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Democracy in Kutztown

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The original meaning of the term democracy is the rule of the people. So what happens to a democracy when the majority within a society is marginalized by the ruling few? Some would say it is no longer a democracy, but rather an oligarchy. According to Participatory Theorist, John Dewey, “no government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interest of the few” (Terchek, 169-170). Of course, this is only one point of view. Many individuals have come to theorize what a democracy should or should not entail. While, the literal definition of democracy has evolved greatly from its original meaning, so as to incorporate the many new aspects of growing societies, it should not disclude the fact that a democracy should center on the people’s power to govern themselves. Keeping in mind this central aspect of democracy, one can pull components of various theories together to create what might be a more realistic view of democracy within their own community. This is specifically true when discussing how democracy is viewed, as well as the democratic practices, or lack there of, being carried out in the Borough of Kutztown. By looking at aspects within Kutztown, such as participation, the elected officials, legislative processes, and much more, one can compare these aspects to classical theories of democracy and accurately assess that because the majority is marginalized; a healthy democracy does not subsist in the Borough of Kutztown.

Before assessing democracy in Kutztown, a central question that needs to be answered is what constitutes the existence and operation of a healthy democracy? Generally speaking, when people are asked to list the major components that should exist in a healthy democracy, they respond in saying freedom, equality, the rule of the people, fair elections, and so forth. However, as has become evident in researching the many classical theories, these ideals are not seen by all as healthy indicators of democracy. In fact, there are many more aspects to examine within a
democracy including: the balance between individual and social interests; the role of religion; the active participation of the people; the elected representatives; and the methods of providing necessary knowledge to the people that will inform them about policies to affect them. Since this project focuses on the operation of democracy at the local level, the analysis of what constitutes a healthy democracy will not deal with topics such as foreign policy, which is handled at the national level. So what then are indicators defining the operation of a healthy democracy at the local level?

There are two main components to be examined in this assessment; the people and the government. Beginning with the first main component, the people, there are three elements that indicate the relative health of a democracy. The first is an active participation by the citizenry, both as individuals and as a community. Next, is the level of education of the people and their ability to access public information. Last to be looked at is the people’s ability to access their public officials.

To start, active participation, by the people, within the community, is essential for the operation of a healthy democracy. After all, democracy is derived from the Greek terms Demos and Kratos. The former is translated to mean “citizens” or the “people,” while the latter translates to “power” or “authority” (King). If the meaning of the term democracy is the authority of the people, at the very least, democracy needs to have an active participation by its citizens. So, what then, constitutes active participation? At the most basic level, active participation consists of voting for public officials. Participatory theorist, Benjamin Barber would say, “…under a representative government the voter is free only on the day he casts his ballot” (Terchek, 171). Barber is correct in saying it is essential the voter have more ways than simply casting a vote, to become involved in the decision-making processes and implementation
of policies. However, Barber takes it too far in saying that representation of the people by public officials is incompatible with freedom (Terchek, 171). The population is too large and diverse not to have representatives making decisions. Active participation should also include attendance at local government meetings or involvement in civic groups, as well as the use of referendums. While not practical at the national, or even state level, referendums for small towns, such as Kutztown, would be beneficial.

One would also expect there to be active civic groups in a healthy democracy that are involved in the community and the local government. This is active participation on a larger level. These groups might engage in volunteer work to possibly put on a town fair or get involved in lobbying so their voices are better heard within the government. Republican theorist, Robert Bellah, labels this democratic communitarianism (Terchek, 85). He feels that the people should be involved in social groupings, which include “…the family, the local community, the cultural or religious group, the economic enterprise, the trade union or profession…” (Terchek, 85). This aspect of democracy focuses more so on the groups within the community. It is also healthy if these blocks within the community do not always agree on everything. Bellah, states, “A good community is one in which there is argument, even conflict, about the meaning of the shared values and goals, and certainly about how they will be actualized in everyday life” (Terchek, 83). However, where democracy suffers is when these disagreements within the community become so severe, neither side is willing to compromise to work together for the overall public good.

In addition to active participation, the education of the people is equally, if not more, important. What good does an active citizenry do if the people are not properly informed about the issues that will be affecting them? Through personal experience, it can be said, that many
young people are not even taught the basics about the American Government system until their latter years in high school. The curriculum taught in high schools needs to include more classes dealing the operation of national, state, and local governments. These classes should also include topics including foreign policy, current world affairs, and political ideologies. The interaction of students with politics and government, at a younger age, would provide them with the information they need for their future involvement in the democratic system. Performance theorist, Anthony Downs, would say that this approach is not rational. He feels that people should only invest their time in something that they will get more out of than what they put into, which is termed rationality. Downs believes that more work would need to be put into educating the population about politics than it would be worth. He feels the decisions should be left up to the elected officials who are fully educated in politics. However, this idea is not rational. Downs seems to be advocating an oligarchy would be more effective. Let us not forget the original meaning of democracy. It is the people who are to have the power. If the power is to remain in the hands of the people, it would only make sense to educate them, so they could make effective and efficient decisions.

Also, as far as the education of the people goes, citizens need to be able to access any kind of public information they seek. They should be able to attend government board meetings, where they are able to address the local government council with concerns. A healthy democracy at the local level should also have a frequently maintained web-site or a regularly published newspaper. It is important citizens be able to read up on what business is being conducted within the local government. Clearly, the level of education of the people assists in the analysis of whether or not a democracy is considered to be healthy.
The last element that should be taken into consideration when looking at the people is the accessibility they have to their public officials. If the people are able to elect officials to represent them, but not have a voice in what the representatives do while in office, the function of representation is lost. What is essential remains that the people have adequate access to their officials, as is suggested by John Dewey. He believes, “The world has suffered more from leaders and authorities than from the masses” (Terchek, 170). The elected officials need to be kept in check by the people. By allowing the people access to their officials, citizens’ voices are heard and the actions of elected representatives are checked.

Now that the people have been examined, the second component, the government, needs to be laid out. The procedures the government utilizes and the officials that operate within the government, are critical elements to consider. When discussing procedures, two areas will be looked at; the checks and balances between the branches, as well as formal, regular, and public meetings.

As is true at the national and state level, there needs to be an executive, legislative, and judicial branch, all of which place checks on each other. One branch should not be able to dominate another or the proceedings of the government as a whole. As one of our founding fathers, James Madison, stated:

If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has
taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions (The Library of American Freedoms, 337)

It has long been a fundamental principle of democracy to include checks on the different branches of government, so as to ensure one is not able to dominate the others.

In addition to checks within the government, formal, regular, and public meetings need to be held. These meetings should be held on a regular basis, which are advertised in advance, either by being posted on the government web-site or published in the local newspaper. Also, each committee within the government should have regular meetings that the public can attend if they so desire. In addition to public access to these meetings, each committee should keep minutes for public record. It is also favorable that formal procedures are utilized during meetings, as well as in drafting and passing legislation.

However, it should not just be procedures within the government to be looked at, but also the officials themselves. Ideally, there should be both genders involved, as well as minority representatives, provided there is a large enough minority population residing in the community. As Inclusion Theorist, Anne Phillips says, “…if democracy is to mean more than the opportunity to vote in periodic elections and the equal right to stand as candidates, it has to involve a more substantial degree of participation, and more genuine openness, regardless of sec, race or class” (Terchek, 253). However, this should not mean, half women, half men, half black, half white. It should take into consideration the demographics of the society. If only 1% of the population is black, then half of the representatives should not be black. Also, for a positive political climate, these officials should be from at least two different parties. When there are elections for offices within the local government, it is important that the people have a choice of candidates to vote for, preferably from different parties. The existence of multiple parties promotes the circulation
of many ideas, which should in turn provide for the implementation of effective legislation. Discourse Theorists feel that this circulation of ideas through debate and discussion is essential for a healthy democracy. Also, at the local level, one might expect to see officials volunteering in some way with the community they are representing, whether is be through a civic group or public service project.

So now that the two main components to be used in assessing the level of health in a democracy have been put forth, they can be applied to Kutztown. In doing this, it is easy to see that the majority is marginalized. To start, some basic demographic information regarding Kutztown should be laid out, so that one may grasp a better understanding of the size and make up of the population. The total population, as of 2000, in the Borough of Kutztown was 5,067 (Kutztown Borough). Of these 5,067 people residing in Kutztown, 97% is White, 1% is Black, and 1% is Hispanic (Kutztown Borough). These ratios are very different from the national average, where 75.1% are White, 12.3% are Black and 12.5% are Hispanic (Kutztown Borough). Of the total population, 47.8% are men and 52.2% are female, ratios fairly similar to the national average. However, the major difference between Kutztown demographics and the National demographics comes into play when discussing age. The median age of Kutztown residents is 24.5 years, while the National median age is 35.3 (Kutztown Borough). The reason for this is clearly due to the fact Kutztown is home to many Kutztown University students. Of the total population, 40.9% of the residents are between the ages of 15 and 24 (Kutztown Borough). The following chart taken from the City-Data web-site illustrates the age distribution of Kutztown.
It is evident that the Kutztown University students are an important component of the town (Kutztown, Pennsylvania). When discussing the amount of money that flows into the local businesses of the town, the students are the top consumers, especially to businesses such as Mamma’s Delight Pizza, Salon Joey, and Feed & Read. Not only are students the primary consumers of the town, but they also fill many of the part-time employment positions of the local businesses. However, while the students bring about a unique aspect to the town, there are those residents who are concerned about the way the students have changed the community over the years. In speaking with the Code Enforcement Officer, Richard Diehm, an employee of the borough since 1978, he stated a primary concern among the borough council and local residents is the preservation of the face of the community (Diehm). The growth of Kutztown University since its establishment on September 15, 1866, has brought about many new changes to the community, which has caused a reaction among long-time residents, such as Mr. Diehm. Essentially, Kutztown University will continue to expand, which will require the town to further
develop and accommodate more students. In researching Kutztown, this seems to be a central issue playing a major role in the policies and legislation being created by the local government.

However, before delving into the details of the role students in the local government of Kutztown, the level of democracy should be assessed according to the components that were previously laid out. The first component to be examined when discussing the people is the level of active participation in the Borough of Kutztown. In attending two of the council meetings, which are held once every month, there seemed to be a very low attendance. On the January 18, 2005 Council meeting, there were only twenty people in attendance. One should not compare this number to the total population of 5,067 because there are 991 residents under the age of 19, many who do not know the first thing about the local government (Kutztown Borough). So, when recalculating the population under consideration for attendance, the new number that will be used is 4,076. Still, the turnout percentage is only about 0.5%. The next two council meetings, which were held on February 15 and March 15, had similar turnouts. However, in an interview with a landlord and owner of Salon Joey’s, it was stated that on September 28, 2004, there was a council meeting, in which an unusually high number of residents attended. This was due to a hotly contested ordinance the council was attempting to pass, which was not favored by the residents of Kutztown. However, when reading the minutes, only 53 residents were counted, still a very low attendance rate in relation to the population under consideration (September 28, 2004 Council…). One thing that must be noted, however, is the fact that the Borough of Kutztown has invested in what they call Hometown Utilicom. This is the borough’s own community internet service run strictly through the borough. After a council meeting, Hometown Utilicom plays back the meeting at 10 AM, 2 PM, and 7 PM daily on channel 2 until the next council meeting is held (Welcome to…). Any subscriber to Hometown Utilicom has the
opportunity to watch reruns of all of the council meetings, which might account for the low turnout at the council meetings. It must also be noted there is no way of knowing how many residents watch these playbacks of the council meetings.

Also, in looking at the people, the number of people casting votes in elections is of importance. As for the presidential election, President Bush did visit Kutztown and gave a speech on July 9, 2004, in which there was a very high turnout of both Bush supporters and protestors. Going back to Robert Bellah, this is an indicator of the existence of a healthy democracy, since there were large numbers of residents who stood on both sides in disagreement. It seemed to be a politically active climate. However, this was also a hotly contested presidential election. It can be assumed there is less political activity when it comes to local elections. However, there is a mayoral election coming up in Kutztown, which is going to be interesting. As will be discussed later, a reasonable prediction to have is there will be an unusually high turnout rate. There are three new candidates running against Mayor Marino. Mayor Marino has been fairly popular among many residents and Kutztown University students, but is strongly disliked by the council and many more people, so it will be interesting to see the turnout. However, the number of people who voted in the last national, state, and local elections has yet to be acquired.

The larger element of active participation is the role of civic groups. In Kutztown some of the civic groups include the Kutztown Lions Club, the Kutztown Community Partnership, Kutztown Rotary Club, and the Kutztown Area Historical Society. The Kutztown Lions Club is active, meeting the first and third Thursdays of every month at 6:30 PM in the Kutztown Fire Company (Kutztown Lions Club). The club has a regularly maintained web-site for anybody to look up the upcoming events. As of December of 2002, there were 89 members of this
organization, a number that has most likely grown over the past couple of years (Kutztown Lions Club). However, in comparison with the total population, the membership is not as great it should be. The club is involved in helping those who are disadvantaged throughout the community. They have raised and donated money to groups such as the Kutztown Fire Company, Kutztown Youth Athletic Association, the Kutztown Public Library, and many more (Kutztown Lions Club). Clearly, this is a beneficial civic group to Kutztown that has been very involved in the community.

The next civic group is the Kutztown Community Partnership. This organization meets the first Thursday of every month in the Borough hall at 8:00. It also has a regularly maintained web-site, which posts upcoming events for the public. “KCP will be the "voice" or lobby for both public and business improvement and historical preservation issues during the downtown revitalization process” (Kutztown Community Partnership). It is a non-profit organization that was established to assist local businesses and since its establishment February 7, 2002, its membership has grown steadily (Kutztown Community Partnership). There are over 30 of the local businesses involved in the group, as well as individuals and other local civic groups. It seems to be one of the larger and involved groups in Kutztown, with a solid membership from all levels within the community, an indicator of a healthy democracy.

There is also the Kutztown Rotary Club involved in the community. The Kutztown Rotary club has been in existence since April 14, 1926 (Rotary Club of Kutztown). This club has an extensive list of members posted on its web-site. It lists every member's name and year they became a member. Some of these people have been a part of this club for fifty years or more (Rotary Club of Kutztown). The club does work within the community, such as providing extra funds for the town to put up Christmas lights and supplying park benches for the Kutztown
Park (Rotary Club of Kutztown). It also donates to charities. This is another strong indicator that there is active civic involvement in the community.

The last major civic group for discussion is The Kutztown Area Historical Society. It has been in existence since 1974 (Kutztown Area Historical Society). Their primary purpose is to help preserve the town, its history, and its German culture. They have regularly scheduled scholarly events, which are posted at least one month in advance. However, these events cost money and are scheduled in the mornings, during the week, when most people are working. The Society does have a museum with regular hours for residents to tour. There were also no records of the number of people involved in this group. This appears to be a much weaker civic group in comparison with the other three.

There are other smaller civic groups that, when taken together with the four discussed above, provide the residents of Kutztown with many options of becoming involved in the community. Overall, there does seem to be a low amount of involvement within these community groups. While it is essential the people come together to form these civic groups, it is equally important these groups provide the citizens with recreational events. Interaction, discussion, and debate between local residents is important. It promotes the circulation of new ideas and the spread of information to better provide a flow of information throughout the population. Discourse Theorist, Sheldon Wolin, feels, “…the core of democracy rests on its openness and readiness to hear new voices and concerns as well as to reevaluate existing policies” (Terchek, 236). Civic groups, as well as community activities, are arenas for this type of information and idea exchange to take place. Also, when looking back at Participatory Theorists Dewey and Barber, community involvement is probably the strongest indicator of a
healthy democracy. So what types of public events does the community of Kutztown provide to the people?

There are two main events held yearly that come to mind. The first is the Kutztown Fair, held every August. This August marks the 134th Kutztown Fair to be held. Not only does the fair have live entertainment and Pennsylvania Dutch food, but also game booths, rides for the kids, and competitions for prize winning livestock. It is the event of the summer, and from personal experience, brings in a fairly large part of the community. This is probably one of the best community activities organized by Kutztown. The fair is provided for by the sponsorship of local businesses and is organized by citizens of the community volunteering their time. This is an extremely positive indicator of a functioning democracy if taking the view of the Participatory Theorists and to an extent the Discourse Theorists.

The other main community even of Kutztown is the Kutztown Pennsylvania German Festival held every summer for nine days (Kutztown Pennsylvania German Festival). This year marks the 55th annual festival. It attracts over 100,000 visitors and over 200 craftsmen. It is also Americas largest quilt sale (Kutztown Pennsylvania German Festival). Like the Kutztown Fair, but on a much larger scale, it has entertainment, PA Dutch food, and many game booths. It promotes the German culture of Kutztown and helps renew community interaction. Again, as was the case with the Kutztown Fair, is an indicator of the operation of a healthy community.

When all of this is put together, one of the most important components of a healthy democracy, the people, seems more involved in some areas than others. Attendance at the council meetings and membership in civic groups is very low in regards to the total population. Also, many of the members and officers of these civic groups are also employees of the Borough. This makes it appear as though the power of the civic groups is controlled by the few
that hold the power within the Borough. In saying this, a high number of people turnout for the community events. Most of the local businesses donate money, while the local residents donate time, so that these widely attended events are able to be put on for the people. When stepping back to look at this as a whole, it seems as though a few hold the power and hold occasional community events to keep the rest of the population content.

The next subtopic to be looked at within Kutztown is the education and access of public information the people have. While attending the February 15 council meeting, there were students from a Kutztown University journalism class involved in the meeting and asking many questions (2/15 Council Meeting). However, this was required for a class and none of them returned for the next meeting held on March 15. During this council meeting, three students from Kutztown High School gave a presentation on suggestions for the future developments of Kutztown (3/15 Council Meeting). They seemed to have been well-informed and well-rehearsed in giving their presentation. Also attending the same meeting was a local Boy Scout troop. They were required to attend a local government meeting so they would be able to earn a merit badge (3/15 Council Meeting). This seemed to be the extent of the involvement of the younger age group. As was previously noted, through personal experience, this is most likely due to the lack of focus on government classes in high school. Schools should be teaching detailed government classes in ninth grade and require students to attend a local government meeting.

As far as the people’s ability to access of information is concerned, there is a strong indication of a healthy democracy. At every council meeting, there is news reporter from the local newspaper, who writes up a story about the meeting. Every attendee of the meeting receives a copy of that meeting’s agenda. Also, all the minutes from every council meeting are posted on the borough’s web-site (Welcome to…). Also posted on the web-site are important
ordinances that are being deliberated as well as all necessary contact information for any of the employees and public officials of the borough (Welcome to…). However, not all of legislation, codes, or ordinances passed are posted on the web-site. Rather, in talking with Mr. Diehm, it was stated, any information that was a matter of public record could be attained, provided it was requested. The borough provided copies of any legislation requested for this project. It also was willing to sell copies of any previous council meetings provided a form was submitted and approved. However, the most important part of this access to information are laws that exist in the borough that make it mandatory for the borough to advertise any upcoming legislation that is being considered. There are very specific time periods these have to be advertised for, depending on what type of legislation it is. Overall, the accessibility of public information in Kutztown indicates a healthy democracy.

The last element to be looked at when discussing the people of Kutztown is their access to public officials. As was previously stated, all necessary contact information is posted on the web-site, including office hours and phone numbers. Through personal experience, every time there was an attempt to contact an official or an office for information, there was a quick and helpful response. Also, in attending the February 15 council meeting, the public officials were very pleasant. After talking to them briefly, they gave out their business cards, and said to contact them for any needed information. They were all extremely accessible and helpful thus far. When discussing the ability to access these officials, there is yet another strong indicator.

In summing up the elements relating the people of Kutztown, a fairly healthy democracy does not seem to exist in Kutztown. When looking at the people’s level of access to information and to public officials, there seems to be a successful operation of democracy. However, in examining the individual involvement in the local government meetings and participation of
civic groups, as well as the education level of the youth population, there appears to be a weak democracy. It must be noted that in looking at some of the members and officers of the civic groups, it was found that some of them were the same as those employed at the borough. For example, Gina Wiand, the borough office manager and public relations head is also on the steering committee of the Kutztown Community Partnership. Also, one of the candidates for this year’s upcoming mayoral election, Sandy Green, happens to be the secretary of the Kutztown Community Partnership. Some might say this is a positive indicator, since there are such dedicated members of Kutztown involved in many aspects of the community. However, when government officials are also heads of the civic groups that lobby, it seems as though the control of the government lies in the hands of a few people. So it appears it is only the opinions of a few that are being heard. The members of the government should not be the heads of these civic groups.

As for the healthy turnout at the community events, it appears that the people only want to attend the “fun” events in Kutztown, rather than the important ones. Not saying that community events are unimportant, but the people need to take responsibility and become more involved in other aspects of the community, such as the council meetings. This also in turn suggests that as long as the council continues to sponsor these community events, the people will remain content and not be concerned with the important issues. The avenues for public involvement are available, but the people need to become more engaged in the activities of the civic groups and the local government.

However, as was previously laid out, the people are not only component that needs to be examined. The second half of assessing democracy in Kutztown involves a look at the local government. As was laid out before, there are two main areas to be examined when discussing
the government; the procedures utilized and the officials themselves. Beginning with the procedures, the checks and balances within the Borough of Kutztown are extremely weak. As far as the judicial branch is concerned, when there are disputes that are brought before the courts, they are heard at the Berks County Court of Common Pleas. This court is fairly independent from the business conducted in the borough, unless there is a conflict. Although there is currently a dispute being handled by this court, it is not often the judicial branch is brought in on the business of the local government in Kutztown. The real problem lies between the executive and legislative branches. Mayor Marino’s current term is from 2002 until 2005. Throughout these past few years, the borough council has continually revoked Mayor Marino’s powers. In an interview with Ed Vicci, an intern with the borough, it was stated that the mayor previously had voting rights within the council meetings, but they were removed (Vicci). The legislative branch should not be able to remove the voting rights of the executive unless he is removed fully from his position. Ed Vicci also stated the mayor is no longer permitted in the borough hall without an on-duty police officer present. The locks were changed on the doors, so he is restricted to certain areas of the building (Vicci). Also, at both the February 15 and March 15 council meetings, every veto the mayor put forth was overturned unanimously by the council without hesitation. Currently, the council is seeking legal assistance from Barley Snyder Attorneys at Law, in an attempt to remove the mayor from office for the supposed physical assault on the Borough Manager, James Vetrano. However, the only people who witnessed this assault were the members of the council, who have been attempting to remove him from office. It talking with Mayor Marino, he stated that he had not been informed that he was not permitted to attend the meeting in which this accused harassment occurred. He said he was simply trying to get in the door and when James Vetrano tried to blocking his way, the mayor brushed by him
on his way in. However, regardless of whether or not there was physical contact, the executive should not be restricted from attending any of the legislative branch’s meetings. The legislative branch in Kutztown has tremendous power over the executive branch, an ill indicator of democracy as was laid out by James Madison.

When discussing the legislative branch’s procedures, the credibility of democratic processes are further weakened. In both the February 15 and March 15 council meetings, every topic that was brought up on the agenda was passed unanimously, without one opposed vote, besides Mayor Marino’s vetoes, which were overridden unanimously. This makes the legislative branch a very powerful body with what appears to have almost no check in place. The only check that seems to exist is that of the people, which has not even been that effective. What occurred during the September 28, 2004 council meeting demonstrated the people’s lack of power. There was an attempted amendment to Chapter 135 of the borough code, dealing with student housing rights. In particular, the landlords of Kutztown were those who were the most opposed. This amendment would have discriminated against students and landlords Kutztown (September 28, 2004). It attempted to establish what has been labeled as a “three strikes law.” Essentially, every time any kind of complaint would be filed against a student occupied apartment, the students could be evicted and the landlord would get one strike. After three complaints, the landlord would lose his license. Anybody would have been able to file a complaint against a student residency, when perhaps there might not have been any real reason to file a complaint. However, the amendment said nothing about students being able to complain against landlords or other residents in town. It only went one way, against the students. Many residents spoke out against the borough and urged the borough not to override the mayor’s veto (September 28, 2004). However, a vote was called and Mayor Marino’s veto was overridden
unanimously. This led to the landlords organizing and seeking legal assistance, with the threat to sue the council if this amendment was not negotiated. Currently, both sides are in the negotiation process. When taking this as a whole, the legislative branch remains virtually unchecked. Despite the fact that many residents turned out to speak to their elected representatives at the September 28 council meeting, their requests were ignored. When the branch responsible for creating the laws ignores the interests of the people who chose them to represent the public interests, it shows extreme weakness in the democratic process. This situation further illustrates the marginalization of the majority. The people’s views are only heard when there are threats made. The only views that are being heard and acted upon are those sitting on the council. Anthony Downs states that this is because these representatives are acting on their own selfish motives and not for the good of the people (Terchek, 155). When this happens, it seems no matter the level of health of the people exhibit, if they have no power over their representatives, democracy is lost. However, before jumping to that conclusion, more needs to be examined.

As was briefly mentioned before, all of the committees within the local government hold regularly scheduled meetings, which are open to the public. Not only are they open to the public, but they are held primarily during the evening hours, so those who work are able to attend. The times and locations are posted on the web-site. As far as the council meetings are concerned, formal procedures are used. Every meeting is properly called to order and everything that is discussed is voted on. While, as was previously established, these votes mean nothing since they are always passed unanimously, the formal procedures are still in place, which is a positive indicator.
As for the elected officials, there also seems to be strong indicators in place. To start, there are six council members, elected from six districts within the borough (Diehm). However, when looking at the demographics of Kutztown, over half are women, with only one woman sitting on the council. While Jan Crooker is the only woman on the council, she is president, which suggests there are not discriminatory policies in place. Also, one of the mayoral candidates running in the upcoming election is a woman. The remaining council members consist of five white males. Since there are such small percentages of minority groups residing in Kutztown, one would not expect to see a Black or Hispanic working within the government of Kutztown. Another area that should be taken into consideration is party affiliation. While the council members’ political affiliation was not found, it is highly possible they are all from the same party, seeing has how they vote unanimously on every issue. However, with this upcoming mayoral election, party affiliation does come into play. There are a total of four candidates running for mayor, two Republicans, two Democrats and one of them is a woman. Carl Mantz, a current council member, and Eric Ely are both running under the Republican ticket, while Mayor Marino and Sandy Green are running under the Democratic ticket (Vicci). This is a positive indicator in that it gives voters choices between parties and between candidates within those parties.

When looking at the government as a whole, there are mixed results. While there are positive indicators, such as regular, public meetings and multiple parties for voters to choose from in the upcoming election, there are also highly negative aspects, namely the lack of checks and balances on the legislative branch. All three branches should have relatively equal powers, but yet in Kutztown, the executive has no check on the legislative. Also, let it not be forgotten that democracy means the authority of the people. When the people have to seek legal council
and threaten to sue in order to have their interests heard, there is a major problem. Serious reform would need to be undergone within the legislative branch of government in Kutztown in order for it to be considered acting democratically.

So what kinds of reform should be implemented so that a healthier democracy exists in Kutztown? First off, the Mayor needs to be able to check the Council. How to make sure the council is checked is difficult to say. He does have veto power, but it is constantly overridden. Perhaps there should be more council members than six, so that there is less of a chance of the body agreeing every time. However, at a minimum, the Mayors voting powers need to be restored to him.

Also, to bring all of this back to the marginalization of the majority, a student representative would be of great value to help ensure democratic practices are being carried out. Since over 40% of the population consists of 15-24 year olds, it would only make sense to have a representative from that age group in attendance. Also, since the very development and existence of Kutztown is propelled by the students, their voices should be heard. Sure they can attend a council meeting and watch, but that is not enough. If a representative from Kutztown University would be able to sit on the council with voting rights, a whole new viewpoint would be brought to the meetings. Also, that student could then report back to the university newspaper the topics that are being deliberated and what legislation is being passed. It would help to educate the younger age group on the activities of the local government.

However, in saying all of this, it is not only the local government that is at fault here. The population needs to become more engaged. It is the fault of the residents for not attending these meetings that are open to them. As was stated before, all the avenues for involvement are at the public’s fingertips, but they choose to stand by and let the council do as they wish.
So, does a healthy democracy reside in Kutztown? As is evident, there are mixed results. However, despite some healthy indicators, overall, the answer would have to be no. Going back to the original meaning of democracy, the authority of the people, is the reason why the answer is no. The residents of Kutztown are disengaged in the operations of their government. It is the same few people who are involved in the government and the civic groups. Because of this the council is able to act as an oligarchy. They pass legislation unanimously and even when opposition is voiced, they push forward with what they want. Opposing views need to be brought to the council and deliberated, especially those of the students. The existence of a healthy democracy in Kutztown has potential; potential that lies in the hands of the people provided they become more engaged. So while the marginalization has much to do with the unchecked power of the council, it is also the fault of the people for not being involved enough to change the way things are done.

All of this can be summed up by Alexander Hamilton in *Federalist Paper 85*. “The result of the deliberations of all collective bodies must necessarily be a compound, as well of the errors and prejudices, as of the good sense and wisdom, of the individuals of whom they are composed” (The Library of American Freedoms, 571).
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