*“Should a totalitarian party that gets enough votes to form a government through a democratic election be allowed to rule?”*

I am going to assume that the democratic election is a real democratic election, not a “democratic election”. By which I mean that the election is free and fair, without any form of tampering; voter fraud, voter intimidation and so forth, occurring during the course of it. And when such abuses do not occur, the election is to be considered a legitimate one. A government gains its legitimacy by the consent of its people. And this legitimacy comes from the legitimate election. This makes it all the more frightening, as electing a totalitarian party to the position of government can therefore be considered a form of suicide.

In that statement, I’m not talking about the voters literally sentencing themselves to death by voting for the totalitarian government. It is of course not an implausible outcome, as totalitarian governments tend to have their own people killed, in large or small numbers. No, what I’m thinking of is far more sinister. I’m no sure whether or not it would make people’s skin crawl, though I do think it is entirely possible that some would be affected by it that way. What I’m thinking of is simply this: democracy taking its own life. I say this, as totalitarian governments have a tendency to suspend democracy (i.e.: no elections due to a national “emergency”), or remove it entirely. They might let a semblance of democracy exist, but that would be nothing more than a sham.

It is perfectly understandable why totalitarian governments are not adherents of democracy. Totalitarian governments want total control of society, and democracy is not helpful in achieving that end. But achieving power through elections makes them look all the more legitimate. Democracy is not the method most often used by totalitarian parties to achieve power, though. They tend to take power through some sort of struggle, often a violent one. Coups are also a method that has been used time and time again. And if they even use democracy, they turn to voter fraud or rigging elections. These methods are not considered to be as legitimate as a real democratic election. This is why governments that take power using those kinds of methods, often stage “elections” to look more legitimate in the eyes of the international community.

So, if a totalitarian party becomes a government, through a legitimate election, it is a legitimate government, on the same basis as non-totalitarian parties elected to power through legitimate elections. But of course, the non-totalitarian parties can be seen as more legitimate, since they do

not plan to take total control of their societies. But they still share the same legitimacy, as parties elected to power by the will of the people.

Something that I personally find to be amusing, is the thought of a totalitarian party, that styles it self as anti-democratic, coming to power through a legitimate election. That would make them some of the worst hypocrites the world has ever seen.

I’m reminded of a controversy, concerning an event that occurred, in the decade before the one we’re currently in. In the small, double-landlocked country of Liechtenstein, an election took place. It was a direct election, the voters voted concerning an issue, and their vote decided the outcome.

They voted about whether or not to expand the powers of the Prince (their monarch, the country is a principality). This drew wide condemnation of the election by The Council of Europe, and it was the opinion of the Council that the election was undemocratic. This can be viewed as quite strange, given that it was an exercise in direct democracy, which often is considered the purest form of democracy. But it does make some sense, given that the people were voting over giving some of their power away to their monarch. My own personal view is that it was a democratic election, as it followed democratic principles. The will of the people was what decided the outcome. And as far as I know, the election was not tampered with in any way either. Although the Prince threatened to leave the country if they voted no.

Anyways, the Liechtensteiners went ahead with the election, and the great majority of them voted yes. The powers of the Prince were expanded. Despite the condemnation, no sanctions were placed on the country; no intervention by the international community occurred either. It was allowed, and a subsequent election showed that the people of Liechtenstein believed that they did the right thing when they voted yes. Now, the Prince and government of Liechtenstein are not totalitarian, just to be clear about that.

But the question remains, should it even be possible for a totalitarian party to have the same right as other parties, to form a government through a democratic election?

If a totalitarian party, is not given the ability to form a government through democratic elections, they are treated very unequally in comparison the other parties. This means that they are not treated equally in the eyes of the law, which goes against the basis of the judicial systems of most democracies. It also diminishes democracy, as the will of the people is unable to express itself. A

counter argument is that it keeps democracy safe, as it is not possible for it to be destroyed from within. This is an example of “the ends justify the means”.

Do totalitarian parties even need to have the ability to come through power by way of legitimate elections?

They seem to be perfectly able to gain power without it, as I mentioned before. In the situation in which a totalitarian party wins the election, and then wants to form a government on the basis of it, but it is then not allowed to do so, other ways to power would most likely be utilized. A coup perhaps, or some sort of struggle, which they possibly would emerge victorious from, given that they did get the vote of the majority, and therefore have many supporters. Of course, numbers are not everything in a conflict, but the point still stands. And they could use the argument that due to their expulsion, they are restoring democracy and removing the illegitimate government that is undemocratic.

My personal opinion regarding all this, is quite simply that I do believe that yes, totalitarian parties should be able to from a government if they acquire the necessary number of votes. Through elections that are legitimate. A government that comes to power in an illegitimate election is illegitimate by default. I believe that if one is to have a true democracy, one should always let the will of the people decide. If the democracy is not a direct democracy, but a representative one, the will of the people’s representatives, decides. “You reap what you sow”, is very applicable in relation to democracy. If one is to have a true democracy, one should have to face the consequences of it. It is possible to use democratic methods to remove democratic principles, but it does not remain a real democracy afterwards. One can let a totalitarian party come to power, and then watch as democracy is destroyed. When you participate in democracy, you have great power; power to destroy it even. The ability to destroy democracy is very much like the ability you have to destroy yourself. You can commit suicide, if you want to.

I also believe that legitimate elections, are not what totalitarian parties are most likely to use in their quest for power. Their track record shows that they use other means, and more often than not, violent ones. They do not seem to need the legitimate means to acquire power, though they can find them useful. Being viewed as legitimate by the international community is useful for a government, but no requirement. For example, the government of Somaliland (considered a part of Somalia, wants to become its own country) is doing fine, though they are not internationally recognized as a country by anyone, and the government in Mogadishu is considered to be the legitimate one.

But what if totalitarian parties are never allowed to rule, no matter how many votes they have, is there any reason as to why they should even participate in democracy?

It would be like running a marathon, without being allowed to cross the finish line. That would be incredibly frustrating and demoralizing; most likely leading to a great amount of anger and rage. It is highly likely that the party would just opt out of democracy altogether, and then become an excluded echo chamber. When they feel that they have no other option than a coup, armed struggle et cetera, become their ways of gaining power. And if the voters of the party decided to never vote again, the amount of voters would diminish and the democratic processes would lose some of their legitimacy, given that fewer people would participate in them.

There are a lot of small parties around the world, and they participate in democracy with incredibly slim chances of victory, and they are not banned nor made illegal in any way. But there is a point to it, one day the party might gain power and become the government. Votes for such parties can of course be a form of protest, instead of a genuine expression of want for their rule. So the totalitarian party could still have a purpose, albeit a less glamorous one. A protest party with an incredibly large share of the votes would also be a strong indication of an unhealthy political climate. It would have to be addressed in some form, as ignoring it simply wouldn’t do.

One of the 20th century’s most famous politicians (a certain Austrian has first place) Sir Winston Churchill once said (I’m paraphrasing): “Democracy is not the best system, but it is better than all the other systems we have come up with so far”. Democracy has its flaws, such as its ability to destroy it self, but us humans have flaws too. And it is therefore not surprising, that something made by humans, has flaws. A flawed system, with flawed participants.

The way I see it, a democracy in which a totalitarian party, that wins a legitimate election, is barred from becoming a government, is no true democracy. Such a democracy is not ruled by the people, even if the people made it so. Using democracy, democracy can be removed. Therein lays the paradox of democracy.