Great Uncertainty: Present State of Complex Democratic Society
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Introduction

As a social scientist concerned with the Big Picture state of democratic complex society – presently and historically, my assessment of the current condition of these societies leads me to the conclusion that there is Great Uncertainty about the prospects for their future. Of course most social scientists focus in special areas of interest where they may identify significant issues, but not consider the state of affairs for complex society more broadly. And, standard citizens may be unaware, too busy, or in denial of the full range of problematic circumstances that apply.

The Positive

Yes, there are all the glories to be celebrated for modern complex society: democratic government, individual freedom, universal justice, scientific achievements, technological innovations, medical wonders, extended longevity, standard of living "advancements," escalating global trade, etc. Indeed, there is little doubt that modern humans in complex societies have achieved much and that they have great future potential. Assuring that future is the question – in light of all the problems, or to put it more positively – all the challenges.

The Challenges
In Different Categories

Ecological

Considering the sustainable carrying capacity of Earth, humans have grossly
> overpopulated the planet – probably by 4 billion people.

The current human natural resource demand is unsustainable, and less than
> half of the world population is responsible for most of this demand.

Without proper evaluation, humans are causing species extinction at a very high
> rate in an ecological system where everything is interdependent.

At the global scale, humans are causing massive pollution of critical water, air,
> and soil resources. Actions to address this matter are very inadequate.

Humans are causing global climate change which threatens continuing resource
> availability across broad bands of Earth's most productive zones.

Human caused climate change is very likely to result in the migration of 2 billion
> people – causing widespread and dangerous conflicts.

Use of the growing national nuclear weapons arsenals can result in a global
> catastrophe for complex society – even causing human species extinction.

Political

Most modern human challenges/problems are global in scale, but presently no fully empowered global government exists to address them.

The United Nations would have to be significantly restructured with commitment to it by all nations if it was to become sufficient to the task.

Currently, there is not even a serious discussion of this global objective to achieve adequate global cooperation across a broad range of institutions.

Competition among nations remains a significant source of serious conflict that can threaten the survival of complex society – even the species.

There is a strong current trend toward autocratic/fascist/totalitarian structured complex societies putting democratic societies at risk of conversion.

Gerrymandering and voter suppression activities in many current democracies undermine the basis for democracy itself.

Apathetic citizens in democracies are unaware of the critical importance of the separation of governmental institutions [executive, legislative, judicial].

In the U.S. few citizens educate themselves about candidates and issues, and less than half of the eligible citizens bother to vote in most elections.

Democratic political societies are currently threatened by economic/financial interests which are working to "buy" control of these institutions.

Inadequately controlled money and money based lobbying in politics is currently a major source of problematic results in campaigns, elections, and laws.

To succeed, democracies require cooperation and compromise. In this context, current partisan extremism, which has many causes, must be rejected.

Judicial

The current process of appointing judges to the courts is resulting in partisan judges of questionable qualifications being appointed at all court levels.

Judges must be selected by independent sources and based on a candidate's legal qualifications, proof of impartiality and commitment to the rule of law.

Efforts to undermine the independence of justice departments and the courts to follow, apply and enforce the law must be rejected.

The justice system must do a much better job of assuring equal representation for all parties in the judicial process.

The justice system must do a much better job of applying the law equally to all parties when it comes to fines, probation, and incarceration rates.

The justice system has failed to adequately pursue white collar and organized crime which negatively impact the community in many ways.

The justice system has failed to pursue corporate crime and to hold corporate executives responsible for those crimes. Fines are just expenses!

The legal profession has been largely co-opted by private and corporate self-interests. Lawyering to serve communal interests must be promoted.

Social

The diversity of human groups by race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, social structure, etc. is the source of far too much unwarranted conflict.

The extended family has been substantially weakened – dispersed in response to increased personal freedom and mobility.

The nuclear family is weakened by these same forces.

Commitment to marriage has been substantially weakened by elevated personal freedom and easy access to divorce.

Single parent families are now common – increasing the social and economic stress on both parents and children.

Many children raised in "broken" homes lack conditions of stability and security on which they can depend to support their maturation.

Citizens are suffering increased social isolation due to high mobility and the pervasive use of internet/smart phone virtual technology.

Social media increases the access to social connections but reduces skills in and the positive consequences of full social interaction.

The face-to-face social networks of many citizens are extremely limited. Many do not even know the names of their next door neighbors.

Increased mega urbanization has created such huge and dense populations that citizens mostly view and treat one another as strangers.

Increased urbanization, suburbanization, and mobility have reduced involvement in and commitment to community at all levels.

Very few interactive events are community wide in scope – reducing the sense of community identity and unity.

Nations are more ideas promoted by symbols than interactive realities. Ironically, major conflicts are one of the few sources of true national unification.

Economic

Free enterprise capitalism promotes self-interest/competition and reward for success, not recognition for cooperation.

Under capitalism, corporations are required to maximize returns for share holders, not to support alternative, "outside" goals.

A powerful financial industry [banking, investments, brokerage] has arisen; it primarily supports the self-interests of both capitalists and autocrats.

Communism promotes economic cooperation and sharing equally in the results in all enterprise. It minimizes self-interest and reward for industry.

Regulated capitalism and socialism are compromise economic models rewarding both competition and cooperation – models to be favored!

The WTO promotes international, capitalist self-interests. It needs to support equality in labor and ecological rules to better balance its influence.

Economic inequality within nations and globally is a huge concern. Corporations and the wealthy must meet their full tax obligation – no loop hole hunting.

Health

The battle must be resolved over whether health care for citizens is a public service or an independent economic enterprise.

The global food industry is driven by economic gain and promoted by advertising – not defined by important public health goals.

The negative health consequences of the industry's favorite products – simple, satisfying, immediate, carbs – are well known – metabolic syndrome.

Pharmaceutical companies are driven by economic gain from the drugs they develop and offer – not by important, prioritized public health needs.

Government needs to provide the general criteria for what constitute healthy foods and desirable drugs to be developed and offered to the public.

Especially in the context of modern sedentary life, humans must commit to appropriate and sufficient exercise to achieve and maintain health.

The WHO must be empowered globally to identify and address the sources of diseases – especially those that have epidemic and pandemic potential.

Information

Failure to resolve the debate between free speech rights and the public need for accurate information has had very negative social consequences.

Unregulated use of internet platforms has allowed the exploitation of the internet and social media for irresponsible, even dangerous, purposes.

Intentional disinformation, conspiracy, fake news, propaganda campaigns have had horrific social results – Trumpism. Balanced regulation is essential!

Cyber warfare among nations and corporations is extremely disruptive.

Space satellites to serve military purposes add to international destabilization.

This information failure exemplifies the problem of technology coming to market without adequate evaluation of its potential +/- impacts/side effects.

Education

Since the withdrawal in 1970s of public funding, higher education has become more and more expensive – negatively impacting society in many ways.

Political and religious extremism is now manifesting in attempts to control access to information sources at all educational levels – unproductive!

Education must foster critical thinking skills in citizens – the ability to identify what positions are logical and based on the full facts and reliable sources.

Education must recognize the value of intuitive skills and foster their development through training in the meditative/mindfulness process.

Education curricula must serve students with different primary learning modes – activity/doing, observation/visualizing, language/hearing-reading.

Science must do a much better job of outreaching to the public to inform it as to the methods, goals and major results of the different sciences.

Military – National Security

U.S. annual military expenditures are excessive – approaching 1 Trillion dollars
– equal to the combined budgets of the next 13 most invested countries.

With forces in five global theaters, the U.S. is trying to "police" the world.

Reducing U.S military expenditures by half would free the resources to support
nearly all existing and proposed U.S. social and infrastructure needs.

The U.S. hegemonic military perspective and enormous expenditures need to
be thoroughly reexamined and much of the funding reallocated.

International security should be a function of an empowered global government -
releasing huge national resources to be assigned more productively.

Personal Armaments

The failure to resolve the debate over the individual right to bear arms, what
types of arms, and in what contexts has had very negative consequences.

Excessive access to assault weapons with large magazines supports the idea
that the display and use of guns are legitimate in social conflicts.

The ongoing cultural fascination with guns is supported in many popular culture
genres where extreme gun violence is the norm in resolving disputes.

Modern societies suffer in multiple ways from the continuing commitment to
gun centered "cowboy" and military traditions.

Religion

In the face of results from modern science, religion has either lost members or
become more fundamentalist. These extremes are unproductive.

Spiritual pursuit through the human intuitive faculty avoids the dogma of
traditional religion while supporting its core unification perspective.

Humans can understand themselves in the Big Picture of the universe without
having to rely-on/believe-in gods, gurus, saints and saviors.

There is a solution for this science – religion conflict, but it is little understood or
appreciated in the mainstream of complex society at the present time.

Without a resolution for this problem, complex societies are under constant
threat of serious conflict from different groups with competing religions.

Conclusion

Authoritarian complex societies have been the norm since the advent of complex society some 8 to 10 thousand years ago. In the history of complex society, democratically organized such societies are very young and have not yet passed the initial test for their viability and stability. Unfortunately, there are many complacent citizens in these societies that fail to recognize the value and fragility of their privileged position in these democracies.

As the testing continues, successfully addressing the major issues that emerge in these democratic complex societies is critical. Unfortunately, the list of major "challenges" that is cited above is not only extensive; most of these issues are being either ignored or minimally engaged. Moreover, the collective negative effect of these challenges is growing and the time to address them is shrinking.

In an effort to contribute a partial solution for this enormous overall problem, I suggest that there are two specific challenges that are most important to be addressed and that – if resolved – have the greatest potential to create the conditions where many other issues can be successfully settled:

1) Designing and implementing a truly empowered global government as a
federation of fully committed and cooperative nations,
2) Greatly reducing the negative influence of money from non-public sources on
issues in almost every challenge category.

The Prospects for Humanity in Complex Democratic Societies??
Unfortunately,
Not Good!
Realistically, as a Social Scientist,
"Great Uncertainty" is the Best Overall Assessment I Can Offer.
I Am Trying to Avoid the Descent
Into Pessimism
And Thence
Into Depression.