Living Democracy!

HELMUT SCHMIDT LECTURE 2021

01







"For me, democracy means taking responsibility. Achieving democracy for a society is similar to learning to take responsibility for his or her future for a person. It is a coming-of-age process. Only when we realize our personal responsibility for the future of our country will democracy be sustainable. Belarusians are on our path to democracy. The outdated dictatorial system is trying to hold us back. But rest assured that Belarusians will prevail."

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Leader of the Democratic Movement in Belarus and Speaker of the Helmut Schmidt Lecture 2021

LIVING DEMOCRACY



LIVING DEMOCRACY NOW!

TEXT: NINA-KATHRIN WIENKOOP AND JULIA STRASHEIM, BUNDESKANZLER-HELMUT-SCHMIDT-STIFTUNG

For years, scholars, activists, and politicians have been arguing that democracy is in retreat worldwide. We have witnessed how governments in countries such as Turkey, Venezuela, or India have resorted to restricting the freedom of the press, the space for civic participation, or the independence of the judiciary. These developments have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Most worryingly, they are happening where scholars long considered democracies to be most stable: in the member states of the European Union and in the US. Here, the values and processes most closely associated with liberal democracy are now openly questioned anew. These "established democracies" face issues, such as crises of representation or an alienation of citizens from elites, which are often strikingly similar to those troubling "young democracies".

But democratic backsliding in the EU, such as in Hungary, also has serious consequences for the state of democracy in the world. For all the while the EU fails to take more decisive action against anti-democratic tendencies within its own borders, it loses credibility when demanding that other governments comply with democratic standards, such as in Belarus or Afghanistan. The question of credibility also requires a closer link between external and internal support for democracy that is often missing in media debates, research and, above all, politics.

At the same time, people are also increasingly rising up to hold governments responsible and demanding (more) democracy, loudly and on the streets. The number of protests, as well as interest in politics, is steadily in-

creasing. Belarus is a particularly impressive example, where protests continue despite heavy repression. Even beyond Belarus, people are currently showing governments all over the world what it means to really "live democracy" — a motivation for us to put this value at the forefront (and on the cover) of this first edition of our new journal.

This journal combines essays, photo series, statements and prose by established as well as up-and-coming researchers, activists, decision makers, representatives of civil society organizations, and artists. The journal will be published annually in time for the Helmut Schmidt Lecture, a new event series for which we invite outstanding public personalities to address issues of pivotal current significance. Our aim for both the journal and the lecture is thus no less than bringing diverse voices together on urgent and thought-provoking issues.

This year, we are organizing the first Helmut Schmidt Lecture jointly with the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in Berlin. And we could not be prouder to have one of the most inspiring global voices for democracy as inaugural speaker: Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya, leader of the Belarusian opposition. This choice also underlines that, despite all the bleakness regarding the state of democracy in the world, the Helmut Schmidt Lecture and this journal also want to see the silver lining. The pressures democracy faces both at home and abroad have also given a real boost to thinking about and mobilizing for democracy. We hope to contribute to this development with new and creative ideas for how democracy can be strengthened, fought for, rethought — and lived!

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Learn, argue, participate: Experiencing the history of democracy in the permanent exhibition of the Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung.

Schmidt! Living Democracy

TEXT: MAGNUS KOCH AND MERLE STRUNK

Free access to knowledge is one of the most important foundations of a functioning democracy. As extracurricular places of learning, museums and exhibitions make a fundamental contribution to this. But they are much more. They are also always social places: places where people come together, spend time and exchange ideas. This makes them valuable for a democracy, especially in times of crisis. Hardening fronts, such as we are experiencing at the moment, can only be broken down if people talk to each other. Museums are places of political communication, of respectful and objective debate; they are thus important pillars of a democratic society.

Many institutions have created digital alternatives during the Covid-19 pandemic. In recent months, we have all become acquainted with many new forms of events and knowledge channels that many now use as a matter of course. And yet, discussions in virtual spaces are not a complete substitute for a lively debate between people in the "real" world.

We were all the more relieved when in June 2021—with a delay of more than half a year due to the pandemic—the permanent exhibition of the Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung entitled "Schmidt! Living Democracy" was able to open its doors, creating a new dialogue space in Hamburg's city centre. For not only does the exhibition pay tribute to Helmut Schmidt's journalistic and political work, it also focuses on the importance of democracy for the fifth Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and encourages our guests to actively engage in conversation together and thus also in political debate about history and the present.

Personal Mediation, Told in Multiple Perspectives

Schmidt, born in Hamburg in 1918, had decided in a prisoner-of-war camp to become politically involved in the reconstruction of his country. In 1946 he joined the Social Democratic Party, where he worked first as a volunteer and soon as a professional politician. Throughout his life, he advocated the model and practice of a parliamentary democracy. For him, the fundamental rights,



"If we tell a biography not as a one-way street, but as a path with twists and turns, with room for manoeuvre and counterdesigns, we enable our visitors to form their own judgement."

the state guarantee of the free development of the personality, the division and control of powers, and freedom of the press were among the central values; in speeches he often quoted from the relevant passages in the Basic Law, the Charter of the United Nations, and other important sets of rules. His "lessons from the war" are a central starting point for our historico-political mediation work.

There is no doubt that a look at Helmut Schmidt's long life is worthwhile if one wants to trace German democratic history. Nevertheless, the question arises as to how contemporary a person-centred narrative of history still is. The accusation that such an approach quickly turns into a heroic story that does not allow for other perspectives is not unfounded. We are aware of this danger.

However, biographical exhibitions, books and films have a great advantage for political education work: they offer emotional access, enable identification, and create access to historical contexts with their current references. Personal history opens the window to the past and makes people curious about the more complex social contexts behind it.

It is therefore not a question of reducing the representation to the historical actors and their actions. The question is which paths led there? What were the opposing voices? What were possible alternatives for decisions and processes? If we tell a biography not as a one-way street, but as a path with twists and turns, with room for manoeuvre and counter-designs, we enable our visitors to form their own judgement.

A historical actor structures the material, acts as our guide through history. The provision of historical contexts and multi-perspective narration is, however, the prerequisite for a critical discussion at the level of contemporary historical research. Themes, practices and patterns emerge that transcend the immediate subject matter and through which historical learning can succeed.

Polyphonic Democracy

In the case of our exhibition, it means that we will trace Schmidt's political agendas, his most important decisions and conflicts, as well as his imprints, personality and principles, but also that we will focus on those aspects that are particularly relevant to the history of democracy.

Schmidt's most important topics are economic and financial policy, international security and cooperation, with a particularly strong focus on European unification. These agendas also run through our exhibition as common threads, whereby not only Schmidt's political convictions or (social-liberal)



governmental action become the subject. In accordance with the principles of multi-perspectivity, the exhibition also deals with the social counter-forces, opposition, protest and resistance, media processing and positioning, in short, with the changing society in the context of German division and the Cold War, a change that has been accelerating since the mid-1950s.

From the beginning, Helmut Schmidt thought of democracy primarily in terms of parliament and the parties: this was where the political will was to be formed, this was where the important social debates were to take place. This brought him into conflict with the emerging "New Social Movements", whose exponents soon found this approach too rigid and hierarchical, and who also wanted to exert political influence outside the parliaments. During Schmidt's time as chancellor, many of the conflicts that had been smouldering within the party reached their climax. The exhibition contrasts these positions: civil society's opposition to NATO's "rearmament", to the "peaceful use of nuclear energy", the commitment to the preservation of natural resources and "quality of life", and also a rejection of an uncritical concept of growth and prosperity; in contrast, Schmidt's understanding of economic and political stability, energy security and his specific security policy understanding of a strategic balance between the military blocs in the Cold War, supported by the governing coalition and large sections of society.

Visitors to the exhibition experience these often-conflicting views as a manifestation of a modern civil society; in different arenas, on different levels, it traces the disputes about the best way forward for the common good. Conflict and dispute emerge as central elements of a living democracy. Sharp, occasionally irreconcilable debates characterize the core of the "old" Federal Republic. The fact that Schmidt was ultimately unable to reach many of the younger and often well-educated people with his concepts is symbolized by his being voted out of office in 1982, even though his successor Helmut Kohl (CDU) continued Schmidt's policies to a high degree, for example in the areas of foreign affairs, security and energy.

Visitors Become Designers

Democracy, as becomes clear at the level of contemporary historical representation, must therefore be constantly renegotiated in its conditions and contents. This involves both issues and the forms of social confrontation. What does it actually mean to live democracy?

The great opportunity of exhibitions and other publicly accessible educational venues is to reach their visitors directly on site—to involve them and motivate them to participate.

We want to take advantage of this opportunity and not only present the historical events surrounding Schmidt's work. We try to get into conversation with our guests and rely on a self-initiated exploration of democratic practices. Here are three examples: Using a large timeline of world political and Schmidt-related dates, we invite people to share memories and thus highlight certain events from history and the present. In this way, the guests themselves create a diverse panorama that depicts different perspectives on history and invites a change of personal perspective. Controversial statements by Schmidt on topics such as migration, Germany's foreign policy role in Europe and the world, or financial and economic policy also encourage discussion. Our guests can comment on the statements, i.e. signal disagreement or agreement and exchange arguments. Finally, we also call for a vote: each of our ten multimedia tables on the most important stations in Schmidt's political life has a question ready that builds a bridge to the present on the basis of the topics discussed there. The leitmotif is the future of democracy, for example when we want to know what our guests think of a general, European compulsory service for young people in view of Schmidt's advocacy of compulsory military service in the 1960s and 1970s. The results of these polls are presented in real time on a large screen in the exhibition. Thus Helmut Schmidt, his life and political work, are the occasion and the central theme of the exhibition. However, the focus is also always on the visitors themselves. What do they think about issues, which historical events have influenced the reality of their lives and what is important to them for the future? In this way, visitors become shapers, not only of the exhibition, but also of social debates and thus also of our democracy. You want to live democracy? Go to the museum!

We see the Helmut Schmidt Forum as a starting point for social debates, dialogue between generations and the exchange of ideas. In this perspective, the future of democracy in Germany and Europe should also be debated here on an ongoing basis and in the best sense of the word.

- → Magnus Koch, Head of Exhibitions and History, Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung
- → Merle Strunk, Education and Outreach Officer, Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung



Political elites and (mostly male) decisionmakers like Helmut Schmidt have long shaped how our democracy is understood. We think: It is time for Helmut to step aside and make room for other voices and perspectives. For this journal, we thus asked activists from all over the world what democracy means to them and how they stand up for it. Their answers run right through this issue.

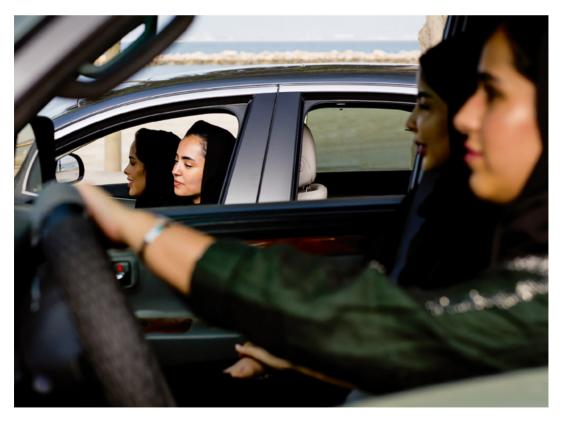
"The snail's pace is the normal pace of any democracy."



Helmut Schmidt, 19 October 2003, in DIE ZEIT

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESSES

TEXT: DONATELLA DELLA PORTA



WOMEN PRACTICE DRIVING IN DAMMAM, SAUDI ARABIA, JUNE 17, 2018. ACCORDING TO ONE OF SAUDI ARABIA'S TOP DAILY NEWSPAPERS, OKAZ, THE GOVERNMENT HAS ESTABLISHED A COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE PROSPECT OF REMOVING THE GUARDIANSHIP REQUIREMENT FOR WOMEN OVER AGE 18.

Strangely enough, while the images often used to illustrate many cases of democratization represent people protesting in the streets, progressive social movements are rarely addressed in the scientific debate on regime transition. Without assuming that democratization is always produced "from below", research has however started to analyse the ways in which the masses interact with the elites, and protest with bargaining. In particular, I have studied "eventful democratization" as cases in which authoritarian regimes break down following—often short but intense—waves of protest. Studying these cases, I noted in fact the particular power of some transformative events but also of broader mobilization processes, including a multitude of less visible, but still important, protests that surround them. Indeed, democratization processes are often remembered for specific historical moments that catalyse the fall of the authoritarian regime, but also for the cascade of protest events from which they emerge but also that they produce. During these events, cognitive, affective, and relational mechanisms transform the contexts in which dissidents act.

Civil society organizations are first of all important in the very first challenges towards authoritarian regimes. Charities help citizens in overcoming various types of hardship; labour unions call for strikes; and peace, women's, human rights, and/or environmental groups launch protest, but also educational campaigns. Resistance has an everyday, symbolic dimension as well, as discontent is expressed in oppositional talk and underground humour works as an escape valve for anxiety. Everyday strategies of survival by the poor and the marginalized witness to a capacity for resistance through what has been defined as a quiet encroachment of the ordinary, with threats to survival at times activating those networks for collective mobilization.

Protests also emerge, however, in "hit-and-run" forms, such as the writing of graffiti, the clandestine placement of flags or crosses in symbolic places, or the capture of official events (with, for instance, the singing

of prohibited songs at concerts or sporting events, or diversions of funerals). Protest waves tend to accompany different phases of the democratization process: they produce liberalization, push for breakdown, influence negotiations. In most of the cases, non-violent actions dominate the repertoire of protest, which tend to be built upon the tradition of pre-existing movements at the national level (from labour to religious issues). During public protests, concentration in public spaces helps to build solidarity and show support. If traditions are visible in the waves of protest for democracy, they are also producers of new forms of action. Especially, often short but intense, these waves of protest are punctuated by transformative events, often related to moments of brutal repression and/or innovative resistance to it.

Variable mixes of old and new social movements bring their own experiences within cross-class, cross-ethnic or cross-ideological coalitions, with politicization often related to a repression that comprises everyday harassment and extraordinary brutality. Oppositional round tables in Eastern Europe, like the camps in main squares during the Arab Spring, acquire an important role in the reconstruction of that public space that the authorities coerced and denied. They constitute powerful symbols, but also safe havens where fear is kept at bay and solidarity develops.

Intense emotions of rage and indignation allow protestors to overcome the fear that usually keeps squares (and streets) empty in authoritarian regimes. Claims become politicized, as growing participation creates a sense of empowerment. Relations among the various actors that participate in the resistance tend to become increasingly dense, with formal and informal networks connecting recently mobilized individuals into broad oppositional webs.



NOURAH ALGHANEM, WHO HELPED PLAN A 1990 PROTEST IN WHICH FOUR DOZEN SAUDI WOMEN DEFIED THE KINGDOM'S BAN ON DRIVING CARS, AT HER HOME IN RIYADH, SEPT. 29, 2017. THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT WOMEN WOULD BE ALLOWED TO DRIVE WAS A SWEET MOMENT FOR THOSE FIRST PROTESTERS, WHO PAID DEARLY FOR THEIR DEFIANCE. "I'D THOUGHT MAYBE I'D DIE BEFORE I SAW IT," ALGHANEM SAID OF THE BAN'S END.

These processes of intensification and densification help to explain a paradox often mentioned with regard to the breakdown of authoritarian regimes: the surprise of a change that nobody (among scholars and observers, but also often oppositional activists and repressive apparatuses) had predicted or expected. Beyond the individual changes in calculations of risks and advantages that the increase in the number of protestors brings about, collective processes also develop in action. Previously existing resources and op-

portunities—themselves built in (previous) action—cannot be overlooked. So while during the protest we see important moments of coordination in action, with a flourishing of new organizational forms (especially but not only coordinating committees), pre-existing social movement organizations and experiences are important as well. Given the repressive nature of the authoritarian regimes, these social movement organizations—often defined under the label of civil society—frequently have specific characteristics vis-à-

"Variable mixes of old and new social movements bring their own experiences within cross-class, cross-ethnic or cross-ideological coalitions, with politicization often related to a repression that comprises everyday harassment and extraordinary brutality."

vis those in democratic countries. Smaller in terms of members, even if occasionally capable of mobilizing hundreds or thousands in petitions, vigils or demonstrations, they are often forced to live a semi-clandestine life, alternating public statements in moments of liberalization with low-profile activities in moments of higher repression. They share with social movement organizations in democracies their preference for loosely networked horizontal structures. Giving a positive value to direct participation, they also often take the form of affinity groups, building upon family or friendship ties. Sometimes, political solidarities grow out of earlier contentious moments, remaining alive in little-visible forms. But new oppositional groups also emerge, mobilizing new generations of activists. If horizontality offers the flexibility that is all the more necessary given strong repressive apparatuses, loose networks still need some coordination, especially as the number of protestors increases. Coalition building happens during the protest waves, but the process is facilitated by previous experiences of coordination. Transnational networks might increase the organizational resources of those mobilizing for democracy, giving international visibility to the oppositional claims as well as some protection from repression to the activists.

As resistance intensifies, a challenging task for small and tendentially scattered—or loosely organized—groups is the development of a discourse capable of resonating with a broad range of political and social groups. The stigmatization of opponents as corrupt often emerges as an effective framing strategy targeting the enrichment of the political elites but also their betrayal of their original promises. As protest ex-

pands, demands become more politicized but also more radical, converging on the call for the fall of the authoritarian regime. Patriotic appeals are often visible in the use of national anthems and flags, as well as in the organization of protests on important national anniversaries. The reference to a shared destiny is used by activists to propose an alternative vision of the nation to the one presented by the authoritarian state, at the same time exploiting the possibility of occupying public spaces, transforming the meaning of permitted public demonstrations. An important part of the claiming and framing is reference to the visions and practices of democracy with support for participatory forms. In fact, it is not by chance that the more the transition is accompanied by mobilization "from below", the more attention to civil, political and social rights has been noted—in the democratic constitutions that signal the end of the transition to democracy, but also during the various steps in the development of democracy.

→ Donatella della Porta, Professor of Political Science, Dean of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences and Director of the PhD Program in Political Science and Sociology, Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence

Five Questions

ANSWERED BY PEER STEINBRÜCK



Peer Steinbrück served as Federal Minister of Finance from 2005 to 2009. He is chairman of the board of trustees of the Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung.

1. Who are you - and how do you stand up for democracy in your current work?

My name is been their series of and canchidated

Offices between 1930 and 2016 and canchidated

(or chance for his in the election (2013. He member of

advisory boards of several foundation and enterpri
les, as anothers of some books and affects and as

speaker on different events and conficences I try to,

angre for democracy, literality and an open lociety.

2. What does "living democracy" mean to you?

If living democracy means cantraversial factoren tanian debates; a various chril society; a doe model
amareness of representatives of politics, business, medias, churches, culture and posts.

3. What do you see as the three central values of democracy?

Divilion of policer; rule of law; freedom of

4. How would we realise that we no longer live in a democracy?

Philipped interference of courte-not to mention the abolition of the independency of justice; a successive tollower of state-controllodi institutions by a party; consorchis of medias.

5. Your three wishes for the future of democracy are...

If civil society that is quite abort of democratic constraints;
the containment of right and left radical parties with antidemocratic, bank european, racist and hatichalistic positions; for the big interms giants by dataprotiction, tax laws and competion law.

LIBERALISM, ILLIBERALISM AND COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL EUROPE

TEXT: IVAN KRASTEV



In Ferenc Karinthy's 1970 dystopian novel Metropole, a talented Hungarian linguist arrives at the Budapest airport but then goes through the wrong gate, gets on the wrong plane, and lands in a city where no one can understand him, despite the impressive array of languages he speaks. It is my fear that Central Europe is starting to resemble the city where the misfortunate Hungarian has landed. It is the most confusing and puzzling corner of the EU.

Populists' electoral victories in the region could not be treated as accidental. In the wake of the Law and Justice party's electoral victory in 2015 parliamentary elections in Poland, Adam Michnik, the editor of the liberal daily Gazeta Wyborcza commented, "sometimes a beautiful woman loses her mind and goes to bed with a bastard". Now it is time to acknowledge that the beautiful woman has decided to marry the bastard.

The "Central European paradox" is that, contrary to Western expectations, populists' electoral victories did not result in disappointment with democracy or rejection of the rule of law. The question then is, "Why do voters who routinely profess a commitment to democracy simultaneously support leaders who subvert it?"

The answer suggested by the Yale political science professor Milan Svolik is that political polarization triggered by populists' electoral victories "undercuts [the] public's ability to curb the illiberal inclination of the elected politicians". Confronted with a choice to vote for the party they support, while aware that the party leaders have violated democratic principles, or vote for the opposition they detest for the purpose of saving democracy, the ordinary voters follow their partisan interests and instincts rather than their commitment to democratic principles. In Svolik's words, "voters are reluctant to punish politicians for disregarding democratic principles when doing so requires abandoning one's favourite party or policy". Similarly to what we have witnessed in the United States in past years, political polarization has turned the Republic of the Citizens into a Republic of Fans. Enthralled fans, with their critical faculties switched off, are central to populists' understanding of politics as a loyalty game.

Citizens' loyalty is contingent and critical. Readiness to point out and correct mistakes by your own party is a sign for a liberal citizen of the highest loyalty. The loyalty of fans, by contrast, is zealous, unthinking and unswerving. Their cheers reflect their sense of belonging. "Trust but verify" is replaced by rowdy adoration. Those who refuse to applaud are traitors. Any statement of fact takes the form of a declaration of belonging. In the Republic of Fans, any electoral defeat is unfair or somebody's conspiracy and any criticism of one's own party amounts to treason. Populists prefer to view themselves as a persecuted minority, even when in government. Their dream is to be viewed as a victim and, as a result of that, to be allowed to act as a villain.

Svolik's research highlights the critical problem that liberal oppositions face in populist-governed Central Europe. As the previous local elections in Hungary and recent parliamentary and presidential elections in Poland demonstrate, liberals are doing well in the big urban centres and with young and better educated voters, but they are losing heavily in rural areas and small towns. As recent research shows, differences in voting behaviour and xenophobic attitudes in the East can be attributed less to economic factors than to unfavourable demographic trends such as high churn rates, a strongly ageing population and an oversupply of men of marriageable age. In a similar way, study of the political trends in the US reveals the critical importance of the "density divide". Trump's support is highest in regions characterized by lower density and populated mostly by white Americans. Voters in these regions are characterized by more conservative social views, an aversion to diversity, and a relative disclination to migrate and seek higher education.

In a sense, the post-communist East has become a European version of America's red states. Keeping in mind that, at current fertility rates and churn rates, Central Europeans are breeding themselves out of existence, it is clear that the votes of the best-educated urban voters will not be enough for liberal oppositions to return to power. But the decision of the Central European liberals to reach out to culturally alien voters by appealing to their commitment to democratic principles is doomed to fail.

Populist voters will not punish their parties even if they agree that their leaders are violating democratic principles. When the accusation is made that their leaders are lying while the opposition is telling the truth, their response is that the opposition is telling the truth not because of their commitment to the truth but because in this particular case the truth works for the opposition.

Making defence of democracy their major political identity when talking to voters leaves the anti-populist parties constantly vulnerable to attack for hypocrisy, because at the heart of the populists' success is that what they say is quite often not a lie but a half-truth. When Mr Kaczynski asserts that the constitutional court is always political and that impartial institutions do not exist, he is lying in order to subjugate the courts. But when Civic Platform insists that when constitutional judges enter the courtroom they are not influenced by who nominated them to the court, this is not the whole truth either.

In other words, making the defence of democracy their major political identity in a politics defined by extreme polarization is not the most effective way for liberals to defend democratic principles. What voters living outside the big urban areas expect is that liberals should defend not only democracy but that they should defend them.

In this sense it is impossible to make sense of the growing political divides in Europe but also within European societies if we do not realize that what liberals and illiberals cannot agree on is not the size of the government or the nature of economic policies but who belongs to the political community.

The clash between liberalism and illiberalism in Europe today is a contest between two contrasting ideas of who are the "people". Liberalism is a vote for an inclusive body politic representing the diverse nature of modern societies. Illiberalism is an exercise in democratic majoritarianism for the purpose of preserving the ethnic character of national democracies.

Illiberals grant their leaders the right to violate any democratic principle out of the fear that, if liberals come to power, they will "elect" the wrong people by changing citizenship laws or by reforming migration policies.

In a world characterized by open borders and shrinking populations, populist parties get elected by capitalizing on the demographic fears of otherwise democracy-loving publics.

→ Ivan Krastev, Chairman, Centre for Liberal Strategies and Permanent Fellow, Institute of Human Sciences "Democracy is an ideal that exists hardly any—where, it is an eternal and perpetual search and fight for obtaining rights and laws for better living. I advocate the participatory democracy of consensus rather than that of the majority because in my opinion the minority can well and truly hold the truth."

WHY ARE RAPPERS BECOMING PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT LEADERS? TUNE IN TO LISTEN TO THE SONGS BY THIAT AND KILIFEU OF THE HIP HOP GROUP KEUR GUI. THEIR MUSIC HAS BEEN VITAL TO MOBILIZE THE YOUTH IN SENEGAL AND SPREAD THEIR CLAIMS.





Thiat, Senegal, Co-Founder of Y'en a marre

How (Not) to Deal with the Vulnerabilities of Democracies to Outside Influence

TEXT: THORSTEN BENNER

For the first decade after the end of the Cold War, democracies in North America and Europe felt secure. Twenty years ago, 9/11 added a sense of insecurity in the US and other European countries targeted by terrorism. Democracies reacted with the "war on terror" that included a lot of self-defeating overreach that, in turn, ended up weakening democracy.

In recent years, democracies have experienced another dimension of vulnerability: authoritarian states such as China and Russia influencing democracies. The Kremlin's disinformation campaign during the 2016 US elections marked a rude awakening. After 1989, Western democracies got used to a state of affairs in which they influenced other non-democracies but were not on the receiving end themselves. Most Western democracies had forgotten about the Cold War, when influencing and interference efforts were standard business. In 1974, Helmut Schmidt became German chancellor after his predecessor Willy Brandt had to resign when authorities discovered that a close aide was a spy planted by the intelligence service of the German Democratic Republic. But those experiences had long been forgotten, so to many, revelations about the Kremlin's election interference or Beijing's efforts to

influence open societies came as a shock.

It is a welcome development that as a result of these trends, we have had an increasingly intense debate on how to deal with attempts of authoritarian states to influence democracies in recent years. However, some of the prominent approaches have weaknesses we need to address. They risk overestimating both the strength of authoritarian efforts as well as the level of virtue and integrity that exists within democracies. After the attempts to influence the 2016 US election, many tend to see Russian president Putin and the Kremlin's intelligence services as strategic geniuses. However, there is no conclusive evidence what exact effects the Kremlin's disinformation efforts had, let alone if they were decisive for Trump's victory.

Disinformation makes use of existing divides and wedge issues in society. Most disinformation efforts in the US come from within. Outside efforts take advantage of the post-truth information environment created by US media such as Fox News and Breitbart. It was the choices of key US political actors, in particular the Republican Party and its candidate Donald Trump, that allowed the Kremlin-orchestrated leaks of Hillary Clinton's and the Democratic National





"While the term 'sharp power' has inspired quite a bit of useful research, it has a number of shortcomings. It overlooks that from the vantage point of authoritarian systems, soft power exercised by democracies is seen as extremely 'sharp'."

Committee's partially doctored emails to have such an effect in the first place. Had Democrats and Republicans agreed on not using the documents leaked by Russian intelligence for campaign purposes, this would have blunted much of the effect. Reversing the overall decline of political culture in democracies would increase protection against outside disinformation efforts.

At the same time, it is crucial that we increase our evidence base. Social psychology can help us understand better when and how targeted advertising on social media has an effect on voter choices. It was a mistake by many in the media to believe the claims by Cambridge Analytica about their decisive role in the 2016 US election. This was little more than a PR operation by a company seeking to grow its business. As Lotus Ruan and Gabriella Lim (2021), experts at the University of Toronto, have argued, "researchers of disinformation should be as focused on trying to discern the actual effects of propaganda across the entire media ecosystem as they are on the number of clicks, tweets, and likes a campaign receives. Evidence of activity is not the same as evidence of impact".

Similar problems exist with regard to the increasingly popular concept of "sharp power" that was conceived by the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and even found its way onto a 2017 Economist cover. US political scientist Joseph Nye (2018) argues that "whereas soft power harnesses the allure of culture and values to augment a country's strength, sharp power helps authoritarian regimes compel behavior at home and manipulate opinion abroad". In the words of the initial NED (2017) study, sharp power "pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries". The term is said to capture "the malign and aggressive nature of the authoritarian projects, which bear little resemblance to the benign attraction of soft power".

While the term "sharp power" has inspired quite a bit of useful research, it has a number of shortcomings. It overlooks that from the vantage point of authoritarian systems, soft power exercised by democracies is seen as extremely "sharp". Moscow and Beijing feel threatened since democratic soft power goes to the very legitimacy of their regimes. Precisely because the Chinese party state does

not tolerate any challenge to its absolute claim to power does it fight back so hard. Understanding this does by no means equal condoning Beijing's actions.

In addition, some of the most effective sources of influence of authoritarian states in democracies do not "pierce, penetrate or perforate" any protective layer but come through open doors. Authoritarian states benefit from the one-sided openness of democracies. Whereas China, Russia and others tightly control access to outsiders, democracies are much more open. Many of the most effective efforts to build up stocks of influence come through open doors. Unlike in the Cold War, when the economies of Western democracies and Soviet bloc states were decoupled to a very large degree, today's effort profit from the high degree of economic and financial integration between democracies and authoritarian states, such as China and Russia. Close economic and financial ties offer convenient ways to build leverage. One of them is to weaponise market access, e.g. by threatening to make access to the Chinese market more difficult for companies headquartered in countries pursuing policies Beijing dislikes. Another way is to simply buy the support of elites in democracies. That doesn't need to take the form of bribery given that you can legally buy the services of many professional elites, in lobbying, PR, finance, law and also academia. The case of Gerhard Schröder, who is now in the service of the Kremlin, demonstrates that you can even buy former chancellors. Smaller authoritarian states such as Azerbaijan also know how to use this very well as shown by the many revelations about close ties of some German policymakers to the regime.

The best antidote to this is mandatory transparency requirements. Professionals in democracies are free to offer their services to whoever they choose to. But the public deserves to know about this. Transparency is a response to authoritarian influence that uses the power of public debate in democracies. In addition, democracies should invest in institutions that strengthen democracy globally. Most of all, democracies should invest in their own credibility by rejecting enemies of democracy at the ballot box and by abiding by self-professed principled in their actions globally. That is the best way to keep soft power sharp.

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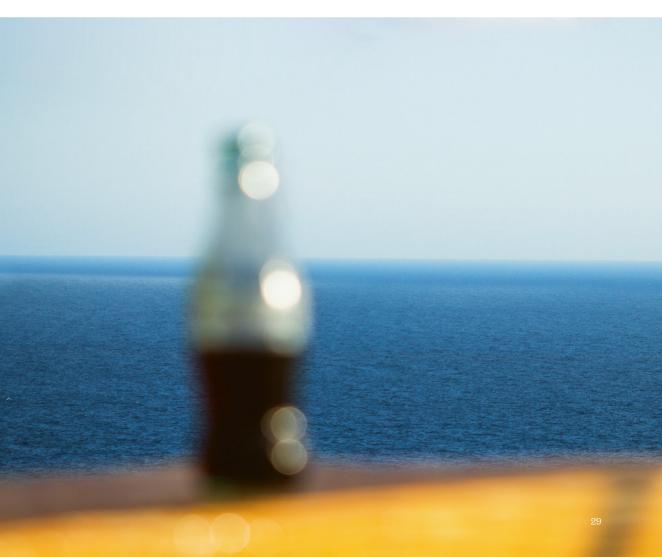
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Democracy promotion long took centre stage in how organizations such as the United Nations or the European Union attempted to foster peace in the world. This is changing. Fighting terrorism, controlling migration, and ensuring stability and security are now at the top of the list of priorities. Is the path to peace still paved with democracy?

Peace Out, Democracy?

TEXT: JULIA STRASHEIM



"Democracy is not a bottle of Coca-Cola which you can import" (JULIUS NYERERE)

Anyone who has ever opened a textbook on international affairs has probably stumbled across the sea of acronyms used to abbreviate the names of United Nations peace operations: UNTAC, UNMIK or UNMIBH for the missions in Cambodia, Kosovo, or Bosnia are just a few examples.

Concerning UNMIK, the mission created following the Kosovo War in 1999, peace researchers like to use an anecdote to describe how UN missions are often decided on in a top-down manner by international experts, while local populations affected by war rarely get a say in how "their" peace is built. After UNMIK was deployed, as the story goes, it emerged that the English pronunciation of the name ("anmik") means "enemy" in the Kosovar Albanian dialect—a particularly embarrassing public relations failure.

If the names of UN peace operations tell us something about decision—making in international affairs, it is difficult not to notice a recent development. From the first UN mission, formed in 1948, until 2010, the name of only one out of 66 missions included the term "stabilization". But three of seven missions created since 2010 do so. What has changed?

The Idea: From the Bullet to the Ballot Box

Promoting peace in the world is among the core goals of both the UN and the EU.

The UN Charter, which is the organization's founding document from 1945, lays down the goal of maintaining international peace prominently in Article 1. In Western Europe, it was the idealistic vision of Europe as a "peace project" that drove integration after World War II—a notion that also shaped how policymakers developed the EU's foreign policy.

How the UN and the EU attempt to foster peace in the world is often described as *liberal peacebuilding*. This means that policymakers think the best recipe against violence is strengthening the institutions and processes associated with liberal democracy. In the

past, this has included tasks such as sending election observers to monitor polling stations in Afghanistan, launching radio programmes to disseminate information on elections in Cambodia ("Radio UNTAC"), or training police officers, prosecutors and judges in Kosovo.

The idea behind this engagement rests on the democratic peace thesis, which posits that democracies are not only unlikely to engage in war with other democracies, but that they also resolve conflict peacefully within their borders. Promoting democracy in post-conflict societies should thus help to foster peace, because warring parties no longer see the need to fight each other on the battlefield, but do so at the ballot box.

The Reality: Frustrated Expectations

But there's a catch, and liberal peacebuilding is in crisis. This has many reasons.

One is the profound disappointment among policymakers with the ambitious peace and state-building activities of the 1990s and early 2000s, such in Cambodia or Afghanistan, where peace has remained fragile and democracy has failed to consolidate.

This has led many to realize that a top-down export of Western blueprints of what states should look like brings neither peace nor democracy, and that democratization is not always the best path towards peace. While established democracies, such as Germany, resolve political conflict through elections, in societies after war, elections can spark new violence, and fears of violence inform voters' choices.

Take Liberia, where the first civil war ended in 1996. A year later, Liberians voted rebel leader Charles Taylor into office. This was not simply because Taylor had a particularly persuasive election manifesto, but because he had already announced his return to war if defeated. His supporters were known for the slogan: "He killed my pa. He killed my ma. I'll vote for him."

Likewise, in Nigeria, fears of violence marked the lead-up to the 2045 election. To promote a peaceful vote, soft drinks manufacturer Coca-Cola released a special version of its international "Share a Coke" campaign. The ad depicted two customized coke bottles where the traditional red-and-white wrapping was changed to include the words "Broom" and "Umbrella"—the symbols of the two major political parties in Nigeria—clinking at the top to signal national unity.

Import and Export: Democratic Backsliding at Home

Speaking of soft drinks and politics, Tanzania's first president Julius Nyerere once said: "Democracy is not a bottle of Coca-Cola which you can import" (in: Kabogo 2020). Thus, among the main reasons why democracy promotion no longer takes centre stage in peacebuilding is that democracy's most enthusiastic exporters—the EU, its member states, and the United States—face issues at home that deeply affect their foreign policies.

In the EU, democratic backsliding in member states such as Hungary or Poland, where governments openly challenge the fundamental democratic structures and values of the Union, has the potential to undermine the EU's legitimacy abroad.

In the US, President Donald Trump between 2017 and 2021 voiced thinly-veiled contempt towards the institutions of the liberal international order, such as the UN. As two eminent democracy scholars recently said: While democracy activists around the world long looked to the US for support, during the Trump presidency it was "illiberal politicians and authoritarian regimes" who did (Carothers 2020). And since Trump left office, the lack of commitment to democracy among Republicans, most visible in their efforts to restrict voting rights, has further damaged the "global democratic cause" (Diamond 2021).

Yet the rise of non-Western actors has also added to the crisis of liberal peacebuilding, meaning China in particular. Today, China is among the top personnel contributors to UN missions and gives billions in aid to governments in the Global South. The "Chinese peace" (Kuo 2020) emphasizes stability,

development, or infrastructure, rather than democracy; and the resources Beijing offers to conflict-affected countries diminish democracy-promoters' political leverage.

The Implications: A Pivot to Stabilization

The consequences of these profound changes not only become evident in the names of UN peace missions, where "stabilization" is the new go-to catchphrase. They are also visible in the creation of the European Peace Facility in early 2021. This fund, for the first time in history, allows the EU to export lethal weapons and military equipment to third countries.

While the changes in the UN and EU do not fully overlap and the concept of "stabilization" still lacks a clear definition, these developments show that a new way to respond to violent conflict has emerged. The UN and the EU have lowered their transformative ambitions. Promoting stabilization, fighting terrorism, controlling migration, and strengthening the capacity of security sectors to take better action against armed groups now head the list of priorities. While liberal peacebuilding regarded democracy as a necessary precondition for stability after war, stabilization rests upon the idea that democracy can only follow stability (Belloni 2020).

In theory, this could be true, but the current trends in international interventions could also turn out to be counterproductive or even to exacerbate conflict and insecurity.

Exporting weapons, so that armies in countries such as Mali are more capable of fighting terrorist groups, is neither a form of sustainable peacebuilding that tackles the root causes of war, such as inequality, nor does it solve what actually makes armies ineffective, such as corruption.

Downgrading democracy or human rights when working with security forces also risks achieving the very opposite of peace, if army personnel end up using violence against civilians. For instance, in Mali in 2020, more civilians were killed by state security forces that receive training from the EU mission in the country than by jihadist groups (Traoré 2021). This destroys trust in the state and helps the recruitment calls of armed groups.

The Future: Quo Vadis, Peacebuilding?

In the long term, international engagement must rely on a more holistic approach. This does not mean going back to the times of top-down democracy promotion and ready-made Western blueprints for peace. Local populations in conflict-affected countries have good ideas of their own for promoting peace, and peacebuilding must rest on context-sensitive approaches that incorporate their voices and solutions.

A good way to go forward could be to build on Carothers' call for eradicating old boundaries: If democratic backsliding in established democracies is a defining feature of our time, this can also create opportunities for a new type of democracy support where shared problems of established democracies and post-conflict societies are addressed simultaneously. States could learn from another without resorting to the usual one-way direction of support from the Global North to the South. This could also help renew the legitimacy of international engagement by showing that democracies are "open to confronting their own shortcomings" (Carothers 2020).

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IS GLOBAL DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS? TUNE IN AS WE DISCUSS THIS QUESTION — AND OTHERS — WITH GUESTS SUCH AS ANNA LÜHRMANN, MAX CZOLLEK, OR KÜBRA GÜMÜŞAY ON OUR PODCAST "DER KRISENLOTSE". NOW AVAILABLE ON ALL MAJOR STREAMING SERVICES (IN GERMAN). \rightarrow



"For me, democracy is the vision and the process that brings positive change in people's lives. Every citizen should get the opportunity to exercise this right with responsibility. Even though democracy says who won the election, minorities

must be respected in all spheres of life. Women must not have to wait for dawn to go out and feel secure and comfortable walking on an equal footing with men all over the world; this is what democracy is about."



Babita Basnet, Nepal, Journalist and Women's Rights Expert

The European Capital of Democracy: An Exercise in Political Education



Friends and foes alike are convinced: Europe and democracy are in a deep crisis. Representatives of all political hues continue to emphasize this lamentable state of affairs in seemingly endless academic debates and at conferences. Of course, it is of utmost importance to analyse the cause of the crisis, but these discussions often stop halfway with little focus on solutions and are therefore unsatisfactory. Frankly, many have already had enough of such discourses.

What might a new approach to combating this crisis look like? How could concrete, positive, democratic interventions also become effective on a larger scale? After all, democracy does not feed on itself. It is important that citizens feel empowered to change society through democratic means. And the more they participate in the democratic process, the more this sense of empowerment can grow.

For this to happen, political education should be readily available for everyone. And nothing is as instructive for citizens as gaining political experience through active participation in a democratic act. This leads to the important realization that democracy is much more than voting once every four years.

This is where the proposal of a European Capital of Democracy comes in. This initiative is an exercise in political education that involves the entire European population. Starting in 2022, one of the thousands of mid-size to major cities from the 47 member states of the Council of Europe and Kosovo will be chosen each year as the European Democracy Capital, thus becoming a Europe-wide hallmark for strengthening and expanding democratic practice.

Candidate cities must present an ambitious programme of democratic activities in their own area of expertise in order to convince a jury of experts and be shortlisted. A citizen jury of 10,000 Europeans from all participating countries will be presented with the shortlist of five candidates and will finally select the European Capital of Democracy via an online platform. The "Innovation in Politics Awards", which have been awarded annually by a jury of one thousand citizens since 2017, serve as a model. The sophistication of the jury system lies in the combination of professionalism and accessibility for all citizens, which ensures the legitimacy of the chosen city as the focus of the Europe-wide democratic discourse.

The city that is awarded the honorary title is expected to curate, organize and implement a variety of programmes and events aimed at improving and strengthening democracy in cooperation with civil society and citizens during its Democracy Year. Politicians, experts, artists, citizens and media representatives from all over Europe will be invited to observe and participate in these activities.

The city will also become a stage for a Europe-wide discourse on new developments in democracy and participatory practice at all levels of social action. New possibilities of digital technologies for citizen participation will be discussed in special forums, art festivals will deal with current and future challenges for our society, and youth events will offer digital games on democracy and the challenges of dealing with disinformation, among other things.

These activities open up numerous opportunities for organizations, foundations and institutions to collaborate, share experiences in democratic practice and implement their initiatives. This wealth of participatory and cross-party positive exchange across national borders sparks imagination, invigorates curiosity about best practices and shows citizens new perspectives on how we as Europeans want to live together now and in the future.

A European Capital of Democracy sheds light on the most successful local, regional, national, and transnational bottom-up initiatives so that they gain prominence and multiply their impact across Europe. By creating a focus on democratic opportunities and solutions, this concept connects politicians, activists and citizens even in the most remote places and brings together all those who are operating within the political challenges of our century. The cross-party discourse is also more constructive and positive at a transnational than a national level, because politicians usually only compete with each other in a national context. The experience of the Innovation in Politics Awards has shown that constructive exchange beyond the party family works best when national borders are crossed. Hence, the fact that Europe's politicians are often being excessively entrenched in national discourse can be turned into an unexpected advantage in this project.

A European Capital of Democracy will not be another space for attempts to analyse the unpleasant status quo. It will be a marketplace for new, visionary and innovative projects and methodologies, and for everything that works well. This approach completely transforms the crisis discourse, which suddenly becomes constructive, solution-oriented and empowering. It serves as a driver and accelerator for concrete improvements.

The crises of democracy and the crises of Europe are structurally intertwined. They have arisen because there is not enough democracy and not enough Europe. The citizens' criticism of the democratic system and of Europe is based, among other things, on disappointment about too little participation. In order to give Europeans the opportunity to shape their present and future, the existing limits of democracy must be overcome. Hopefully, this process will also include a discourse on how Europe can become more efficient for its inhabitants and for global society as a whole. And what higher goal could political education achieve?

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Class division is seen as a main characteristic of British society. But while for many the explicit differentiation into upper, middle, and working classes still resonates, social class is on the decrease as a dividing factor in UK politics. Instead, attitudes to constitutional questions, regional and national political communities, as well as age have become the new dividing lines in UK politics today.

From Social Class to Age: Political Realignment in **UK Politics** and the "Devolution Generation"



When we look towards the United Kingdom, stereotypical images of social class differences are easily invoked. This stretches beyond cultural references and institutions—the monarchy, adversarial Westminster democracy, and football—to the essence of political decision—making and public attitudes. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the debates about Brexit. Repeatedly commentators sought to explain the Brexit vote by invoking a social class divide: they painted an image of Brexit as an expression of frustration that set apart the abandoned working classes, especially those situated in the North of England, from the cosmopolitan middle-class elites of London and southern English university towns (Farage 2016/Crampton 2016/Harris 2016).



While blaming Brexit (like other divisions in contemporary UK politics) on frustrated working classes is compelling because it fits the classic image of a country divided by social class, it is a poor reflection of actual political attitudes. Indeed, inequalities in the UK, regional and class-based, are persistent, and some association between socio-economic background and Brexit sympathies did emerge (Mckenzie 2017/Bhambra 2017). But there was much variation within traditional working-class areas in the North and, furthermore, many areas with very high Brexit support were actually in the South—on the whole, wealthier and Conservative-leaning regions. Brexit cannot be explained by focusing on any one group of the population—and must not be blamed on the working classes.

The Waning of Class Differences in UK Politics

Class differences have continuously become less relevant in determining the dividing lines between groups of British voters—a process that began before Brexit but has accelerated since. While those in higher social classes used to be much more likely to vote for the Conservative Party and, conversely, working-class people for the Labour Party, this relationship has weakened over time. The 2017 UK general election saw Theresa May's Conservatives increase their vote share disproportionately in lower social classes, while the Labour party—led by its most left-wing leader in decades, Jeremy Corbyn—gained votes particularly among those in the managerial and professional social classes (Skinner/Mortimore 2017). This breakdown of classic social class political alignment continued into the 2019 general election.

Realignment, Devolution, and an Unprecedented Gap in Age

Crucially, the decreasing link between social class and political alignment is not unique to general elections and UK-wide debates. It features strongly in the devolved nations—Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland—and highlights how new dividing lines are replacing the UK's traditional class cleavage. As a part of a process called devolution, sub-national parliaments or assemblies were established (or re-established) in the late 1990s and powers deferred from the

UK parliament at Westminster to Edinburgh, Cardiff, and Belfast as well as, more recently, to newly established metro mayors in English regions. This has brought about a realignment of political attitudes. While initially most people in Scotland, for example, emphasized their class identity over their Scottish one, saying they had more in common with someone of the same social class living in England than with a Scot of the opposite social class, this has fundamentally changed since the advancement of devolution, and it has important consequences for political choices. Over the past decade, who people vote for has come to depend largely on identification with political communities—whether people in Scotland, for example, identify more with other Scots—replacing social class as the most important determinant (Eichhorn/Kandlik/Kenealy 2015).

What is more, these national and regional identities are furthered by a new dividing line in UK politics: age. Age patterns have always set political attitudes apart, but the magnitude of age as a political cleavage has increased dramatically in the UK over the past decade. In the Brexit vote in 2016 roughly seven out of ten 18 to 24-year-olds voted against leaving the EU, compared to only just over a third of those aged 65 and above (Moore 2015). The 2017 UK general election saw an, until then, unprecedented gap in young people's support for the Labour Party over the Conservatives (Sloam/Henn 2019), only to be outdone in the 2019 UK general election, where 56 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds voted for Labour, but only 14 per cent of those aged 70 or older (McDonnel/Curtice 2019). Today, young people are not only more likely to vote for Labour, they are also more likely to be in favour of Scottish or Welsh independence.

New Political Alignments and the "Devolution Generation"

Devolution, national/regional political communities, and age are so bound up that the way they relate to one another is key to understanding political realignment and the decreasing importance of social class in contemporary UK politics. In combination with age, devolved legislative powers and institutions are now shaping people's understanding of political communities, and more so than social class. Advancing devolution has raised the profile of sub-UK political institutions. For many, the Covid-19 pandemic—with its different rules in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and (to some extent) even some metropolitan regions in England—not only demonstrated that health is a devolved power, but crucially that political institutions other than those at Westminster devise and deliver policies that directly affect people's lives.

This is particularly true of younger people, where generations are now coming of age who know nothing but devolution in the UK. For many Scottish and Welsh young people, for example, their identification with their respective sub-national political community is increasingly more important than social class—not because they are raging nationalists, but because they are socialized into political communities that are not united in Westminster. In Wales, for example, support for independence is pronounced among both Welsh- and English-speaking young people. And while age is a key factor in political alignment in its own right, it is even more pressing since the voting age was lowered to sixteen in Scotland and Wales, but not in other parts of the UK, as young people increasingly come to question which political community they can actually influence as citizens.

The big question in UK politics is thus no longer how to overcome the class cleavage, it is whether and how political institutions and parties adapt to changes brought about by advancing devolution and, in particular, whether they manage to engage young people who expect different pathways to shape a future that might have little to do with the classic ideas of the United Kingdom we have become used to.

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"Democracy is our greatest chance to listen to every voice in our communities and create a shared vision of society that responds to the needs of the present, while building hope for the future. With Volt, I advocate for democracy by bringing citizens closer together to listen to each other, find common ground

on shared values, and bring about concrete change for their towns, regions and continent through social activism and political elections for a shared, transnational and progressive future."



Federica Vinci, Italy, Co-President of Volt Italia

The Populist Radical Right & Collective Memory

TEXT: LUCA MANUCCI

Populism is successful across the globe, from the Philippines to Turkey, in Brazil and Italy. It attracts much attention, especially because its illiberal and authoritarian tendencies challenge pillars of liberal democracy such as the separation of powers, rule of law, free media, and protection of minorities. Regardless of its definition, there is a large consensus that populism separates society into two antagonistic groups: "the people" and "the elites". Building on this Manichaean separation, populists claim that those in power have lost touch with the men and women in the street, ignore their needs and desires, and are only interested in keeping their privileges. It is an idea encapsulated in the speech that Pablo Escobar gives in the TV show Narcos: "I am tired of the people with power running this country. This is a fight between the people with power and poor people, weak people. If I am elected, those who never had a voice will have a voice."

Things get confusing when people read that Hugo Chavez and Marine Le Pen are both exemplars of populist rhetoric, which is true because populism can be combined with other ideologies such as socialism, nativism, or liberalism. Adding to the confusion, populism is often misused as a synonym for far right, because around the world it is a specific type of populist party that is achieving the most stunning electoral success: populist radical-right parties. Why are these parties so successful? Trying to make sense of this phenomenon, political scientists borrowed from economists the idea that this success is the result of a strong demand which is met by a corresponding supply. Among other things, citizens are supposed to vote for populist radical-right parties because they feel that their social status is threatened, they are unsatisfied with the way democracy works, and they are in favour of a traditional approach to family and gender while opposing the arrival of migrants.

This approach, however, is limited: the argument that people vote for populist parties because populist parties exist, and vice versa, is circular. Moreover, it has a crucial weakness: How do we explain the fact that in some countries

populist radical-right parties are in power, while in others they remain at the margins of the political system? How can the populist radical right succeed in countries where the conditions are unfavourable, and fail in contexts where it is supposed to thrive? My answer to this question is that we have to introduce another element: collective memory (Manucci 2020). In Western Europe, countries building a collective memory that strongly stigmatizes the fascist past curb the success of right-wing populism. Conversely, where historical revisionism normalizes the fascist, right-wing populist parties thrive.

In recent years, however, the effects of collective memories are fading, and this confirms that democracy is not given once and for all, but is a process. Germany is the country that most of all built its post-war democracy on a strong condemnation of the Nazi past, coming to terms and often dealing with its cumbersome legacy through a process called Vergangenheitsbewältigung. Since 2017, however, Alternative for Germany (AfD) proved that no country is immune to the populist radical right: a nationalist, anti-liberal party claiming that Germany should stop feeling ashamed for its Nazi past, it entered the Bundestag in 2017. For the moment an alliance with AfD at the national level seems unlikely, but should this barrier fall, Germany will join the long list of countries where radical-right populist parties can exercise power.

Italy, on the contrary, never dealt with its own fascist past, preferring to consider itself an unfortunate ally of Hitler and victim of the circumstances. The collective memory of fascism has been largely built on the false myth of the "good Italian", and since the 1990s, radical-right parties have been in power thanks to the alliance formed with Silvio Berlusconi. In August 2021, two members of the populist radical-right Lega proposed shocking amendments.



A FASCIST MOTTO READING IN ITALIAN "MANY ENEMIES, MUCH HONOR", DECORATES THE MOSAIC PAVEMENT ON THE AVENUE FROM THE OLYMPIC STADIUM TO A FASCIST-ERA OBELISK, IN ROME'S FORO ITALICO SPORTING GROUND. THE FORO ITALICO, FORMERLY CALLED FORO MUSSOLINI (MUSSOLINI'S FORUM), WAS BUILT UNDER MUSSOLINI'S REGIME TO BOLSTER ROME'S BID FOR THE OLYMPICS IN THE 1940'S.

Economy Undersecretary Claudio Durigon called for a park, which now honours the two iconic anti-Mafia investigators killed in 1992, Falcone and Borsellino, to be renamed after Arnaldo Mussolini, Benito's brother. A few days later, former city councillor Andrea Santucci proposed renaming Rome's Piazzale dei Partigiani (Square of the Partisans) "Adolf Hitler Square". While these are provocations that will not be implemented, you would be surprised to know that in Italy there are countless streets, parks, and squares named after members of Mussolini's regime. The same goes for the country's colonial past, often celebrated through street names and monuments.

The recent debate about statues is strictly linked to the issue of collective memory and its role in shaping today's societies. For example, in 2020 the statue of 17th-century slave trader Edward Colton was pushed into Bristol harbour in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. The memory of the slave trade also re-emerged in Belgium, where several civil society actors started a critical reflection about the statues commemorating King Leopold II, and eventually the Brussels Parliament set up a committee to "decolonize the public sphere". This debate should not be about "cancel culture", as far-right activists often claim by playing the victim card, because changing a street name or removing a statue is not a matter of censorship or cancelling our past. First, it would be impossible to cancel centuries of colonialism, racism, and slavery. Second, this is a debate about what parts of our past we want to remember and which we want to commemorate, what values to pass on, and how to do that. If anything, it is the opposite of cancelling our past: it is an open discussion of a controversial topic that we have preferred to ignore for too long.

In the meantime, Hungary is showing us how populist radical-right actors can manipulate history once they are in power. Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister since 2010, declared that his goal is to build an illiberal country, and he is rewriting history accordingly. Among other things, Orbán is pushing the rehabilitation of Miklós Horthy, right-wing autocrat between 1920 and 1944, ally of Hitler, and responsible for allowing the mass deportation of Hungarian Jews to death camps. Orbán's government erected statues and memorials in Horthy's honour and renamed squares and streets after him. In Brazil, populist radical-right president Jair Bolsonaro repeatedly praised the military dictatorship that between 1964 and 1985 tortured and killed its opponents, and he is acting without any respect for the constitution or the country's minorities. The darkest pages of our history should not be celebrated, but neither should they be forgotten. What we decide to collectively commemorate is like a mirror: it reflects our image and shapes our identity. We can choose to create a convenient, glorious, Photoshopped image of our past but-like in Dorian Gray's portrait-something, somewhere, will begin to rot.

→ Luca Manucci, Researcher, University of Lisbon

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EVER WONDERED WHAT WE NEED ARCHIVES FOR? THIS SHORT VIDEO INTRODUCES ARCHIVES AS SPACES OF DEMOCRACY THAT HELP US TO UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT, SIMPLY BY PRESERVING THE PAST. (WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES) \rightarrow



"In spite of the challenges it faces in practice, I'm all in for democracy and I work to ensure that 'we the people' means everyone. By now we should be able to put in place a system that does take everyone into account. One that allows everyone – men and women, privileged and poor – to benefit from and

contribute to the society he or she lives in our terms equal to those of others. I work for the practice of such true democracy by raising awareness about the increasingly opaque, unelected systems that shape our reality and developing pathways for how we, ALL the people, can take our power back."



Rolling Back the Rollback

DO WE HAVE A EUROPEAN STRATEGY ON CIVIC SPACE?

TEXT: MARTA PARDAVI

It is time for a European strategy on civic space to protect and foster a vibrant, independent and pluralistic civil society in the EU. Without it, the EU cannot effectively tackle the challenges that it faces, such as the climate crisis, recovery from Covid, rapid digitalization and not least the growing illiberalism and ambivalence about democracy. Citizens and their groups have the right to participate in policymaking through channels of public deliberation and should feel heard if they are to be motivated to take part in them. While in some member states independent civil society needs support to counter threats posed by illiberals, civil society everywhere in the EU needs recognition as an essential stakeholder in governance and as a strategic partner for EU institutions and governments. The European Commission should launch a European strategy on civic space to reinforce and boost citizens' right to participate in, and contribute to, solving the global challenges we must address together.

In a liberal democracy, civil society is a key element for building a solid foundation based on citizens' trust and participation in democratic processes, and for holding government and institutions accountable to the voters and the law. When a number of EU

governments are intent on squeezing civic space further, this constitutional principle of the Union is in need of reinforcement.

Lessons from many EU member states show that focusing on building democratic institutions without strengthening civil society and citizens' understanding of democracy itself creates a weak footing for democracy. Where citizens fail to appreciate democratic institutions and can no longer trust them, those who are interested in undermining and dismantling democracy will seize the opportunity to erode it.

The lack of trust in democratic institutions and processes has come to jeopardize democracy in Europe. The real problem is not that most people prefer an alternative to democracy, it is rather the ambivalence about democracy's meaning and potential to deliver tangible positive results in our lives that creates a crisis of trust and deep divisions between people and institutions, and among people themselves (More in Common Deutschland/Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH 2021). Young people feel most ignored by politics, and do not see their concerns as adequately represented.

Efforts to strengthen democracy in Europe should include robust efforts to strengthen civil society itself, in all its roles—as watch—



dogs, policy advocates, community builders and service providers. Particularly in those EU member states where democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law are under threat, these efforts should be boosted and led by the EU itself.

In the past few years, it has become increasingly hard for civil society to operate in many EU member states (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020). A decade ago, comparisons between the threats and injustices faced by human rights defenders and civil society organizations in Turkey or Russia and those in certain EU member states would have been inconceivable. Today, we are no longer surprised and are slightly fatigued when someone asks this question.

Following a period of slumber and slow recognition of the human rights and rule of law problems within the EU's realm, particularly but not only in Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, in the past few years the European Commission has started to tackle this regression. Although it has not been using its powers to take member states to court for breaching EU values to its full extent, it has launched several strategies to achieve better protection for fundamental rights, democracy and rule of law in the EU itself.

At the core of these strategies are the EU anti-racism action plan 2020—2025 (European Commission 2020), the Gender Equality Strategy 2020—2025 (European Commission 2020), the strategy to strengthen the rule of law within the Union (European Commission 2019) and the European democracy action plan (European Commission 2020).

These strategies also recognize the important role of civil society in protecting and promoting these fundamental values, and call for supporting civil society initiatives in these fields. Moreover, in spring 2021, with the launch of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme, the EU made the first real investment to support fundamental rights, civic space, democracy and rule of law within the EU itself.

Despite the likely pushbacks from some recalcitrant member state governments, these strategies need to be converted into reality, and civil society has an essential role in making this happen.

However, when it comes to other important challenges, the European Commission does not seem as vocal about involving and supporting civil society. It is telling that the Commission Communication on the European Green Deal has but two mentions of 'civil

society' or 'NGOs' (European Commission 2019). The Conference on the Future of Europe has been found wanting in genuinely strong and meaningful civil society participation, despite loud calls from NGOs and citizens.

A European Strategy on Civic Space

Our vision should be an expanded civic space where civil society becomes a permanent, empowered and engaged actor in European governance. This calls for moving beyond diagnosing and addressing the shrinking of civic space in the context of democratic erosion in Europe. Instead, our focus should be on expanding the space for citizen action, creating an inclusive space that provides effective citizen participation in the realization of European responses to European as well as global challenges.

As a first step, the European Commission should take the lead and unequivocally express its political commitment to supporting and expanding civil society space in the EU and civil society participation in EU policy—making and implementation. A communication from the Commission should acknowledge the key importance of civil society in Europe both for preserving democracy and for achieving the strategic priorities of the EU.

Beyond taking stock of what the EU has done so far, the Commission should lay out the path for further measures in the field of protecting, supporting and cooperating with civil society. The legal framework, the EU acquis on civil society, should be fortified by adopting legal safeguards at the EU level for civil society organizations. The Commission should not hesitate to pursue legal action if member states breach EU law to stifle civil society organizations. Since these breaches are on the rise, the Commission should also include the monitoring of civil society space in all the EU27 as part of the annual Rule of Law Reports, and take follow-up action for severe breaches of EU law.

Civil society organizations have been calling for more effective ways to contribute to strengthening democracy in the EU. Better interaction with EU institutions—improving the structured dialogue and consultations with civil society—would be key in this regard. The EU should promote and support the

transnational and cross-sectoral cooperation of civil society so that its policymaking builds on inclusive and plural viewpoints. In the absence of member state compliance, we depend on the Commission to build a Union that enables people and groups to participate meaningfully in the political, economic, social and cultural life of their societies and facilitates effective access to information and meaningful dialogue with governments.

→ Marta Pardavi, Co-Chair, Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC)

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"For me, democracy means playing an active part in decision—making processes. The past has repeatedly shown us that movements bring about change. When young people take to the streets demanding climate justice, for example, that's democracy in action. It's our way of participating in a political system where many of us cannot vote. Democracy is everyday action and not just making your cross at the Federal Elections."

TODAY'S SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ARE LESS DEPENDENT ON TRADITIONAL MEDIA. THEY COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY VIA SOCIAL MEDIA. JUST TAKE A LOOK AT FRIDAY'S FOR FUTURE'S INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT!





Quang Paasch, Germany, Spokesperson of Fridays for Future Germany

LIVING DEMOCRACY

Let It be Demo

PHOTO: RUZBEH MEHDIZADEH TITLE: BORDERLESSNESS



LIVING DEMOCRACY

CURATED BY JOCELINE BERGER, FOUNDER, WIRSPRECHENFOTOGRAFISCH E.V.

wirsprechenfotografisch is an intercultural photography and education project that aims to support peaceful coexistence in a multicultural and multi-religious society and to create spaces for encounters. With the organization of joint workshops and projects consisting of refugees and locals, the breakdown of negative stereotypes and encouraging a creative dialogue is among themselves in focus. Refugees should participate in the civil society, develop political awareness and have the opportunity to get involved. In particular, the medium of photography as a universal form of communication is used for implementation. Since 2017, the project has also set itself the aim of improving the historical and political awareness of young people on a national and international level. wirsprechenfotografisch was initiated by the Islamic and political scientist Joceline Berger-Kamel in 2015 in Hamburg as a reaction to the growing refugee movements.

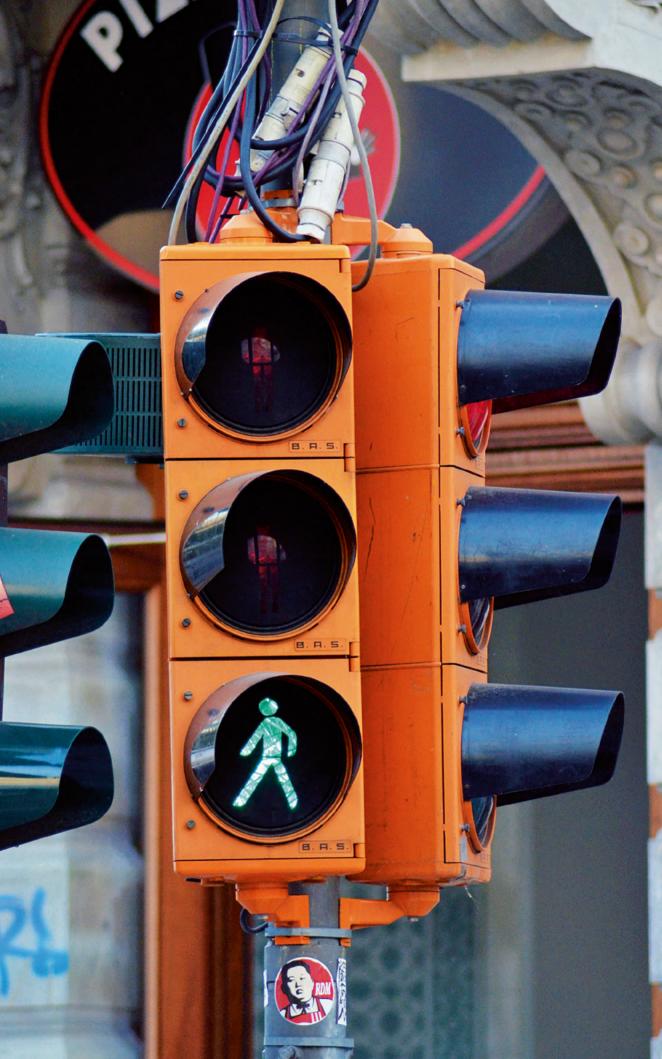




PHOTO: CARLOS ARGUELLO TITLE: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION





PHOTO: HOMAYOUN BAHMANIA TITLE: SAFETY





PHOTO: CARLOS GUTIERREZ TITLE: HOMOPHOBIA





PHOTO: ABDURAHMAN HATUEV TITLE: SOCIAL JUSTICE



PHOTO: LUCRECIO BRENES TITLE: TOLERANCE







PHOTO: RUZBEH MEHDIZADEH TITLE: FREEDOM OF RELIGION

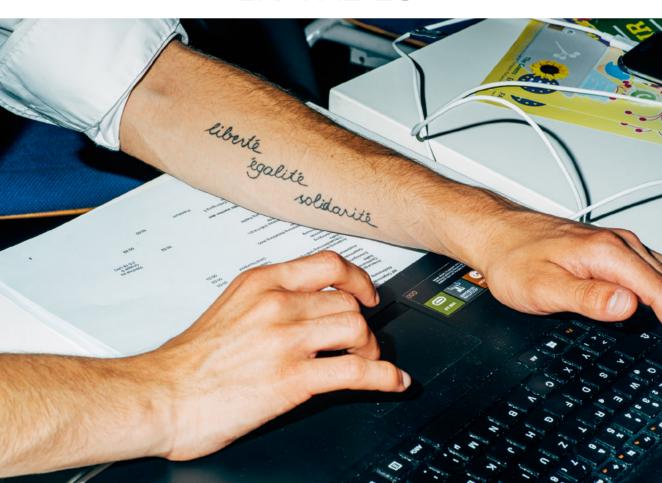
FIND OUT MORE ABOUT WIRSPRECHENFOTO-GRAFISCH E.V., AN INITIATIVE THAT USES PHOTOGRAPHY TO SUPPORT YOUNG REFUGES, AND FOSTER A DIVERSIFIED VIEW ON POLITICS AND SOCIETY.

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The EU Is More Than a Single Market

WHY WE NEED A MORE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TOWARDS DEMOCRACY IN THE EU



The EU focuses mostly on single market rules to fight democratic back-sliding. While this rather narrow approach enables the EU to be on the "safe side" in legal terms, it is insufficient in view of the scale of democratic backsliding we are currently experiencing. The EU needs to take a more holistic approach towards democracy that puts at its centre the rule of law and fundamental rights, but also encompasses other areas such as media freedom and civil society.

TEXT: SOPHIE PORNSCHLEGEL, CHARLEMAGNE PRIZE FELLOW

In June 2021, the Hungarian Parliament passed the so-called "Anti-paedophilia Act"—the controversial anti-LGBTQI bill that is supposed to "toughen punishments for child abuse", but in reality bans the "promotion of homosexuality" to under-18s in Hungary. Two months later, Hungary ordered shops to sell children's books seen as promoting homosexuality in "closed wrapping". This worrying development should be read in a broader context of democratic backsliding in Europe, which represents a growing threat to citizens' rights in the EU, but also to European integration. According to the European Commission in a 2019 report, "threats to the rule of law [...] challenge the legal, political and economic basis of how the EU works" (European Commission 2019). In other words, value breaches undermine the Union's legitimacy. These developments also have very concrete political consequences that lead to blockages of crucial EU initiatives: At the end of 2020, Hungary and Poland threatened to oppose the much-needed Covid-19 recovery plan over its rule of law conditionality.

The Hungarian anti-LGBTQI legislation led to a generalized outcry in Europe, after roughly a decade of democratic backsliding and escalating conflicts with Brussels. The European Commission rapidly launched an infringement procedure against Hungary in July 2021. However, the obvious violations of human rights and fundamental values only came last in the infringement procedure, which was based on the violation of six EU rules, most prominently the freedom to pro-

vide services (Article 56 TFEU-Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) and the free movement of goods (Article 34 TFEU), as firms are no longer allowed to promote products or services that depict homosexuality in Hungary, therefore limiting the free movement of goods and services in the EU. It is only as one last point that the European Commission mentions that the Hungarian bill also violates "human dignity, freedom of expression and information, the right to respect of private life as well as the right to non-discrimination, based on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights" (European Commission 2021). This might seem surprising: Why does the European Commission put the violation of market-based principles of the single market at the forefront of this infringement procedure when the core issue is the blatant violation of the EU's fundamental values by the Hungarian government? Why does it not name the systematic violations of fundamental values, beyond the violations of the acquis communautaire?

First, the EU faces a situation in which it must work with an extremely vague definition of its values—the concepts of human rights, democracy and rule of law are elusive, even more so at the EU level. The "Copenhagen criteria", which were agreed upon in the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993, only set out that countries that want to join the EU should be "consolidated democracies". The member states need to "have stable institutions guaranteeing democracy,

"With its current approach, the EU cannot successfully respond to the prevailing scale of democratic backsliding. While safe—guarding democracy is a complex endeavour that calls into question the architecture and competences of the EU and therefore needs to be thought through carefully, the European Commission should have the courage to develop a more comprehensive definition of democracy at Union level."

the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities" (European Commission 2020). However, the criteria do not provide more information about what kind of democratic standards are required to be a full member of the EU—unlike the rules for the single market, which have been defined in very concrete terms and agreed in the acquis communautaire. Historically, the EU was a project of economic integration of sovereign nation states with similar values, but with different political systems. The policymakers who defined the Copenhagen criteria could not envisage a situation in which two member states would slide back into authoritarianism. This famously led to what is known as the "Copenhagen dilemma" today: While there are criteria to join the EU, the enforcement of those values after accession is particularly tricky.

Second, the European Commission has been careful to avoid confrontation with member states. There are several explanations for this. Potentially, the Commission wants to maintain good relations with the Council, and followed the heads of states and governments' reluctance to engage with this sensitive topic. It could also be that the Commission fears blockages on other policy files should they forcefully push for the respect of fundamental values. Another explanation could be that

the Commission prefers to leave this "dirty issue" in the hands of the European Court of Justice (ECJ), knowing that the Commission has only a limited number of effective tools at its disposal. Finally, despite being the "Guardian of the Treaties", the Commission seem to be more comfortable with protecting the acquis communautaire—such as the exact definition of certain products or services—than with enforcing elusive "values" in a Union that numbers 27 member states with widely different political systems and constitutional "identities".

There have been, over the years, some developments to better protect fundamental values—but with limited reach. First, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, created in 2000 and made binding in the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, enshrines fundamental rights in EU law. But the Agency for Fundamental Rights, which was founded in 2007, has a limited mandate to effectively implement the EU Charter, and cannot, for instance, effectively respond to the crackdown on civil society organizations. Second, the ECJ has been active in the field of rule of law thanks to a range of cases, mostly related to Hungary and Poland. The ECJ recently defined a new principle, the "non-regression clause", in its Repubblika (Maltese judges) case in April 2021 (Leloup/Kochenov/Dimitrovs 2021): EU

member states should not regress beyond what was agreed at the time of EU accession, clearing the way for a new effective mechanism to safeguard democratic standards. Despite this rather effective legal pathway, the European Commission has avoided pinpointing systemic violations of fundamental values in its infringement procedures, which makes it more difficult to recognize how widespread the democratic erosion is in certain member states. Finally, existing political measures have been rather ineffective, such as the Article 7 procedure, while new ones, such as the Rule of Law report, continue to promote debate and discourse rather than effective action, and are therefore not adapted to the current level of democratic backsliding in the EU.

Beyond the two areas of fundamental rights and the rule of law, there has been little focus in the EU on other key aspects of democracy, despite the fact that democratic erosion also concerns a number of other fields, such as academic freedom or civil society. In December 2020, in an attempt to tackle this rather narrow scope of values, the European Commission published a European Democracy Action Plan, which focuses on disinformation and media pluralism. However, the plan does not prioritize democratic erosion at national level and relies mostly on (non-binding) soft-law instruments. This approach misses out potential spillover effects from one area to the other. For instance, a judicial system controlled by the executive also means that protection of whistle-blowers and journalists is lacking, thus jeopardising media freedom. The same is true of civil society organizations such as public watchdogs and academic institutions, which all suffer as a result of democratic backsliding but have been little protected by the EU until now (Bárd/Śledzińska-Simon 2019).

With its current approach, the EU cannot successfully respond to the prevailing scale of democratic backsliding. While safeguarding democracy is a complex endeavour that calls into question the architecture and competences of the EU and therefore needs to be thought through carefully, the European

Commission should have the courage to develop a more comprehensive definition of democracy at Union level. The same is true of national decision makers, who have for too long buried their heads in the sand and done little to protect democracy in the EU. Raising concerns will not be enough at this stage—what is required is effective action. The future of the EU depends on it.

→ Sophie Pornschlegel, Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre

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"World out of Joint"

CITIZEN DIALOGUE ON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

TEXT: SARAH BROCKMEIER

The 2008 financial crisis, Brexit, the election of Donald Trump, millions fleeing conflicts in the Middle East, a global pandemic, a disastrous end to the war in Afghanistan: From the perspective of many citizens in Western democracies, recent crises in foreign policy have added to a feeling of uncertainty that the German President and former Foreign Minister Steinmeier has described as "a world out of joint" (Federal Foreign Office, 2015).

In this context, in recent years, foreign policymakers have turned to an instrument for addressing decreasing legitimacy and political trust that has become common in other policy fields: dialogue with citizens, including a wide range of formats from local citizen panels to nation—wide citizen assemblies with randomly sampled citizens. Foreign ministries in Paris, Washington or Berlin send diplomats into towns across their home countries, in programs such as the "Hors de Murs" program of the French foreign ministry or the US State Department's "Hometown diplomats" program. In Ireland, Norway and Canada, governments have involved not just civil society stakeholders but also the larger public in the context of developing new strategies for foreign aid or foreign policy. Citizens consultations on "Canada's World" put together by civil society organizations in Canada or the "Citizens' Assembly on Brexit" organized by British universities have been larger scale efforts to gain citizens' views on foreign policy.

German foreign and security policymakers have been at the forefront of experimenting with such new formats. Starting with the Foreign Office's "Review2014" — a process that involved reform debates on German foreign policy with both expert voices and citizens voices — both the Foreign Office and the Defense Ministry have sought to explain their policies to a wider public through a growing number of citizen dialogues. These



include new formats such as an annual "citizen workshop" in the Foreign Office or "Open Situation Rooms" in which citizens meet with ambassadors for simulations of crisis situations that they have to "solve" themselves.

Civil society in Germany is also engaging citizens in dialogue on foreign policy. In a 2017 study I co-authored, we found more than 120 organizations — foundations, NGOs, local associations — that organized some form of citizen dialogue on foreign affairs in Germany, though a vast majority used traditional formats such as panel discussions or talks to do so (Adebahr et al., 2018). In January and February 2021, a coalition of advocacy NGOs and implementing organizations held a nationwide citizens assembly on "Germany's Role in the World" with 160 randomly selected citizens. (I served as an external consultant to the organizers). Commissioned by the German Bundestag, the results of the deliberation amongst citizens in the council were presented to parliament and debated in several parliamentary committees.

While most of these efforts are relatively recent, there are at least two lessons that can already be drawn for future ventures to scale up the dialogue activities on foreign and security policy.

Clear Goals and Expectations Management Are Key

The first has already been learned in other policy fields and on local, regional and national levels: The key to a successful dialogue is a clear process, clarity on the goals and expectation management on what happens with the results.

Citizen dialogue on foreign policy can serve at least three purposes: In their most ambitious, participatory forms, similar to the citizen assembly on "Germany's Role in the World", they aim to solicit input on foreign and security policy based on the expectation that those inputs will influence policymakers or participants will at least receive a feedback on their ideas by policymakers. A second purpose can be simply explaining the complexities of foreign policymaking and thereby, from the perspective of some organizers, increase the legitimacy of and trust in policymakers. Most of the dialogue work by the German Foreign Office falls into this category. It is motivated to a large extent by a desire to address a widening gap between external expectations for Germany to pursue a more active foreign policy and a public that is perceived to be skeptical of such a more active course (Geis and Pfeifer, 2017). A third potential purpose for citizen dialogues could be learning more about foreign policy views and how they change: While the debate about Germany's responsibility in the world evolves a lot about what Germans think, we have surprisingly little evidence on citizens' attitudes and how and why they change (Rotmann et al., 2020).

All of these aims are important in their own right and legitimate, but it remains crucial that organizers are clear about their objective from the start and communicate them to participants. Most importantly, policymakers should only ask for inputs into policy decisions, when they are prepared to take them up or at least provide some kind of feedback. Research on citizen participation and evaluations of past efforts have shown that bad processes and disappointed participants can be detrimental for participants' feeling of political efficacy and trust.

"Policymakers will profit more from citizens' inputs if they relate to one of the many trade-offs they face. The under-standing of complexity of many foreign policy decisions will grow if participants are asked to weigh between two (usually bad) options."

Focus on the Dilemmas and Trade-Offs of Foreign Policymaking

A second lesson might be even more relevant for a complex issue such as foreign policy than for many other issues: Rather than focusing on open-ended questions, citizen dialogue should focus on real-world trade-offs and dilemmas and, ideally, force citizens to take decisions. For all three purposes listed above, the effects are greater, if the questions, format and moderation force citizens to weigh and prioritize different options rather than to list all their preferences in isolation. Policymakers will profit more from citizens' inputs if they relate to one of the many trade-offs they face. The understanding of the complexity of many foreign policy decisions will grow if participants are asked to weigh between two (usually bad) options and consider views by other countries and actors. And researchers would learn more about foreign policy views if they asked not for a wish-list but for priorities.

The citizen assembly on "Germany's Role in the World" is a good example of what can happen if the topic and questions are set too broadly or participants are not forced to choose between real-world policy options. The citizens presented a rich set of ideas and recommendations to policymakers. Yet, on defense spending, for example, the citizens on the one hand concluded that Germany needed to fulfill NATO's 2% target - the commitment by member states to spend 2% of its GDP on defense. On the other hand, the participants suggested counting civilian instruments and humanitarian aid, including by NGOs, into the 2% target. Taken separately, these are two legitimate policy options. But in reality, German policymakers cannot do both. Were Berlin to suggest counting civilian measures into the 2% to its NATO partners, it would be seen as the opposite of Germany fulfilling the target. Policymakers need to choose between these options and would have benefited from knowing where citizens stand on this question when forced to choose, too. Similarly, participants did not have to weigh competing demands and trade-offs on the European Union: They called for a much stronger and united European foreign policy. At the same time, they had very specific recommendations on EU migration policy. If other EU states did not agree with the German ideas on migration (or arms exports for that matter): (Where) would they have been prepared to compromise on their interests and values for the EU to be more united?

There are plenty of such trade-off questions that policymakers face every day in foreign and security policy. Is market access in China more important to us than standing up for human rights and international law? Should we forego advocacy of our principles and interest in other strategic issues in order not to jeopardize cooperation on climate with China? If EU agricultural subsidies damage African markets — are we prepared to cut them back, even if that costs jobs within the EU?

Debating such dilemmas with citizens not only provides more insides for policymakers and researchers, they also provide better topics than open-ended questions on how to deal with the Iran nuclear talks or whether we need a European army: Most of the trade-offs and dilemmas can ultimately be reduced to value questions that every citizen can relate to: What is fair? What do we want to stand for?

Conclusion

There is great potential to increase both the quantity and quality of citizen dialogues, on foreign and security policy in Germany and the EU. The demand for and attendance of the existing dialogue demonstrates that there is an interest amongst citizens to debate these issues. Yet when scaling up such dialogues policymakers, academics and civil society actors should remain aware what their respective goals are, adjust their formats and questions accordingly, communicate these clearly to participants and focus on debating real—world trade—offs and dilemmas with citizens.

→ Sarah Brockmeier, Non-Resident Fellow, Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi)

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"Democracy means power to and for the people. Making democracy real goes beyond elections: it is a matter of public deliberation, participation, accountability, and social justice. However, it is impossible to exercise public deliberation and political ement in situations where

public deliberation and political involvement in situations where poverty threatens basic freedoms. Poverty is not merely an obstacle to democracy or something that democracy has to address, it is a structural problem that prevents democracy from unfolding integrally."



Sergio Coronado, Colombia, Human Rights Activist

Democracy Beyond the EU–US Partnership:

TURNING TRANSATLANTIC RHETORIC INTO GLOBAL ACTION

TEXT: ELISABETH WINTER

All over the globe, democracy is in decline. Nationalist authoritarian sentiments are on the rise, and the United States and the European Union (EU) are no exception. According to the Freedom House Democracy Index, the quality of democracy has deteriorated in several EU member states and the United States. What is more, the overall number of countries that experienced a deterioration of their democracy in 2020 outnumbered countries that saw democratic improvements by the largest margin recorded since the negative trend began in 2006. Simultaneously, strong democratic movements are emerging all over

the world. Their focus ranges from climate activism and racism to LGBTQI rights and the rule of law.

Traditionally, transatlantic partners consider themselves as promoters of democracy. Though this notion has been righteously challenged from several perspectives, the United States and the EU can in fact help to safeguard democracy beyond their own borders. Building on their currently shared challenges to democracy, transatlantic partners should seize the moment to turn their rhetoric about democracy into effective global action.



Shared Transatlantic Challenges to Democracy

Democracy is supposedly a core pillar of the transatlantic relationship—nevertheless, it has been withering for several years. Neither is democracy in good shape in the EU or the United States, nor have the two partners been able to effectively cooperate in supporting democratic ideas around the world lately. Most transatlantic cooperation of recent years has centred on questions of security and economics. During the years of the Trump Presidency, the EU—US partnership touched a new low point on almost any subject. Despite their cooperation drifting apart, transatlantic partners face similar challenges to democracy that demand a joint response.

Distrust in Democratic Institutions

The United States and the EU are confronted with a rising distrust in democratic institutions. The tenets of democracy are challenged as popular confidence in the rule of law drops, public representation through political parties and elections is doubted, and a fragmented media deliberately spreads disinformation. Too often, this distrust is warranted. For the first time in history, a US President has refused to accept his electoral defeat. Supported by some news media that repeated his false claims of voter fraud, it culminated in a violent attack on the US Capitol. Meanwhile, the EU is sanctioning its own member states for deliberately violating the rule of law. Abolishing the tenure system of the Polish Supreme Court, the ruling Law and Justice Party politicized Poland's highest national court. Meanwhile, Viktor Orbán put all Hungarian mainstream media under his control, undermining independent reporting. As citizens feel disconnected from their political decision makers, intolerant anti-pluralist parties agitating against "the establishment" have gained power. Once in office, they advance the erosion of democratic norms, abuse democratic institutions, and damage democratic performance even further.

Rising Social Inequality

The United States and the EU are experiencing a rise in social inequality that questions the ability of democracies to deliver for their peoples. As globalization and digitalization unfold, the gaps between the rich and the poor are widening. The 2008 financial crisis revealed winners and losers: solidarity among EU member states plummeted while many people in the United States and the EU lost their homes and jobs, feeling abandoned by their democratic governments. The Covid-19 pandemic revealed the same picture, as the burden is disproportionately on those on lower incomes. Studies show that they are particularly vulnerable due to long-standing socio-economic inequalities. The mounting economic disparity between a small wealthy group at the top and the rest of society translates to the political sphere. A growing number of people are disappointed by their democratic representatives as they fail to improve the lives of the working people through their policy decisions, whereas the wealthy elite appears to exert disproportionate political influence.

New Geopolitical Competition

Both the United States and the EU need to navigate broader geopolitical shifts that add a further challenge to their democracies. Authoritarian powers such as Russia and China have become assertive. They interfere in the domestic politics of their neighbouring countries, exert political influence on smaller democracies, and target their main competitors, the United States and the EU. Their tools range from China's Belt and Road Initiative to Russian media platforms that spread disinformation. These efforts aim to discredit the democratic model by damaging its performance domestically and challenging its dominance globally. Consequently, global crises such as the 2008 financial crisis or the ongoing pandemic have become litmus tests for democracy: Which system will fare better? Ideological rivalries as well as national sentiments have prohibited much-needed global cooperation. Vaccine diplomacy is the most recent infamous example.

Turning Transatlantic Rhetoric into Global Action

Despite this dire outlook for democracy in the EU, the United States, and globally, there is still some hope left. Active political movements across the globe can be a healthy sign of democracy in action. But we cannot take for granted that the democratic forces will succeed. Against the backdrop of a widespread distrust in democracy, a remaking of democracy is not guaranteed, an advance of authoritarian ideas a practical possibility. Transatlantic partners should work together to make a meaningful contribution to the global advancement of democracy.

Put Democracy Back on the Agenda

The United States and the EU should put democracy promotion back on their shared agenda. Facing similar challenges to democracy which neither the United States nor the EU can tackle nationally, refocusing on joint transatlantic efforts promises new opportunities. Instead of taking democracy at home for granted, transatlantic partners should put democracy promotion at home back on their common agenda. The close EU—US partnership ranging from trade to security can build the foundation for a constructive cooperation on democracy.

Globalize Democracy Promotion

It is about time that transatlantic partners globalized democracy promotion and embraced it not as a national but as a global endeavour. Globalizing democracy promotion means engaging in a global dialogue to problematize the national and international constraints on democracy, develop solutions on how to counter them, and coordinate the active operationalization of democratic measures. Yet, the transatlantic partnership still bears a national and "Western" sentiment of democracy. The first move needs to be made by the United States and the EU, who must acknowledge their own democratic deficiencies and halt their attempts to promote democracy internationally without any global coordination.

Whatever level of EU—US democracy cooperation is achieved, it needs to stay open to engagement and cooperation with democ-

racies around the globe. A renewed focus on global democracy cannot take the form of an exclusive club in which transatlantic partners claim the leadership for a global democracy agenda. The way to promote democracy globally is through a subject-based coordination that involves all interested democracies. This form of coordination allows agenda-setters to rotate, enables different levels of engagement, and keeps an open seat at the table so that interested democracies can join the effort.

Own a Positive Narrative of Democracy

Democracies need to share their own positive narratives of democracy. They should define democracy for its own sake, not only to distinguish themselves from authoritarian regimes. For several years, the United States has been framing global politics under the rubric of the US-China rivalry. Though the EU prefers a more nuanced approach, Brussels has intensified its tone against Peking lately. Involved in this great power rivalry with China, transatlantic partners need to be careful not to fall into the China trap. Instead of claiming "we are everything that China is not", a positive definition of democracy is needed. Otherwise, democratic countries would leave it to authoritarian regimes to tell the story of democracy.

The newly introduced "Summit for Democracy" initiated by US President Biden needs to engage in this endeavour. Though the summit aims to stand up for democracy wherever it is threatened, the uniting idea of the countries involved is to cooperate to counter China. A proper defence against authoritarianism that goes beyond generic terms needs a clear and unambiguous understanding of what needs to be defended. Finding a common understanding of democracy should therefore be the principal theme for the first meeting in December 2021. Together, participants must reintroduce a positive list of what democracy means for its people. For instance, poll data from the United States shows that most US teenagers cannot name the three branches of government and do not know how their institutions are supposed to function.

Live up to Your Principles

Only a democracy that lives up to its own democratic principles is a credible ambassador for safeguarding democracy globally. Too often, the United States and the EU have demanded that their partners meet such high democratic conditions but fallen short of meeting them at home. In his 2020 Foreign Affairs article, President Biden pledged to reinvigorate democracy at home first, as it builds the groundwork for any global action. But the hard work for him and any democracy is to turn expectations into results. Breaking down democratic ideas into concrete action points allows the United States and the EU to cooperate on the ground case by case.

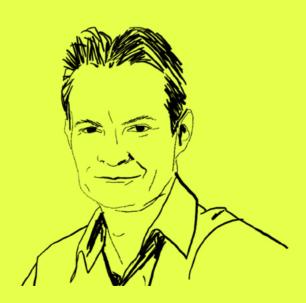
One practical focus where transatlantic partners can cooperate and help each other is on the rule of law to ensure that power is used in accordance with the wishes of the people. For example, operational proposals from a transatlantic working group could support Washington in coping with states changing election laws to manipulate election outcomes; and similarly, they could help Brussels to find effective measures to handle anti-democratic constitutional reforms in some EU member states. Another practical focus for democracies across the Atlantic is human rights. Regularly, the United States and the EU call for better compliance with human rights from authoritarian states, particularly targeting their rivals China and Russia. Notably, the Me Too and the Black Lives Matter movements have revealed grave drawbacks on women's rights and the prevalence of institutional racism in the United States and the EU.

Democracy Promotion Beyond the EU-US Partnership

As the once-proud birthplaces of democracy, transatlantic partners must put their best foot forward to prohibit authoritarian advancement and safeguard democracy at home and abroad. Confronted by similar challenges to their democracies, the United States and the EU should seize the moment and join forces to counter growing distrust in democratic institutions, rising social inequality, and an intensifying geopolitical competition. In the spirit of democracy, though, a new approach to transatlantic democracy promotion is needed. A sustainable global advance of democracy cannot be based on an exclusive transatlantic-led alliance. To turn transatlantic rhetoric about democracy into effective global action, the United States and the EU must put democracy back on their shared agenda to jointly globalize democracy promotion, own a positive narrative of democracy, and live up to democratic principles.

→ Elisabeth Winter, Programme Director for Global Markets and Social Justice, Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung "In happy countries, governments are afraid of their people. In unhappy countries, people are afraid of their governments. I've learned first-hand that freedom can be won by courage, commitment and mass non-violent action. Working for CANVAS, a Serbian non-profit that trains pro-democracy and human rights activists worldwide, taught me that every

pro-democracy struggle is different, but the principles of success are the same: vision, unity, strategy and tactics, and non-violent discipline. Whatever governments — or conspiracy theories—tell you, it is the people who decide. for dawn to go out and feel secure and comfortable walking on an equal footing with men all over the world; this is what democracy is about."



Srđa Popović, Serbia, Co-Founder of the Nonviolent Resistance Group Otpor!

ABSOLUTELY ALL WORDS

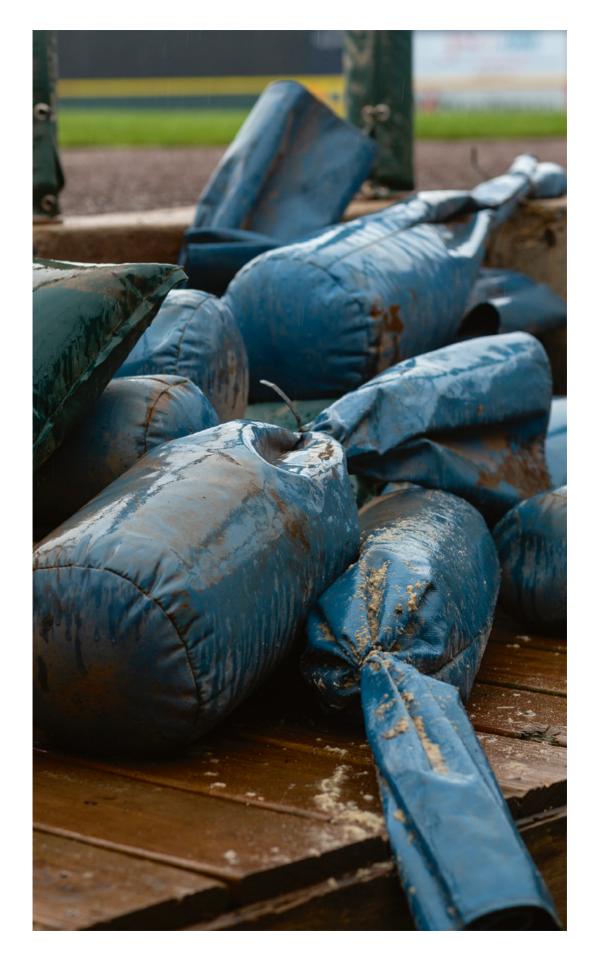
REMIXED BY JULIA WOLF

I

A car floats. In this aerial photo. A man and woman stand on the stoop. A melted slide smolders as a playground continues to burn. A resident uses a bucket. People use rafts. Two brothers embrace Monday. A church and a cemetery. It went so fast. A bear cub clings to a tree. A damaged road buckles. A refrigerator now dangles from the rafters overhead. A drone photo shows. The author's mother in front of his uncle's house. Wind blows smoke aways for a moment. A man brushes water and mud. Women react as they look. Crews battle. People lay sandbags. A table and chairs. Evacuees ride a bus. Volunteers sort. Men hug a member. Soldiers arrived on Saturday. A firefighter helicopter flies in front of the sun. Smoke and haze. Embers. An iceberg off. Tourists walking near the empty. Water sprinklers last week. In this long-exposure photograph.

II

There's no wrong way to pronounce it. Because everything is so wrong. In the beginning, they didn't notice me. And I could see the stars very clearly. I could see the Milky Way, the dolphins and insects. And I stopped talking. I stopped eating almost entirely. But then. Yes, a big sign made out of wood. Where it said: Everything is so strange and everything is too slow. It said: More trees less assholes. So that there would not be any misunderstandings. I make sure all the facts are correct. I mean, don't get me wrong. If you were smarter, we'd be in school. We are missing our lesson to teach you one. Adults are, of course, welcome. First my mom, and then my dad and my sister will rise like the oceans. And so, yeah. The politicians and the people in power are very sad. I've seen smarter cabinets at IKEA. If they don't care about our future, we can no longer play by their rules. They have ignored us in the past, and they will ignore us again. We need to get angry. DENIAL IS NOT A POLICY.



Ш

Ladies and Gentleman, dear Shareholders. It was a successful year. We are more popular than ever. The car is unrivaled. Food boasts impressive performances. Demand worldwide is rising. We've also benefited from individual freedom and a net cash flow of around €40 billion. We'll continue to generate. Create. Operate in an even higher price segment. But our ambitions go further than that. Six giga-factories are to be set up. Grandchildren will deliver their grandparents. A healthier future, the test of time. The pace of the shift differs worldwide. Ladies and Gentleman, we have created powerful beverage products. I would like to echo our Chairman: 45 percent. 28 percent. 281 000. 39 Percent to 982 000. 5 Billion. Up 60 basis points. Dear Shareholders, this speech might not reflect absolutely all words spoken. However, we look forward to continuing our journey with you.

ΠZ

Today is the day, everyone. Think blue. Think white. Tucked away. Uhm, think secluded. If you want to really drop off the radar. Think ultimate peace and quiet. Palm trees. Paradise—ready properties. Incredible stuff. Our first paying customer. Think tinkets. Think tapas. More flags. Jeff will be in seat number six. The jewels in his crown. Copy that. Wow, and those big, beautiful windows. Sea views are pretty much the norm. Unbuckling from your seat you're free to explore. Fantastic. Amazing. Sorry. I mean: You can see things that change who you are on the inside. The vast darkness. Having that kind of experience changes you. I love it, I love it. Why don't we light this candle. How about that? Ten. We're curious. Nine. Talk about locked and loaded. Eight. It feels remarkably natural. Seven. Talk about beautiful soft reclining seats. Six. The human need to explore is deep within all of us. Five. Yes, I would put my kids on that vehicle. Four. Who wants a skittle? Three. It's so memorable. Two. So unique. One. Oh my goodness, listen to that roar!

V

The voice which used to squawk and squeak. So in 1599 Dutch sailors come to land. The smell of awe and wonder. An abundance of pigeons & popinnayes [parrots]. People couldn't wait to get inside and make their nests in paradise. The first question of course was, how to get dry. Spoiler alert, for oughtt wee yett know: The Dutch Empire acquired the islet. The dodo was very offended. Some of the other birds tittered in the dense, pre-human landscape. With a great deal of thought the dodo, described as stouter and thicker, suggested to race for Caucus. However, the Dutch were already running. Hence the phrase "to go the way of the dodo".

VI

A medic sits in an ambulance. A health worker sings and prays. A health worker comforts a patient. A health worker plants a cross. A health worker. A volunteer health worker. A paramedic. An undertaker. Exhausted grave diggers and teachers and airline crew members and Santa, wearing protective gear. People in protective suits try to prevent a hug. Caskets and coffins. Inmates were recruited to cremate the bodies. A mother had no plans to get vaccinated. The family gathers. In Kommunarka. In Kusumpur. In Manhattan. Navajo Nation has been hit hard. A health worker adjusts a patient's face mask in Paris.

VΠ

Why so young?, you ask. Why? Because they want snowflakes to lecture adults. Obviously. Brainwashing is easier when they control every detail of your life. No meat, no democracy. Don't believe it? Look around. All of them, snowflakes. And it has nothing to do with rising temperatures. It was not about the environment, never. Those darn cow farts! The left doesn't care. SHE'S AN ALIEN. I'm still wondering why hasn't the government changed. Because democracy is the point. Yes, democracy. No drinking straws, no damn democracy. I want my tax money back for that day. We have this in my country every year we plant trees. So what are their chances, you ask? Well, right around zero. Obviously. We'll forget about this in fifteen minutes.

VIII

Our vision: We want to pass. Not bans. Not bans. Prosperity. A loan taken out. Our citizens. Their dream of owning their. We want a country that celebrates. As long as the earth exists we want a country. We can effectively. We stand for affordable energy. We will get our economy moving again. So many reports. So many questions. Today we live in a warm period. The more resolutely we act. The more plant growth will be. The more freedom is in the air. On the contrary! Our climate today and tomorrow. Germany is a strong. We want Germany to. We put our country on the path. We will invest. We want a reset. We will abolish the Re — We will compensate. We will create fair. We will encourage. We can secure. We need secure. That is why we. Will. We are. We will. We want a country. So let's not just. This is the only way. Let's tackle. Let's go. "Yes". Tackle.

→ Julia Wolf, Author

Using text material from CNN and The New York Times captions; an interview with Greta Thunberg on the website Democracy Now and protest banners on Fridays For Future marches; transcribed speeches from annual share holder meetings of Volkswagen and Nestle; TUI's website for the UK and online coverage of Jeff Bezo's space ride on the Blue Origin website; Alice's Adventures in Wonderland chapter III, the wikipedia entry for "Dodo" and the youtube video "Dodo Bird Unboxing"; "Tucker Carlson Tonight" on Fox News as well as comments about the show on youtube; and the electoral programs of CDU, SPD, FDP, GRÜNE, LINKE and AfD for the German federal election in 2021 in English.

#COUNTERSPEECH

How can hate speech be combated on social media? How can democracy be lived in the digital age? We asked Michael Trube, an expert on combatting right-wing-extremism, racism and antisemitism, to provide guidance in form of an imaginary Twitter conversation.

COMPOSED BY MICHAEL TRUBE







tickleme_pink

Come on, have you all forgotten 2015? Now a new wave of refugees will enter Europe. This can't happen, we must close our borders. Criminality will rise and our women are not safe anymore. #afghanistan #safetyfirst



jess_1 @tickleme_pink

Are you really that inhuman?
These people are fleeing because their lives are threatened. It is their human right to seek asylum. #humanrights #evacuate #afghanistan #safetyfirst



the_muffin_man @jess_1

It is not our problem that the Taliban took over. Real Afghan men would stay and fight and not leave their country. That scum has



the_muffin_man @jess_1
It is not our problem that the
Taliban took over. Real Afghan
men would stay and fight and not
leave their country. That scum has
to stay out. #fortresseurop
#europefirst #makeeuropegreatagain #afghanistan #safetyfirst



BVG_imitate





tickleme_pink @BVG_imitate
All right, now I am a racist just
because I care for my country.



jess_1 @tickleme_pink
Maybe you are not a racist, but in
my eyes your argumentation lacks
humanity and feels unjust. You
categorize people because of
their origin. #solidarity
#afghanistan #safetyfirst



the_muffin_man @jess_4
It is not inhuman to care for your own people first. That's what all people have done since the beginning of time. And me personally, I want to live in a country without all these Muslim extremists and sharia lovers. Europe has to stay white and Christian.
#fortresseurope #europestaystrongt



jess_1 @the_muffin_man
Sorry but you are definitely crossing a line here. If you carry on



jess_1 @the_muffin_man
Sorry but you are definitely crossing a line here. If you carry on
calling these people that, I will
end the discussion immediately.
These are people you are talking
about. #notoleranceforracism
#stopracism



BVG_imitate @the_muffin_man





tickleme_pink @jess_1

@the_muffin_man
For me it is not about a white
Europe, I am just afraid that we
will be a minority inour own
country someday. Saying that must
be allowed. We have enough
problems. #freedomofspeech



jess_1 @tickleme_pink

You are allowed to say that, but you have to accept other opinions as well. This is a democratic debate and freedom of speech doesn't mean you can say what you want without opposition. Europe is rich; we can help these people. It is our duty. #democracy





the_muffin_man @jess_1
Come on, this country will be overrun by Muslim invaders and you people want to discuss end-



the_muffin_man @jess_1 Come on, this country will be overrun by Muslim invaders and you people want to discuss endlessly. We have to prepare ourselves for war and bring this invasion to an end. #civilwar



jess_1

Okay, enough @the_muffin_man. I have reported your comment as hate speech. @tickleme_pink If you are interested in a serious discussion, let's have it via PN. I look forward to having a controversial argument with you. If you're not distancing yourself from racism: #goodbye #enoughisenough



BVG_imitate



→ Michael Trube, Speaker, Facilitator and Educator on Combatting Right-Wing-Extremism, Racism and Antisemitism

Independence Day 2026

AMERICA AS A DINO (DEMOCRACY IN NAME ONLY)

TEXT: LARS BROZUS

This essay is not a prediction. It is rather a thought experiment that deliberately exaggerates selected developments and projects them into the future. The goal is to sketch a foresight scenario that will not unfold exactly as described but is plausible enough to come to pass in a similar way.

On 4 July 2026 the USA marks the 250th anniversary of its Declaration of Independence. Throughout the land people throng the streets to celebrate. The biggest party takes place in Washington. Hundreds of thousands of supporters of President Trump have made their way to the capital to pay tribute to their idol. There is a palpable tension in the air. Rumours have been circulating for weeks that the President will announce a historic decision on Independence Day, and he does not fail to live up to expectations. Donald Trump indeed announces something extraordinary when he appears before the vast crowd that has gathered in the evening in front of the White House. He declares that he is willing, with a "heavy heart", to give in to the urging of his admirers and stand again for further terms beyond 2029. Given the solid majority the Republicans have in both houses of Congress, the necessary repeal of the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution seems little more than a formality.

This bombshell sets the seal on the end of American democracy as we know it. For decades, the US system of government has been a model admired and envied around the world. Many states have sought to emulate the legendary checks and balances; others have outdone one another to portray the system as unfair, ineffective, and incapable of reform. Yet now the enemies of democratic government are rejoicing, China and Russia foremost among them. The EU, most of its member states and the UK express dismay and sharp criticism, while NATO ally Turkey, Brazil and India all welcome the announcement. Iran, North Korea and Saudi Arabia all congratulate Trump. The stock markets in Australia, Japan and South Korea, on the other hand, plummet. The geopolitical consequences (Edsall 2021a) of this step appear incalculable.

How Could It Have Come to This?

The decline of democracy began three decades ago (Skelley 2021a). Critical junctures were the 1994 congressional elections that delivered the first Republican majority in both legislative chambers since 1952; the contested presidential election of 2000, which was decided in favour of George W. Bush; the rise of the Tea Party Movement following the election of Barack Obama as the first—and perhaps



the last—black president in 2008, and Trump's first term, which accelerated the breakdown of democratic legitimacy.

The extreme ideological and party-political polarization (Packer 2021) that began in 1994 in Washington was to spill over to the whole country in the following decades. The Republicans radicalized the content and tenor of their attacks on the Democrats and reduced cross-party cooperation with their political opponents to a minimum. The 2000 elections ended up in the Supreme Court, where a majority of conservative justices ordered a halt to the recounts in Florida (Schwartz/Thimm 2017), thus propelling the Republican candidate into the White House. Throughout the whole of Obama's presidency, political adversaries sought to delegitimize the President through the accusation that he had been born outside the USA and was thus ineligible to serve as president. One of the most stubborn adversaries was Trump, who consistently refused to acknowledge his 2020 election defeat to Joe Biden. Instead, he incessantly repeated the charge that he had been the victim of a conspiracy. The Democrats had ostensibly caused millions of ballots cast for him to disappear, and countless illegal aliens had been enabled to vote for Biden.

Although recounts and ballot audits in several states failed to uncover any evidence of this or similar allegations of manipulation and forgery, the accusations struck a powerful chord in the conservative section (Heritage Foundation 2021) of American society. Almost two-thirds of supporters of the Republican Party continued to question (Skelley 2021b) the legitimacy of Biden's election victory. Trump repeatedly called on them not to allow the election to be "stolen". On 6 January 2021, thousands heeded his call and stormed the Capitol in Washington.

Why and How Republicans Are Corroding Democracy

The Republican voter base is steadily shrinking due to demographic, economic and social change in the USA. Since 1992, only one Republican presidential candidate has managed

to win the nationwide popular vote. Given an increasingly diverse society, the Democrats' structural advantage threatens to become entrenched. The Republican Party's reaction is voter suppression (Edsall 2021b): many individual states where Republicans control the legislature (30 of 50 states in 2021; Wikipedia 2021) have responded by restricting voter access. Voter registration, early voting, mail-in or absentee voting, ballot collection or casting a provisional ballot have all been made harder. On election day, fewer polling places make for longer waiting times. All these restrictions have a disproportionate impact on non-white sections of the population. However, the Supreme Court has dismissed lawsuits against the accompanying discrimination against minorities, citing modest burdens (Hasen 2021)—as in the case of Arizona ("Razing Arizona" 2021) in July 2021.

As well as these concrete measures, Republicans rely on election subversion (Brennan Center 2021). This undermines confidence in the integrity of elections. Independent election boards are brought under political control (Cohn 2021). In addition, there is a reversal of the burden of truth: Where in the past lawsuits alleging irregularity had to prove that election fraud occurred, now the requirement is to prove that no election fraud took place. This opens the door to the almost unlimited assertion of even seemingly absurd possibilities of electoral fraud. Even if they are patently without substance, they still have to be disproved. The goal of these tactics is to sow doubt about the legitimacy of elections ("Elections" 2021) through permanent confrontation with fabricated accusations.

Success is already evident in the 2022 congressional elections. The Republican secure majorities in the House of Representative and the Senate. Most of the legislators taking up their seats are Trump loyalists who pursue a policy of fundamental opposition during Biden's remaining time in office. This prepares the ground for Trump's return to the White House. As in 2016 and 2020, he trails hopelessly in the 2024 election in the nationwide popular vote. However, the legislatures in the Republican-controlled

swing states of Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin award their electoral votes to him, although the Democrats lead by a narrow margin in all four states. That gives Trump a comfortable majority in the Electoral College. The Supreme Court dismisses challenges, citing the Independent State Legislature Doctrine (Mayer 2021). This says that the individual states can decide autonomously how their electors are assigned.

Trump picks up seamlessly where his first term left off; the failures of his erratic way of governing promptly reveal themselves anew. The resurgence of the viral epidemic triggers a severe economic depression that primarily affects those in insecure jobs and the low-skilled. The non-white population suffers heavy repression at the hands of state security forces. Around the turn of the year 2025/2026, violent unrest spreads across the USA. The situation at the beginning of "America250" looks sombre. The rampant dissatisfaction in the country leads the Republicans to fear heavy losses in the congressional elections due in November-despite extensive manipulation of general conditions and regulations for administering the elections. The early announcement that Trump is considering running in 2028 will reenergize the Republican camp, so the thinking goes.

→ Lars Brozus, Senior Associate, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)

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"All of the statements in this issue point to the core of any ideal vision of democracy: the power of the people. Every activist included highlights in his or her words that elections are not enough to uphold democratic rule. Instead, we must ask how

democracy improves living conditions, how we can protect minorities and how we can mobilise people to participate in politics. Facing multiple crises, we are currently discussing the future of democracy primarily at conference tables, but we should not forget to ask those who actually practice it by advocating their interests."



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