



DEMOCRACY AT RISK

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DEMOCRACY AT THE CROSSROADS

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MEXICO, Mexico City. A woman walks by as police officers stand guard during a farmers' march in Mexico City, 8 August 2017. Bernardo MONTOYA/AFP/Getty Images

In what has been described as a “decade of decline” (2006–2016) for liberal democracy, freedom has been continuously eroding all over the world. More than 20 years after Francis Fukuyama’s triumphant celebration of the “end of history”, it seems that liberalism, both economic (free trade) and political (pluralism, civil liberties, constitutional safeguards), is in serious crisis. In 2015, Turkey ranked last among electoral democracies in Freedom House’s index. The Arab Spring has given way to widespread disillusion and violence. In Latin America, several democracies have regressed on the slippery slope towards cronyism (Brazil) and authoritarianism (Venezuela, Bolivia). Asian democracies are facing trouble too, as illustrated by a regain in nationalist rhetoric (Japan), endemic corruption (South Korea) and outright illiberalism (the Philippines).

What is equally a cause for concern is that democracy is on the defensive in its Western heartland. The Economist’s Democracy Index in 2016 downgraded the United States, the beacon of democracy for much of the modern era, to a “flawed democracy”.

Deep disenchantment with democracy is sweeping Eastern and Central Europe as Hungary and Poland dismantle constitutional rights and civil liberties. Populist leaders in Western Europe are calling for similar measures.

Despite such alarming signs, however, democracy remains perhaps the most successful political idea in modern history. In 2015, it was the most widespread form of government in the world, with largely “free and fair” electoral processes in place in 125 countries. Even liberal democracy’s detractors such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Narendra Modi, Viktor Orbán, Vladimir Putin, Rodrigo Duterte, Beata Szydło and Donald Trump have all been elected by majorities and praise their own democratic credentials. Outright autocratic regimes such as China, Cuba and North Korea call themselves democracies too.

We thus face a paradox: while electoral democracy continues to be acclaimed everywhere, a series of indicators measuring political and civic freedom show it to be in deep trouble. The key to this paradox may well reside in the notion of “illiberal democracy”, first coined by Fareed Zakaria in 1997.

According to Zakaria, what is fundamentally at stake is not democracy but liberalism. Since liberal democracy for many has come to stand for democracy *tout court*, it is now seriously challenged by the new phenomenon of illiberal democracies on the ascendency.

Illiberal democracies are best characterised as regimes elected by a popular majority but striving to undermine constitutional safeguards, the rule of law, and civil liberties. Adopting a winner-takes-it-all approach (*volonté générale*), they discriminate against ethnic, religious and/or sexual minorities in the name of the majority. They tend to concentrate power in the executive in a process of constitutional re-engineering that co-opts or corrodes the judiciary (Hungary, Poland), the legislative (Venezuela), or both (Russia). They weaken civil society by reverting to a set of “authoritarian best practices” including media censorship and state propaganda. They mobilise resentment and anxieties by constructing enemies, both external (migrants, the European Union) and internal (NGOs, human rights activists). Political opponents are intimidated, publicly



vilified (“lock-her-upism”) or subjected to repression by the arbitrary application of purposefully vague laws—often antiterrorism legislation. The final step in consolidating illiberal democracies

legitimation (referenda, plebiscites), while striving to maintain an illusion of pluralism.

A number of potential causes may be identified behind the recent surge

social media revolution, coupled with postmodern epistemic uncertainty, has ushered a new era of “post-truth politics” with little space for rational dialogue. Fourth, as the United States retreats from its traditional role of global harbinger of democracy, rivals like China and Russia have been quick to put forth alternative models deemed more competitive, or morally righteous. Fifth, and finally, since its emergence in the Age of Enlightenment, liberalism (freedom) has entertained a complex and tension-riddled relationship with democracy (equality). Liberal democracy, as the 20th century has shown, is an utterly fragile construct.

The question remains how illiberal democracies are likely to evolve in the 21st century. Will they stabilise and become a permanent fixture of geopolitics? Or, on the contrary, will liberal democracy prove resilient and keep the upper hand?

To answer these questions, the present dossier investigates seven case studies from around the world, starting from the premise that illiberal democracy is best represented on a continuum ranging from first worrying signs as in Trump’s America to more advanced authoritarian regimes as in Putin’s Russia—with many shades and nuances in between.

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consists in emasculating the electoral process: not by rigging elections— which usually remain free and fair— but by loading the dice long in advance.

In marked contrast to more full-blown authoritarian regimes, however, illiberal democracies do not yearn for the total control of society. Selectively repressive, they seek regular popular

of illiberal democracies. First, younger generations show signs of historical amnesia as they are no longer cognisant of the totalitarian horrors of the 20th century. Second, a generalised sentiment of insecurity and occupational angst in a fast-changing world has estranged people from the political elites in their own societies. Third, the

RUSSIA: HAUNTING WESTERN DEMOCRATIC IMAGINATION

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If a Martian were sent to earth with the secret mission to figure out the trends of world politics, he would certainly be puzzled by the outsized role that Putin’s Russia plays in the 21st century imagination of the West. Almost half of the Americans tend to believe that Moscow rigged the 2016 US presidential election; many Europeans suspect that the Kremlin shapes public opinion in their countries; and some of the leading Western media outlets insist that Russia’s President Vladimir Putin is the world’s most influential political leader. While in the beginning of this century Russia was viewed as a mixture of failure and banality, today in the minds of many it has mutated into the model of the world to come.

Frankly speaking, neither Russia’s brutal annexation of Crimea, nor its military involvement in Syria or aggressive meddling in American elections could sufficiently explain the obsession of the West with Russia. Russia suffers from low European-level birth rates and almost African-level life expectancy. Its population has one of the highest percentages of university-educated people, but with the lowest labour productivity per hour worked in the industrialised world. The country is profoundly corrupt and though President Putin is a strong leader, the prospects of Russia’s development after him are highly uncertain. So why then is the Western political imagination so obsessed and preoccupied by Russia?

The answer can be found in Dostoevsky’s novel *The Double*, the story of a low-level clerk who ends up in the madhouse after meeting his double, a man who looks like him, talks like him, but who displays all the charm and self-confidence that the tortured protagonist profoundly lacks. When it comes to Russia, the West feels like Dostoevsky’s protagonist in the presence of his double. However, while in Dostoevsky’s novel the double looks like a person that the protagonist

from the past, now it looks like an ambassador coming from the future.

Russia is a classic example of a non-democracy functioning inside the institutional framework of democracy. It is a regime in which periodic pseudo-competitive elections are instruments for dis-empowering, not empowering, citizens and the electorate’s voice is not heard. Could it be that competitive elections in the West – shaped by the manipulative power of money, disfigured by growing political

“Russia is a classic example of a non-democracy functioning inside the institutional framework of democracy.”

always wanted to be, for the West Russia has become the double the West fears it could become. While some years ago Russia was perceived by the Western public as a shadow coming

polarisation and emptied of meaning by a lack of genuine political alternatives – resemble Kremlin-engineered elections more than we like to think? Could it be that the global spread of



RUSSIA, Tuva. Russian President Vladimir Putin (left), accompanied by defence minister Sergei Shoigu, guides a boat during his vacation in the remote Tuva region in southern Siberia. Between 1 and 3 August 2017. Alexey NIKOLSKY/ AFP/Getty Images

democracy signals not the liberation of the masses but the liberation of elites from the electorate?

Moreover, Russia provides the most radical example of the feudalisation and the incoherence of the state in the age of globalisation. Inside Russia's deep state, different departments or agencies – the ministries, the police, the prosecutors, and so forth – may seem irresistibly dominant to ordinary citizens but they spend much of their time fighting each other, often over the control of liquid assets, and face no real incentive to cooperate. Such a loose-knit and conflict-ridden state can neither impose itself consistently on society nor respond intelligently to social pressures and demands. What disturbs Western observers is that while reasons for the growing incoherence of Western states do not necessarily resemble the factors shaping the Russian case, the trend is similar. The loss of a shared national purpose radically undermines the interoperability,

or capacity for rationally guided cooperative action, of increasingly fragmented state institutions worldwide.

Significantly, the Russian experience also sheds light on the global phenomenon of “superfluous people” produced by a worldwide movement for the liberation of the rich. Russia is an impressive example of the global trend toward growing economic inequality in the 21st century. But at the same time Putin's Russia is, in a sense, a socialist utopia: only nature is exploited! Russia's ruling class did not enrich itself by exploiting labour but by privatising the public patrimony, especially the country's hydrocarbon industry. Ordinary Russians do not even seem to them to be worth exploiting. Rather than trying to dominate or control their fellow citizens, the privileged few have simply turned their backs on them. This strikingly new Russian pattern of *spoliation and neglect* tells us much more about what is going wrong in the West today than does the older

pattern of *repression and exploitation* characteristic of most illiberal and undemocratic societies in the past.

Russia is a classic case of how a handful of very rich and politically unaccountable self-enriching rulers have, despite internal rivalries, managed to stay atop the country's fragmented society without resorting to historically high levels of violence. This political model, neither democratic nor authoritarian, neither exploitative in the Marxist sense nor repressive in the liberal sense, is an image of the future that should keep us awake at night.

In short, what causes anxiety in the liberal West is not that Russia will run the world, but that much of the world will be run the way Russia is run today. What is disturbing is that the West has started to resemble Putin's Russia more than we are ready to acknowledge.

THE UNITED STATES AND THE TRAJECTORY OF DEMOCRACY

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Almost 200 years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville published *De la démocratie en Amérique*, putting the intellectual seal of approval on the idea of US-style democracy as a model for other parts of the world. Tocqueville's analysis went far beyond formal institutions and laws to the normative underpinnings of participation, equality, and voluntary association. Arguably, it is these norms which, in spite of the numerous evils in American history – from slavery and the destruction of the

what Louis Hartz called a “new society”, one without an hereditary aristocracy, with vast fertile lands only thinly settled by peoples who could easily be swept aside, and with oceans and distracted great powers protecting it from invasion, was mostly elided by those who drew inspiration from the democratic norms they saw flourishing in the United States. Indeed, even the most scathing political critics of the United States found themselves having at least to quote, perhaps to finesse, or, horrors,

20th century, other factors were added: economic and military power, language, universities, popular culture, and the sheer omnipresence of the mass media. These in turn led to a sort of path dependence, in which elites in other countries acquired the habit of looking to the United States for ideas about participation and transparency, not to mention the details of certain types of legislation, administrative arrangements within organisations, the setting up of advisory bodies, and, of course, many other facets of US society unrelated to democratic norms. The fact that many of those elites in other countries had themselves been educated in the United States, understood English, and had grown up consuming US popular culture, further reinforced this habit. Thus, even if many US political ideas, such as its 18th-century constitution or its insistence on first-past-the-post voting rules, were no longer imitated, the habit of looking to the United States, perhaps copying certain of its practices, but in any case using those practices as an argument for certain policies, remained alive and well. Not even the presidency of George W. Bush, with its hanging chads, invasion of Iraq, and heartbreaking incompetence on Hurricane Katrina, could stamp out that habit: numerous US expatriates can attest to being congratulated by complete strangers after the election of Barack Obama in 2009.

One would like to imagine that this changed after Trump assumed the

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indigenous population to plutocracy, support for foreign dictators, and the tyranny of the majority mentioned by Tocqueville himself – served as a cynosure for people and countries around the world.

The normative power of US democracy was that it was an ideal which, somehow, had been concretised. That this had occurred in the situation of

to adopt outright, features of what they imagined to be American democracy. From attempts at extending the franchise through to legislation modeled on the Freedom of Information Act, US democratic norms continued to serve as a model.

At first, this influence stemmed from the obvious contrast between the US experience and that of Europe. In the



ARIZONA,
Phoenix, USA.
President Donald
Trump speaks at
a "Make America
Great Again" rally.
22 August 2017.
Nicholas KAMM/
AFP/Getty Images

presidency in 2017. To some degree it did, as elites lowered their expectations for US policy and focused instead on short-term coordination with their American counterparts. But this is to ignore the enormous boost that Trump's talking points, and the aides he appointed, gave to xenophobic and authoritarian forces around the world. It is no accident that European advocates of immigration restrictions and crackdowns on the press, the judiciary, and dissenting voices lauded Trump, even before election night; by the same token, there is clear mutual admiration between Trump and various autocratic leaders. In effect, the United States is still a model, albeit an antidemocratic one.

This, however, is not the end of the story, or even of the current episode. We would do well to recall that the United States was a democratic inspiration not only, or even primarily,

because of its constitution, its relatively broad electorate, its legislative arrangements, or its free press, but also because of its protest movements. The story of Gandhi being inspired by Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience is well-known, but this is only the tip of the American iceberg. For example, trade union struggles (which resulted, among other things, in the choice of 1 May as International Workers' Day), antiwar protests, and the multiple strands of protests for civil rights (most famously the Civil Rights Movement against racial injustices) each had a marked influence on analogous activities in numerous countries. The point is not that protest movements in the United States served as models elsewhere: some did, but in other cases, influence ran in the other direction. Rather, the fact that protests did occur in the United States, in the face of well-known antidemocratic barriers, was itself significant to activists

in other countries. As one South African campaigner put it, "When the sit-ins started in the USA, I felt I was there. We read the news eagerly and identified unconditionally with those who were demanding their basic rights."

Thus, the jury is still out on whether or not the United States, under Trump, will become an antidemocratic model. In the end, what matters is not so much what Trump does as what his fellow citizens do in response.



DEMOCRACY AT RISK

TURQUIE : LE VIRAGE AUTORITAIRE D'ERDOĞAN

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TURQUIE, Ankara. Des manifestants brandissent des drapeaux turcs sur la place Kizilay lors d'un rassemblement contre le coup d'État manqué du 15 juillet. 10 août 2016. Adem ALTAN/ AFP/Getty Images

Souvent avec une joie mauvaise, constat est fait du retour de la Turquie à ses vieux démons autoritaires. Et l'Europe d'éprouver un lâche soulagement de se voir enfin débarrassée de la venimeuse question de son élargissement à l'Anatolie.

Car la Turquie de Recep Tayyip Erdoğan a rejoint le camp des « démocraties illibérales » dès lors que l'élection de Nicolas Sarkozy à la présidence de la République française, en 2007, a rendu illusoire toute perspective d'adhésion à l'Union européenne. Face à Ankara, Bruxelles n'avait plus de moyen : ni carotte, ni bâton. Il s'est

ensuivi un glissement autoritaire du pouvoir, de plus en plus personnel, du président turc. Celui-ci, en quelques années, a brisé l'échine politique de l'armée, des médias, de son alliée la néoconfrérie de Fethullah Gülen, de la représentation parlementaire des régionalistes (ou nationalistes) kurdes, de l'opposition civile, libérale et écologique qui s'était manifestée dans l'ensemble du pays en 2013. Ahmet Insel a été le premier à parler alors de la « poutinisation », ou de l'« orbanisation », de Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Jusqu'aux élections législatives de juin 2015, le président Erdoğan

pouvait se targuer du soutien du corps électoral. Mais il perdit alors la majorité absolue des sièges, et se lança dans une périlleuse fuite en avant. Il manœuvra, au prix d'une reprise de la guerre civile dans le Sud-Est, pour obtenir la convocation de nouvelles élections, en novembre, et les gagner. Après la tentative de coup d'État de juillet 2016, il perdit toute limite. Il se fit tailler une Constitution présidentielle à sa démesure. Le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) est à sa botte. La liberté de la presse a été de facto abolie. Les législatives de novembre

2015 et le référendum constitutionnel d'avril 2017 se sont déroulés dans un climat d'intimidation policière et judiciaire. Fait peut-être unique depuis 1950, ils ont été entachés de soupçons de fraude. Des purges de masse balayent la police, l'armée, la magistrature, l'université, l'ensemble de la fonction publique et les partis d'opposition.

Le retour de flamme autoritaire est d'autant plus impressionnant que le bilan démocratique d'Erdoğan, les cinq premières années de son exercice du pouvoir, n'est pas négligeable. Aucun dirigeant turc n'était allé aussi loin dans la reconnaissance, culturelle et politique, du fait kurde, et n'avait osé ouvrir des négociations avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Aucun autre n'avait aussi nettement remis en cause la conception ethnoconfessionnelle de la citoyenneté. Enfin, son accession au pouvoir symbolisait une alternance au profit des « Turcs noirs », que les « Turcs blancs » laïcistes avaient marginalisés depuis les années 1920, en même temps qu'elle abrogeait l'ordre constitutionnel contraignant hérité du coup d'État militaire de 1980.

Comment expliquer ce retournement? Seuls les adeptes de la « transitologie » peuvent s'en étonner. La formation de la démocratie n'a jamais été linéaire. La thèse de l'agenda anti-démocratique caché, qu'aurait de tout temps caressé le président, ne résiste pas à l'examen. Quelles qu'aient été ses intentions secrètes, le vrai problème est celui du rapport de force qui s'est noué entre les tenants de l'autoritarisme et ceux de la démocratie. Or, l'Europe s'est gardée d'appuyer les seconds, tout en versant des larmes de crocodile sur la lenteur des « réformes ». Comme à l'époque de la

Guerre froide, elle préfère au fond les certitudes de l'autoritarisme aux aléas de la démocratie pour confier à la Turquie le sale travail : jadis, la lutte contre le communisme, aujourd'hui, l'endigement des migrants. Le PKK n'a pas plus joué la carte libérale, balançant entre le recours aux armes et la négociation des petits arrangements autoritaires avec Erdoğan. La réaction des autres partis d'opposition a été inepte et en porte-à-faux avec la nouvelle Turquie, née de dix

annihiler toute forme d'opposition évoque les grandes purges qui avaient suivi la révolte de Cheikh Saïd, en 1925. Son répertoire est celui du nationalisme, ou plutôt du national-libéralisme qui entend assurer le contrôle politique du néolibéralisme, comme en Chine ou en Russie, en Hongrie ou en Pologne. Ce à quoi nous assistons, c'est à la résurgence d'une *situation autoritaire* dont les origines remontent à l'absolutisme d'Abdul Hamid II, au Comité Union et

“L’erreur serait d’imputer à l’islam la responsabilité de la restauration autoritaire.”

ans de pouvoir AKP, mais aussi de profondes transformations économiques et sociales. Enfin, le piège de la guerre d'Irak et de Syrie s'est refermé sur Ankara, et a dramatisé la question kurde.

L'erreur serait d'imputer à l'islam la responsabilité de la restauration autoritaire en Turquie. Même si Erdoğan puise dans les ressources du conservatisme musulman pour étayer sa légitimité, il recourt surtout aux vieilles recettes du régime kémaliste. Son conflit avec les *fethullahci* montre qu'il impose lui aussi la primauté de l'État sur le pluralisme religieux. Son instrumentalisation de la tentative de putsch et de la dissidence kurde pour

Progrès, au parti unique de l'entre-deux-guerres, aux régimes militaires des années 1960-1980.

Ces précédents historiques dénotent aussi, paradoxalement, l'enracinement de l'idée démocratique en Turquie. L'exercice du suffrage universel l'a régulièrement réhabilitée. De ce point de vue, les résultats du dernier référendum ont été sans appel : malgré le matraquage de la propagande de l'AKP, le non l'a emporté dans les grandes villes qui lui étaient jadis acquises, y compris à Istanbul, le fief de Recep Tayyip Erdoğan depuis les années 1990.

ORBÁN'S LAWFARE AGAINST LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN HUNGARY

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Heineken beer, the Helsinki Committee and the Central European University in Budapest have recently all been the object of the Hungarian government's unfavourable attention. It tried to ban the beer on the pretext that the red star on the can was a totalitarian symbol, to restrict the workings of the well-known NGO, and passed a new law designed to close the renowned private university, whose fate still hangs in balance.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán embodies the reactionary populist politics gaining ground in many parts of the world. In a well-publicised speech in 2014 he had declared with pride that his country was an "illiberal state", and asserted later that the Trump revolution happened in Hungary, the country that led the global backlash against liberalism. Extolling the virtues of the nation, church and family, Orbán has positioned himself as the defender of Christian Europe against hordes of Muslim migrants. With Orbán taking a leaf out of Putin's authoritarian book, and Poland currently modelling itself on Hungary, one may well ask if illiberal democracies are there to stay in Central Europe.

Between 2010 and 2013 the government led by Orbán enacted some 700 laws that rolled back economic liberalisation: property rights were selectively whittled away and vast

tracts of EU-subsidised agricultural land redistributed to party functionaries. Policies, which initiated a massive recentralisation of economic and political power, were devised to benefit domestic businesses with close ties to the ruling Fidesz Party. The systematic subversion of checks and balances followed a careful design of "lawfare", i.e. legislation passed in ad hoc fashion without public scrutiny or proper legislative deliberation. First, a new constitution was enacted that weakened all checks on majoritarianism. Next, the system for nominating judges to the Constitutional Court was altered to subvert the independence of the judiciary. Then, the electoral framework was changed to make it impossible for any other party to win. The National Election Commission was brought under Fidesz control to curb civil society referenda. Further, by appointing only high party officials to the office of the President, Orbán ensured that presidential powers would not be used to block governmental initiatives. Finally, new laws were enacted to guarantee political control of all media through a regulatory agency exclusively manned by party loyalists. At their own peril can the European Union (EU) and European People's Party (EPP) continue to turn a blind eye to this transformation of the "rule of law" into "rule by law".

A new law assaulting academic freedom, passed in unseemly haste in April 2017, threatens the very existence of the Central European University (CEU), whose professors were called "officers of an occupying army" by former Fidesz Minister Péter Hárach. The discriminatory law targeting the CEU is of a piece with the systematic erosion of the autonomy of all universities in the country. Hungary has seen state expenditure on higher education systematically decline since 2010, with a reduction of 25% between 2010 and 2013. Large funding cuts at all Hungarian state universities have paved the way for the installation of government-nominated "chancellors" tasked with making managerial decisions but de facto determining academic appointments. The result is an alarming decline in student enrolment, which fell by 24% between 2010 and 2014 and a staggering 45% in 2016 alone.

Orbán's government has embarked on a programme of nationalising science, founding, notably, the National University of Public Service, a training ground for the new cadres of the regime. The governor of the Hungarian National Bank has, tellingly, utilised the bank's resources to establish a new economics university in his hometown, whose curriculum includes his own theories. With channels of social



“Between 2010 and 2013 the government led by Orbán enacted some 700 laws that rolled back economic liberalisation.”

mobility within the country blocked, 600,000 of the better educated have exited in the past four years. Their voice is now missing from domestic politics. Emigration can thus become an avenue to eliminate unwelcome critics. But liberal democracy cannot survive in the absence of free public debate and spaces of dissent, which autonomous universities provide. It needs strong, financially independent counter-majoritarian institutions, which advocate diverse, even unpopular, positions. The 70,000 demonstrators marching through Budapest last April, chanting “Free country, free university” in support of the CEU, clearly recognised this, while the state television ignored them, broadcasting instead a programme praising fishing in Hungary.

Democratisation is evidently not the linear, teleological process that

modernisation theory, and its reincarnation, the postcommunist transition paradigm, would have us believe. Nor is democracy inevitably coupled with liberalism. The EU may be in no position to influence the course of illiberal, majoritarian, elected regimes in Russia, India, Venezuela, or the United States. But whether illiberal democracies take root in Europe will depend in large measure on whether the EU and the

EPP continue to tolerate with impunity Viktor Orbán’s undermining of separation of powers, erosion of civil and political liberties, transforming Hungary into a “mafia state” – a term coined by the former Hungarian Minister of Education Bálint Magyar. Reactionary ideologies and authoritarian rule often take root as much due to their popular appeal as to the opportunism and hypocrisy of their liberal opponents.

HUNGARY, Buda Hill. Locals take an oath in front of a national flag of the 1956 revolution (the tricolor with a hole) during an induction ceremony of the far-right Jobbik party. 25 August 2007. Attila KISBENEDEK/AFP/Getty Images

REINVENTING AUTHORITARIANISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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The 2011 Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa thickened the authoritarianism plot. Since democratising change appeared at long last to be making headway across the region, initial forecasts seesawed between hopes for sustained transitions and doubts about their viability. Often either unrealistic, impatient expectations, or fatalistic and deterministic pessimism, such prognoses were nonetheless logical analytical outgrowths of observation of post-authoritarian systems. In earlier cycles, or so-called “waves” of democratisation, the push towards representative systems was understood to be a linear process.

While emphasising the complexity of the transition process and its inherent pitfalls, these assumptions and predictions still functioned on a generic logic of a forward movement. In South-Western Europe in the 1960s, in Latin America in the 1970s and in Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, the sequence had been thus – illustrated by push-and-pull contests and resistance but within an overall drive for transformation. Doubts about the paradigm were already being expressed in the early 2000s, revealing a proliferation of “uncertain regimes”, “semi-democratic regimes”, “competitive authoritarianism”, “façade democracy” and “illiberal

democracies”, which should have given cause for caution.

When between 2012 and 2017 the revolts in the Middle East and North Africa turned, for the most part, into violent civil wars in Libya, Yemen and Syria and the expected changes failed to materialise, culturalist explanations proliferated, arguing that the region was “unprepared” for democracy. Side-stepping the encouraging signs in Tunisia and in Morocco, these interpretations missed the key transformation that the post-Arab Spring had yielded, namely an authoritarianism redux, albeit one that was not only novel and hybrid but also internationally connected. The new-old authoritarian regimes of the Middle East reasserted themselves in at least three innovative ways: (1) by appearing to embody change while crushing it; (2) by securing international support for, or tolerance of, their campaigns, and (3) by, more insidiously, sowing doubts amongst their populations about the need for, and value of, democracy.

Firstly, unable to halt the rebellions, the regimes in Egypt, Syria, Yemen and across the Gulf gave the axiom “If you can’t beat them, join them” new meaning. They, however, neither adopted the values of the democratisers nor co-opted them – as they had done in the earlier 1990s cosmetic democratisation phase.

Instead they revised the narrative to represent themselves as the promoters of the “real” change needed in these societies. Nowhere was this better exemplified than in Egypt where Abdelfattah al Sisi forcibly replaced Mohamed Morsi as president, while criminalising him and his supporters and conjuring up the image of a “new Nasser”. Similarly, in Syria, Bashar al Assad – amidst the widespread murderous repression of his opponents and a large-scale civil war – continued to claim to be the candidate for “a new democratic Syria”. In Turkey, reacting both to the continuing Gezi Park– and Taksim Square–centred protests since May 2013 and a failed military coup attempt in July 2016, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan jeopardised the country’s decade-long promising political transition heralded as a model in the region.

This unapologetic rebranding of authoritarianism in the Middle East was, secondly and more importantly, engineered through a message sent to Western governments and societies that support or tolerate the repressive actions of these hybrid regimes as key to regional stability and the “security” of the West. As in the mid-2010s intolerance, racism and societal divisions spread across Europe and the United States, Western governments proposed more militaristic foreign policies



EGYPT, Cairo. Thousands of Egyptians demonstrate in Tahrir Square to denounce violence against protesters, especially women. 23 December 2011. Citizenside/WAHEDMASRY

and asserted support to authoritarian Middle Eastern regimes in a notable departure from their earlier defensiveness. A newfound resoluteness and

development was reached when the current US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated in May 2017 that human rights values would now take

late 2010s an “empire-strikes-back” disposition questioning in a deeper and more problematic fashion the very pursuit of democracy. The shared sentiment that “revolutions only bring trouble” and that “democracy is problematic” – now voiced by conservatives, now silently tolerated by former militants – spread slowly but surely across these societies. Thus expanded the repertoire of authoritarianism. What a difference six years made! Whereas in the spring of 2011, the dominant regional and international feeling had been one of “never again” should the Mubarak’s style of rule see the light of day, by the spring of 2017 a form of demand for strict authoritarian rule seemed to have crystallised as societies in the Middle East were now torn between their dissatisfaction with the current regimes and their anxieties of chaos and instability. By successfully sowing doubt as to the value of democracy, the region’s authoritarian regimes certainly benefitted from their ability to bounce back and be repressively creative. But they were also partaking of a wider global moment of neo-authoritarianism.

“By sowing doubt as to the value of democracy, the region’s authoritarian regimes benefitted from their ability to bounce back and be repressively creative.”

assertiveness therefore emboldened these authoritarian regimes, whose bedrock remained, however, the contradictions and hypocrisies in Western policies. A high (or low) point of this

a back seat compared to economic interests or national security.

Finally, and even more problematically, many Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes began to adopt in the



DEMOCRACY AT RISK

UGANDA: MANAGING DEMOCRACY THROUGH INSTITUTIONALISED UNCERTAINTY

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UGANDA, Kisoro. Facade with poster of President Yoweri Museveni. 23 July 2012. By Adam JONES/CC BY-SA 3.0

In 2016, thirty years after he violently seized power, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni was reelected to his fifth term. In 1986, Museveni had become president of a country economically and socially devastated from years of autocratic rule by strongmen rulers Idi Amin and Milton Obote.

Museveni made some early reforms, implementing decentralisation and

structural adjustment policies. International donors swiftly labelled Uganda a "donor darling" on its way to democratic transition. Recent assessments of the regime are less optimistic. It is now seen as a hegemonic party-state that relies increasingly on patronage and violent coercion. Scholars have catalogued how decentralisation policies have actually recentralised

state power and fragmented subnational power bases. The regime has used protracted civil unrest to justify uneven development and a militarised state. Today, Uganda resembles other seemingly fragile African states with long-lasting regimes like Angola, Eritrea and Zimbabwe.

Such cases present a paradox. How can state fragility, a system of elec-

toral governance, and autocratic rule coexist sustainably? An examination of how citizens experience Uganda's illiberal regime is revealing. Unsurprisingly, the regime restricts civil liberties and maintains distributive systems that offer overwhelming structural advantage for the ruling regime. However, it also governs by instrumentalising uncertainty. Uncertainty is produced via arbitrary government use of authority backed by a threat of violence. As a result, it infuses citizens' perceptions of the state – particularly state security actors but also politicians and government officials.

preventers as ordinary community members, powerless except to report crime like any other citizen. Constant vacillations between promises made and broken, authority claimed and denied, contributed to uncertainty in interactions between citizens and crime preventers, and between crime preventers and state authorities.

The government's ability to continually redefine the role of crime preventers was made possible by a widely held perception that the ruling regime retained access to overwhelming force – a perception reinforced through citizens' memories of state-sponsored

giving wide berth to issues they think are sensitive. Pervasive uncertainty also erodes trust between constituents and authorities. Citizens are cognisant of the fact that politicians also face harsh sanctions for challenging the regime's interests. Politicians who survive this system are thus assumed to be complicit in the regime, making citizens suspicious of those who claim to act in good faith. Unsubstantiated rumours further fuel this scepticism: tales of state-organised assassinations circulate when public figures die unexpectedly; allegations of bribery proliferate when politicians support the ruling party. However, producing suspicion without evidence allows politicians to maintain the possibility – however slight – that they could act in their constituents' interests. In turn, this keeps many citizens marginally engaged with the democratic process.

I have termed this strategy of rule "institutionalised arbitrariness". Institutionalised arbitrariness helps explain how states maintain "hybridity" or "illiberal democracy" as the status quo. The arbitrary use of harsh discipline means that the state can permit occasional expressions of liberal politics such as democratic elections, universal suffrage, civil society, free association and a free press. It is thus difficult for citizens and international observers to decisively categorise the regime as oppressive and autocratic.

The functioning of a democracy is premised on the ability of citizens and their representatives to develop meaningful and reliable expectations of each other. However, in environments marked by high uncertainty, arbitrary assertions and denials of state authority disrupt feedback loops and fragment citizen organisation. Under such circumstances, citizens cannot develop meaningful expectations, nor can they demand regime accountability. Thus, "illiberal democracies" can produce uncertainty and contingency to manipulate formally liberal governance for the pursuit of illiberal ends.

“Institutionalised arbitrariness helps explain how states maintain ‘hybridity’ or ‘illiberal democracy’ as the status quo.”

Take the experience of Uganda's "crime preventers". So-called crime preventers are mainly underemployed young men, recruited en masse before the 2016 elections with promises of access to government loans and employment in the police force. Their mandate was vaguely defined. Politicians on both sides of the aisle stoked fears that crime preventers would use violence to intimidate opposition voters and candidates, and facilitate vote manipulation. However, the reality appeared more mundane. At times, crime preventers assisted the police in arresting and detaining civilians. At other times, the police and government officials sidelined crime

violence. The ruling regime and its military have fought civil insurgencies since taking power, often sacrificing civilian life in the process. Sporadic and unpredictable state violence in everyday life further buttresses this perception. For example, the police often use teargas and live or rubber bullets to disperse rallies. More mundane instances of state coercion include security sweeps rife with intimidation and extortion.

The perception that the state could intervene anytime and deploy overwhelming force produces a particular type of subject, namely, one that is comparatively subdued and risk averse. Ordinary citizens self-police,



DEMOCRACY AT RISK

POST-TRUTH POPULISM IN VENEZUELA

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VENEZUELA, Caracas. Volunteer rescuers step aside to take cover as riot police motorcyclists charge on opposition activists protesting against the newly inaugurated Constituent Assembly. 4 August 2017. Ronaldo SCHEMIDT/AFP/Getty Images

Illiberal democracy is democracy minus constitutional liberalism. According to Fareed Zakaria, without liberalism's checks and balances democracy lends itself to the kind of "people-making" based on ethnic, class, racial or religious majorities, a feature that is intrinsic to the authoritarian populisms or "illiberal democracies" proliferating everywhere. Characterised by plebiscitary rule and an expansion of the executive that

renders all state branches into adjuncts of the ruler, Venezuela's Chavist regime seems to be a good example of an illiberal democracy. I would, nonetheless, raise the following question: Does Chavism have any unique features? Following the standard argument on "illiberal democracy" the answer would be negative as Chavism would simply offer yet another cautionary tale about democracy without liberalism. Recent

developments in Venezuela, however, would suggest otherwise. In my view Chavism's significance and dynamism have less to do with democracy, understood as majority rule, than with factors that such an understanding occludes. Despite having lost its electoral edge Chavism has recently become even more authoritarian and repressive but *without* drawing (other than fraudulently) on a majority that it no longer possesses.

“While the opposition controls ever more ineffective sites of democratic expression, the regime ‘democratically’ holds the firepower.”

The following suggestions may further our understanding of this situation.

The collapse of representative democracy and of the nation’s representative institutions instigated by a neoliberal structural adjustment programme in the 1980s explains Venezuelan Chavism better than the mere question of democracy. Though it initially came to power following a democratic implosion, the trajectory of Chavism since is only intelligible as part of the breakdown of political representation that is an *endemic*, even postliberal, condition currently affecting not just Venezuela but the world.

This breakdown has two critical effects: firstly, it reveals a crowd sociality hitherto enclosed within social and political institutions and, with it, the emergence of bodily affect as a crucial political and social crucible. Secondly, in such a situation, there is a growing inability of any representative instance to occupy the place of the universal, and, from there, represent the whole of society to the state. Under these conditions infectious affective contagion spreads. This amounts to a preeminence of the horizontal over the vertical as the axis along which forms of personal and social experience and relations are formed, unformed and transformed.

Confronted with such a slippery terrain brought about by globalisation and traversed by myriad images and desires circulated by the media, the Venezuelan state is unable to totalise society, or represent it as a whole society accountable to itself.

Like sovereignty or democracy, populism too mutates amidst such an unstoppable “retreat of the political” as the instance capable of totalising “society”. If in classical populism ap-

peals to the “people” functioned as the political means to *vertically* restore a fantasised lost unity, sustaining such fantasy is increasingly untenable both ideologically and institutionally now that the political is *horizontally* beset by an increasingly divided, differentiating society.

Under these no longer totalising circumstances, appeals to the “people” function according to an unabashedly “tribal” logic aimed at erecting a war machine centred on affect and the body. It operates on an ever more fragmented social terrain, which it does not seek to totalise but to control and dominate. In what in the current climate of post-truth politics amounts to a Humpty Dumpty effect in the sense that a word “means just what I choose it to mean”, the word “people” can simply refer to “my people”, however the ruler chooses to define them. “My people” are then those always ready to bodily crush the enemy rather than any numerical majority that supports a government or a policy.

The result is “dominance without hegemony” (Ranjit Guha). Having lost its majority, Chavism still insists on maintaining power. To achieve this, the massively corrupt regime has developed a whole new arsenal of control mechanisms ranging from the wholesale distribution of weapons to civilians, the so-called *colectivos*, to

placing the army, which is now subjected to minute forms of intelligence monitored by Cuban agents, in control of the nation’s food distribution and vast mineral wealth.

Meanwhile invocations of “democracy” and “the people” continue but mean what the regime wants them to mean, irrespective of any numerical majorities. The recent top-down decision to set up a “Constituent Assembly” capable of bypassing the opposition-controlled parliament is the latest in the regime’s Humpty Dumpty politics. Yet this is not a case of an “illiberal democracy” if by that one means a well-consolidated, semitotalitarian regime. A more likely scenario, I fear, is: an intensification of the prevailing civic strife, corruption, violence, narco-trafficking and chaos. While the opposition controls ever more ineffective sites of democratic expression, the regime “democratically” holds the firepower.

From the very beginning Chavism in all its exorbitance foreshadowed tendencies at work everywhere in times of the “retreat of the political”. Trump’s populist, Humpty Dumpty-like assault on American liberalism bears witness to similar tendencies. In order to defend democracy and liberalism, we will need to rethink them in the face of this withdrawal of the political.

DEMOCRACY ON THE BRINK: FOUR KEY INSIGHTS

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Democratisation is not a linear process, nor can the continued development of liberal democracy be taken for granted. Disenchantment with democracy has gained ground among new democracies where many of the promises associated with economic and political freedom have failed to materialise. But trust in political elites and institutions has also plummeted in many of the established democracies.

By drawing attention to changing narratives about the shape, and even the desirability, of democratic institutions as well as examining the practices of governance in many majoritarian democracies, the contributors to this issue of *Global Challenges* highlight some key aspects of the undermining of liberal democracy worldwide:

1. Ambiguous impact of the (in) action of international institutions. Neoliberal structural adjustment programmes have had a detrimental impact on representative institutions in several countries of the Global South (and some in the Global North too, as the case of Greece shows), as suggested by Sánchez's analysis of populism in Venezuela. Yet, paradoxically, where supranational institutions, or international financial institutions, possess some leverage to ensure prevalence of the rule of law, freedom of expression or separation of powers, they often fail to use it to ensure a commitment to these liberal principles. Randeria argues that EU intervention and sanctions have been conspicuous by their absence despite, for instance, Hunga-

ry's systematic dismantling of liberal democratic institutions. For the Middle East, Ould Mohamedou shows how in the name of "stability" and "security" Western governments have tolerated the ongoing "rebranding of authoritarianism". Democratic ideals in the Middle East and North Africa region have thus been compromised by an interplay of internal and external forces.

as Krastev suggests, liberal and illiberal democracies today seem to mirror each other's anxieties. While Russia continues to be obsessed about the Western gaze, the expansion of Russian authoritarianism has gripped the political imagination of the West as well. If there is justifiable concern with the ideological and financial links between Putin and the European Right,

“We are currently witnessing an expansion of the repertoire of democracy along with that of authoritarianism – or, perhaps, even the blurring of the two.”

2. Shifts in the attractiveness of democratic and authoritarian models. Sylvan's analysis alerts us to the worldwide historic influence that the US "democratic model" has exerted through its oft-lauded constitution, its culture of active political participation, and its strong civic movements. The current political scenario, however, calls into question several aspects of this model, and emboldens illiberal voices all over the globe. Moreover,

there is equal worry that the Russian model may predict the future shape of polities (including Western democracies) worldwide.

3. Restructuring of state institutions amidst new socioeconomic configurations. Krastev identifies a new pattern of resource extraction in Russia which may be best characterised as "spoliation and neglect". Randeria delineates the new contours of the Hungarian state, which has narrowed



USA, Washington, DC, Democracy Spring activists, April 2016.

all spaces of dissent while concentrating economic power in the hands of a tiny elite loyal to the leader. In Venezuela, where the expansion of executive power goes hand in hand with a breakdown of political representation, Sánchez explores the emergence of bodily affect as “a crucial political and social crucible”. Given the retreat of the political, the Chavist regime has used control mechanisms embedded in the military and economic machinery of the state to strengthen its own power base.

4. Use of liberal means to establish and entrench illiberal democracies. Ironically, elections can be instruments for disempowering citizens where they serve to liberate elites from the electorate (Krastev). The 2017 constitutional referendum in Turkey was organised to formally reinforce presidential powers amidst widespread intimidation and massive purges (Bayart). Large parliamentary majorities can be used to undermine the rule of law and to establish instead illiberal forms of rule by hastily passing ad hoc legislation without public scrutiny. Randeria analyses the processes that transformed Hungary’s

governance by “rule of law” into an authoritarian “rule by law”. Focusing on Uganda, Tapscott’s analysis reveals the subtle ways in which a state maintains control over society by fostering a climate of uncertainty fuelled by arbitrary interventions. Thus, irrespective of formally liberal politics, “institutionalised arbitrariness” precludes citizens from entertaining reliable expectations regarding state-society relationships.

The lived experiences of democracies today are being shaped by a multitude of reconfigurations at the national, local and translocal levels. At the beginning of the 21st century, we are witnessing an expansion of the repertoire of democracy along with that of authoritarianism; or, perhaps, even the blurring of the demarcation between the two. Bayart identifies the power dynamics between the proponents of authoritarianism and those of democracy as the real issue in the face of an intensifying struggle over the redefinition of democracy. Illiberal democracies do not share unique defining features that would allow them to be subsumed under a common denominator, as illustrated by the con-

tributions to this dossier. But in what sense these can be considered democracies at all remains a moot question. We need a better understanding of citizens’ experiences of politics and the state in everyday life across the world: the protection of civil liberties can hardly be sustained within political, economic and social structures designed to buttress illiberal regimes. These structures influence citizens’ perceptions of the state, which in turn produces particular types of subjects and subjectivities. To understand current patterns and future trajectories of (il)liberal democracies, it is as important to study the working and transformations of institutions as it is to analyse the responses of citizens to these changes. Today, the need to counter “the overproduction of opinionated opinion” – as emphasised by Albert O. Hirschman in 1989 – and to get the citizenry to engage critically in the polity is as urgent as ever. Creative imagination is required in order to (re) make democracies into vibrant spaces of participation but also objects of political desire.

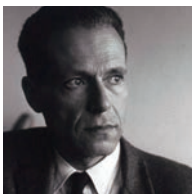
The Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy at the Graduate Institute, Geneva

The Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy addresses the current challenges faced by both established and more recent democracies in an interdisciplinary and comparative perspective.

In view of the growing disenchantment with liberal democracy as well as the tensions between neoliberal globalisation and democracy, the Centre seeks to develop projects that bridge theoretical and empirical research, academic and policy work.

Its activities include:

- research that aims to understand the plurality of democratic experiences by focusing on citizens' democratic aspirations, their dissatisfaction with existing institutions as well as the dynamics of participation and protest in various regions of the world. Drawing on Albert O. Hirschman's scholarship, research at the Centre also aims to explore changing forms of civic engagement including different forms of 'voice' and 'exit'
- organisation of a series of public lectures and conferences
- collaborative activities with academic institutions, international organisations as well as with partners in Switzerland and worldwide



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ALBERT HIRSCHMAN

Among the foremost intellectuals of the twentieth century, Albert O. Hirschman was a brilliant theorist of problems of economic and political development. Born in Berlin in 1915, his work addressed two questions that are fundamental to the study of democratic politics today: When and why do people engage in, or disengage from, public welfare and public action? When and how do people bring about social and political change?

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