems to be because of the decaying powers of the states, the continuing centralization of the Federal Government, the lack of efficiency in Congress to create meaningful legislations and the abuse of the power by the executive branch.

5.3 Application of Hix

Hix believes that the European Union suffers from a democratic deficit and when applying his theories into the context of U.S. politics and the Congress, it is readily apparent that these institutions suffer from the same phenomenon if not worse. His more substantial claims as to why the EU suffers from a democratic deficit can be applied here to the Congress as he states that the strengthening of executive power in the EU has been negative to its state of democracy. This would also be the case of the U.S. where presidents have surpassed the legislative process of Congress several times and weakened the institution. The people are clearly manifesting their dissatisfaction with Congress in recent years and no longer feel confident in them. It could be argued that Congress has moved from relying on a “permissive consensus” to a “restraining consensus” much like the EU due to poor confidence levels in them which has even further made them more ineffective. The Congress can now begin to be held more responsible for the laws they pass and all their political actions but it has not yet prevented them from suffering from a democratic deficit.

The legislative branch has the ability to maximize their democratic strengths in many ways by setting term-limits and avoiding the same members of Congress to remain in power. There is no real political contestation as the two-party system has disabled any kind of diversity in Congress with two very similar ideologies arguing against each other about issues that they actually stand very close in. This alongside other domestic issues in the country have led to the rise of far-right movements much like the EU further creating political instability and polarization. The democratic deficit in Congress is at its historic peak and it continues to grow with both internal political issues such as the party system and the voting patterns and the lack of party loyalty by members of Congress that enable corruption and lobbyism. This is worsened by external issues such as immigration, terrorism or inflation that can actually be controlled by Congress.

The influence of the state governments is not as essential to the democratic strength of the Federal Government according to Hix even though it may cause problems in the future as people begin to lose the feeling that they are being accurately represented in politics when all decisions are being made by Washington D.C.-based interests.

6. Conclusion

The United States of America is undeniably suffering from a democratic deficit no matter what European theory is being applied to the empirical research. Moravcsik's theories claim that the lack of influence by state governments is one of the more alarming issues that cause this deficit due to it creating a sense of democratic illegitimacy for the people. This issue is not as crucial for Hix who believes that the internal structures of Congress such as the party system and the voting patterns are what's causing the legislative branch to be ineffective and underperform with less impactful legislations. Moravcsik's theories still support the federal system of the government but that it needs to return to when states had more power so that the American people feel more accurately represented. To make all these claims for two European theorists about the federal and legislative politics of the U.S. is bold and could even be considered reckless but the point of this bachelor thesis is to experiment with theories and find new ways they can be implemented in appropriate cases.

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