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Challenges Facing Democracy in the United States

Interview with Professor Michael Beckley
Tufts University, United States

Over the last few years, the United States has seen numerous policies and government actions that has put into question the strength of American democracy. Compounding this has been growing polarization of the public as well as political parties. How would you characterize the current state of the US democracy?

Not great. The United States is becoming a hollow democracy. The basic institutions still exist, but the social fabric sustaining them is fraying. Partisan divisions have surged to levels not seen since the Civil War, and the two major political parties have become divided by identity, not just policy preferences. Rural whites overwhelmingly vote Republican while most minorities and urban whites vote Democrat. This crude tribalism leaves little room for compromise. As a result, policy-making lurches between gridlock and partisan overreach, and the country has entered a vicious cycle in which partisan gridlock undermines public trust in government, which incentivizes politicians to starve the government of resources and authority, which leads to even poorer government performance, which leads to more hollowing out of the government. Many statistics bear this trend out. One is non-defense discretionary spending, a category that includes everything besides interest payments on the debt and spending on entitlements and defense, which has shrunk to just 13 percent of the federal budget, down from 25 percent in the 1960s and

The United States is becoming a hollow democracy. The basic institutions still exist, but the social fabric sustaining them is fraying.

70s. If this trend continues, the US government will essentially become nothing more than an insurance company with a military.

Your recent piece in *Foreign Affairs* is titled: *Rogue Superpower. Why This Could Be an Illiberal American Century*. Would you briefly discuss your concerns about the future of US democracy?

I am concerned about the future of liberal democratic governments worldwide for many reasons. My article focused on two factors that will strain democracies in the coming decades: aging populations and rapid automation. Public support for liberal democracy during the postwar era has rested heavily on rising incomes for the working-class, which in turn were largely the result of growing populations and job-creating technologies. The postwar baby boom produced scores of young workers and consumers, and the assembly line provided them with stable jobs. But now populations across the democratic world are aging and shrinking, and machines are displacing workers. The basic bargain—work hard, support the liberal system, and trust that a rising economic tide will lift all boats—is breaking down. Extremism and xenophobia are filling the void.

The demographic outlook is more dire than most people realize. The number of American working-age adults per senior citizen will drop from 4-to-1 today to 3-to-1 by 2030, putting the country under enormous fiscal stress. Other liberal democracies will suffer an even worse demographic crunch. Over the next 30 years, their working-age populations will shrink by 12 percent, on average, making sustained economic growth almost impossible. Meanwhile, the senior populations of the world's liberal democracies will expand by 57 percent, on average and spending on

pensions and health care will double as a share of GDP. These countries will not be able to borrow their way out of the resulting fiscal mess, because they already carried debts equal to 270 percent of GDP, on average, before the COVID-19 pandemic plunged their balance sheets further into the red. Instead, they will have to cut entitlements for the elderly, slash social spending for the young, raise taxes, or increase immigration—all of which will likely produce political backlashes.

Rapid automation will intensify the economic turmoil. History has shown that technological revolutions create prosperity in the long run but force some workers into lower-wage jobs or unemployment in the short run— and the short run can last a lifetime. For the first 70 years of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, from 1770 to 1840, average wages stagnated and living standards declined, even as output per worker expanded by nearly 50 percent. The gains from mass mechanization during this time were captured by tycoons, whose profit rates doubled. Now machines are once again eliminating jobs faster than displaced workers can retrain for new ones, wages for low- and middle-skill workers are stagnating, and millions of people—especially men without college degrees—are dropping out of the workforce. Many economists expect these trends to persist for several decades as labor-replacing technologies currently in development—such as robotic cars, stores, warehouses, and kitchens—are widely adopted.

Sluggish growth, enormous debt, stagnant wages, chronic unemployment, extreme inequality: any of these phenomena would dampen faith in democracy, and some or all may strike simultaneously. In the 1930s, economic frustrations caused many people to reject democracy and embrace fascism or communism. Today, populists, especially on the right, are ascendant across the democratic world. The United States needs to empower a centrist majority to stem this rising tide of polarization and extremism, but that will be increasingly hard to do as rapid aging and automation push the world into a period of unprecedented economic disruption.

What would you prescribe to strengthen democracy in the United States and its role in world?

There are some obvious reforms that already seem to be in motion, such

as cracking down hard on domestic terrorism and regulating content on social media platforms. The insurrectionists that stormed the U.S. Capitol organized online and acted with a shocking sense of impunity, taking selfies and livestreaming their crimes. Now the U.S. government is hunting them down, and political support is growing for regulating social media content.

But the most obvious steps—electoral reforms that would empower a centrist majority—have almost no chance of being enacted anytime soon. These include laws that would automatically register people to vote when they receive a drivers license or state ID; holding all elections on weekends and using open nonpartisan primaries and ranked-choice voting; and banning gerrymandering. The sad irony is that America is too polarized to pass reforms that would reduce polarization.

One exception may be policies designed to reduce economic inequality, which is a deep driver of political extremism. Globalization and automation have fueled a geographic divergence of fortunes in the United States: big cities with diversified economies have flourished while rural communities that depend on old-school manufacturing and mining have decayed. That economic divergence has created a deep political divide between "haves" and "have-nots." Republican politicians have spent years exacerbating that divide by blocking economic redistribution policies while playing up cultural cleavages between rural and urban areas, emphasizing racial and religious differences and inspiring fear of immigrants and big government. But now that Republicans have lost the presidency and both houses of congress, some Republican leaders seem to be searching for a new strategy and may ultimately adopt a more traditional economic populist platform, advocating things like jobs programs and expanded access to education and childcare. That switch could allow some redistribution to take place, which would help stem the tide of rising economic inequality and the political polarization that goes along with it.

Hong Kong has seen an erosion of its freedoms since Beijing imposed a security law on the city in June. Pro-democracy supporters there are still hopeful for progress in spite of arrests and the recent resignation of the entire pro-democracy caucus. What

are your thoughts on the situation in Hong Kong and prospects for democracy there?

Sadly, I think democracy in Hong Kong is doomed. Beijing is aggressively enforcing its national security law, which makes Hong Kong the same politically as any other Chinese city. The international community, and especially the United States and the United Kingdom, can and should protect pro-democracy supporters by offering them asylum and sanctioning Chinese leaders for their involvement in the crack down. More broadly, Hong Kong's democratic demise should fuel the consolidation of an emerging alliance of democracies dedicated to protecting each other's political systems from Chinese political warfare.

Do you consider China's authoritarian regime a major threat to democracies elsewhere?

Yes, China has spent billions of dollars on an "antidemocratic toolkit" of NGOs, media outlets, think tanks, hackers, and bribes. Its main aim is not to win hearts and minds, but to reverse the international spread of democracy and destroy America's image abroad. In the future, new technologies will enable China to control its people and destabilize democracies more efficiently than Mao Zedong could have imagined: a social-credit register to discipline citizens instantly; a digital silk road to conduct espionage across Eurasia; malware to hamstring Western companies; deep fakes to sow chaos in democratic elections; and an array of advanced military capabilities to try to intimidate Taiwan into abandoning its democratic institutions and submit to mainland rule.

What would you recommend to the incoming Biden administration for US relations with China?

Think short-term. Many experts think the United States and China are running a "superpower marathon" that may last a century. But I think the sharpest phase of that competition will be a decadelong sprint in the 2020s. The reason is that China has entered a particularly perilous period as a rising power: it has gained the capability to disrupt the existing order, but its window to act may be narrowing. The balance of power is shifting in Beijing's favor in important areas of US-Chinese competition, such as the Taiwan Strait and the struggle over global telecommunications

networks. Yet China is also facing a pronounced economic slowdown and a growing international backlash. So I worry that Beijing may become tempted to lunge for geopolitical gain while its window of opportunity remains open over the next five to ten years. The United States obviously still needs a long-term strategy for protracted competition. But first it needs a near-term strategy for navigating the coming decade.

That strategy would (1) identify and prioritize the vital interests that are most at risk in the short-term; and (2) explain how to achieve those objectives using the tools, partners, and institutions currently available—not those that could take years or decades to bring online. Militarily, that means prioritizing denial strategies over those that require outright US control of maritime East Asia, Taiwan over everywhere else, and rapid procurement and deployment of munitions and basic platforms that can serve as shooters and sensors over long-term R&D. Economically, the strategy would entail doubling down on aggressive unilateralism in the short-term, with the hope that such measures will allow for liberal multilateralism in the long-term. Negotiating a multilateral trade/investment framework to "write the rules" or reform the WTO would be great, but the United States may not have time if China is ramping up espionage, tech investment, and economic warfare. So the United States may have to rely on aggressive use of investment restrictions, financial sanctions, tariffs, and embargoes to protect its economic competitiveness to blunt a surge of Chinese mercantilism. Diplomatically, the new strategy would rely on ad hoc coalitions focused on particular issues and probably involving some unsavory partners instead of formal institutions. Instead of running US China policy through formal alliances and the United Nations, the United States should organize and lead a "T-12" to secure technology, a "D-10" to protect democratic elections, a repurposed Quad to coordinate maritime security, and a series of bilateral partnerships to help China's neighbors balance against Chinese maritime and economic expansion.

Michael Beckley is an associate professor of political science at Tufts University and a Jeane Kirkpatrick Visiting Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

His research on great power competition has received awards from the American Political Science Association and the International Studies Association and been featured by numerous media including the Financial Times, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, the New York Times, NPR, and the Washington Post.

Previously, Prof. Beckley worked for Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, the U.S. Department of Defense, the RAND Corporation, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He continues to advise offices within the U.S. Intelligence Community and U.S. Department of Defense.

His first book, *[Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower](#)*, was published in 2018 by Cornell University Press.

Misconceptions About the Crisis of Liberal Democracy in Europe

Hans Kundnani
Chatham House, United Kingdom

In the last few years, there has been much discussion about a crisis of liberal democracy throughout the West – that is, in Europe as well as in the United States. Although there is a widespread agreement that there is a crisis, there has been little agreement about how to understand it. Much of the debate has focused on the rise of populism – though there has been much disagreement about whether to understand the phenomenon as a cause of the crisis or as a symptom of a crisis that has different, deeper causes – and on polarization as a threat to democracy.

The discussion about the crisis of liberal democracy in Europe, particularly in think tanks and in the mainstream media, has become confused because of two particular errors. First, many centrist analysts have wanted to believe that it is possible to think about the crisis in an apolitical way without an awareness of the normative assumptions they are making about what a good democracy looks like – assumptions that reflect their own political preferences. Second, the crisis has tended to be seen through the prism of the American experience, though in reality the situation in Europe is very different than in the United States, and yet in some ways is actually the opposite.

Everyone thinks they know intuitively what a good democracy looks like. But defining it is actually far from straightforward and involves normative assumptions that are not often made explicit or thought through carefully. In particular, centrists tend to like consensus and dislike polarization, but it is far from clear that polarization is always a bad thing in a democracy. Many, particularly those further to the left and to the right, see some kinds of polarization not just as a good thing but as the essence of democracy.

What matters is not just the degree but also the kind of polarization. The focus on polarization is exacerbated by a tendency to look at Europe through the prism of America especially since the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016. Polarization is certainly a problem in the United States. Since the 1960s, Americans have gradually divided into two different groups– liberals and conservatives. These two groups have increasingly also mapped on to the two main political parties in the United States – Democrats and Republicans – which now represent what Lilianna Mason has called "mega-identities". Hyper-partisan politics have made political compromise impossible and have paralyzed independent institutions like the Supreme Court.

Many analysts of the crisis of liberal democracy in Europe imagine that something similar is happening in Europe, but it is not. The situation in Europe is actually quite different, as Sheri Berman and I show in an essay for the [Journal of Democracy](#). In reality, in Europe, it is not so much polarization and partisanship that have led to democratic decay and the rise of populism, but party convergence and diminishing partisanship – in other words, the opposite of the situation in the United States.

During the same period that American politics has become more polarized, European politics have actually become less polarized. Centre-left parties and centre-right parties have converged ideologically and have become increasingly difficult to differentiate from each other. A good example of this dynamic is Germany, wherein the last two decades the Social Democrats have moved to the right on economic issues and the Christian Democrats moved to the left on cultural issues. On the basis of

> Shifting voting patterns in Europe illustrate the way that partisanship is not entrenched in the way it is in the United States – far from it. Party identities have weakened, not strengthened.

this centrist consensus, they have governed together in a grand coalition in three of the last four electoral periods, led by Chancellor Angela Merkel.

At a first glance, this convergence may seem like a good thing in democratic terms – especially if one has America's dysfunctional hyper-partisan politics in mind. But convergence can also threaten democracy – in particular, if parties move away from voter preferences, and a "representation gap" emerges and creates a context in which extremist parties can thrive. This is exactly what has happened in Europe. Such parties, which see the mainstream parties as a bloc or cartel, have surged in the last decade or so. This, in turn, forces centre-left and centre-right parties to close ranks even further and so the problem gets worse. In particular, it is far-right parties that have benefited.

Shifting voting patterns in Europe illustrate the way that partisanship is not entrenched in the way it is in the United States – far from it. Party identities have weakened, not strengthened. In particular, as social democratic parties have abandoned left-wing economic policies and embraced neoliberalism, working class voters have abandoned them, particularly for far-right parties like the Rassemblement National (formerly the Front National) in France or the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany. This is not the polarized politics of America but rather something much more fluid and dynamic.

The United Kingdom is a complicated in-between case. At a first glance, it looks a lot like the United States – after all, it too has become polarized by the question of membership of the European Union. Brexit has been widely seen as an expression of populism, analogous to Trump. But this is misleading not only because the issues, centred on the EU itself, are in

reality different, but also because polarization cut across the party system in the UK, which is in part what made a referendum necessary. Since 2016, party politics has become very fluid. For example, in the 2019 election, working-class voters in the north of England switched to the Conservative party in large numbers.

Thus, if one looks carefully at developments in Europe and puts them in historical context, it becomes clear that the story is very different from the United States. In fact, America's hyper-partisan politics looks less like Europe today than Europe in the earlier era of "milieu parties", which is sometimes seen as the heyday of democracy in Europe. To complicate things even more, there are important differences. In particular, polarization at that time was focused at least as much on economic questions as much as cultural ones (though cultural questions also mattered –after all, some "milieu parties" were even based on confessional identities).

This illustrates that even extreme polarization does not necessarily threaten democracy. In particular, it depends on whether polarization revolves around cultural or economic issues. As Prof. Claus Offe has shown, polarization on economic issues is less threatening because they are easier to compromise or bargain over than cultural issues. Whether polarization threatens democracy also depends on whether voters accept the legitimacy of other parties. For example, British politics were very polarized in the era of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, but the outcome of elections was never questioned as it is in the United States today.

This analysis of the liberal democracy in Europe, understood on its own terms rather than through the prism of the United States, leads to two conclusions. The first is about polarization. Centrists want to further reduce polarization, but this would make the crisis of liberal democracy worse. It would be better if centre-left parties moved back to the left, especially on economic policy, and centre-right parties need moved back to the right – in other words, more polarization. This would once again create real alternatives in the centre ground of politics in Europe. In particular, having real alternatives on economic policy would reduce the

salience of cultural issues.

The second conclusion is that centrism is as much a part of the crisis of liberal democracy in Europe as populism. In particular, it is necessary to recognize that there is also another, almost opposite threat to democracy – technocracy or "post-democracy"– to which much populism is a reaction. Technocracy is a particular problem in Europe because the EU is the ultimate form of technocratic governance and produces Eurosceptic populism. Although there is much heterogeneity in populism in Europe, as Prof. Philip Manow has shown, nearly all populists are Eurosceptic – albeit in different ways.

In other words, it is impossible to talk about the crisis of liberal democracy in Europe without talking about the EU. Many centrists see the EU in rather simplistic terms – in particular, as a "community of democracies" that is under threat and therefore needs to be defended. This overlooks the way that the EU was always about constraining democracy through a system of rules. In that sense, the EU (as opposed to its member states) is liberal rather than democratic. Centrists who are serious about the quality of democracy in Europe – as opposed to just winning the fight against populism – need to engage with these difficult questions.

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The Future of Democracy

Professor Erica Frantz

with Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Joseph Wright

Michigan State University, United States

On January 6 of this year, an armed mob stormed the United States Capitol building in a last-ditch effort to challenge the 2020 presidential election results, which saw incumbent President Donald Trump lose. Despite the fact that experts and officials deemed the race to be free and fair, Trump repeatedly issued unsubstantiated claims to the contrary and called on his supporters to take action. While tragic, the deadly insurrection that took place in response to these calls was in many ways unsurprising. It marked the culmination of a prolonged period of democratic backsliding in the US that began with Trump's 2016 election. All signs indicate that democracy in the US will rebound, at least in the short term, with the assumption of power of a new leadership. That said, fissures remain. Importantly, the Trump era makes clear that no democracy is invulnerable to authoritarianism in today's times, even those that appear consolidated.

This experience in the US is not isolated. Around the globe, democracies appear to be in crisis and redirected to a path of authoritarianism. Notable examples include countries as diverse as Benin, Hungary, and Nicaragua. Such trends have prompted many to sound the alarm bell that democracy is under threat. In its 2020 report, for example, the watchdog organization Freedom House stated that 2019 was the fourteenth consecutive year it documented a decline in global freedom.[1] Many of the declines witnessed in recent years reflected a deepening of authoritarianism, as in Azerbaijan, Burundi, and Rwanda. Others, however, captured a deterioration in the quality of democracy, as in India, Poland, and Brazil. In those instances, the deterioration left democracy weakened yet intact, but in other instances it ushered in a transition to authoritarianism, as in Bangladesh, Serbia, and Turkey. Perhaps most notably, a number of these declines occurred in wealthier and more established democracies, such as the US, which scholars have typically considered robust against democratic backsliding.[2]

To be fair, democracy is still the dominant form of government around the globe, and recent democratic transitions in Armenia, Burkina Faso, and Malaysia should give some cause for optimism. That said, the rapid pace of democratization that followed the end of the Cold War has clearly slowed down. From 2000 to 2009, the number of transitions to democracy was nearly three times the number of democratic collapses (twenty-five cases versus nine cases, respectively).[3] From 2010 to 2019, however, democratic transitions slowed to twenty-one cases, whereas democratic breakdowns increased to sixteen. This suggests that while democracy still has the edge over authoritarianism, the tide may be turning.

Two trends are important to better understand what is happening. The first is a change in the method through which democracies are falling apart. Whereas, historically, coups usually toppled democracies, today's democracies are increasingly collapsing from within, through power

Around the globe, democracies appear to be in crisis and redirected to a path of authoritarianism.

grabs on the part of their elected leadership—a process referred to as authoritarianization. Concurrently, we are also seeing a change in the types of political parties supporting incumbent leaders in democracies. Traditional political parties appear to be on the decline, with democratic leaders increasingly coming to power backed by personalist political parties. These parties exist to promote and further their leaders' careers, as opposed to advancing policy and personnel choices. This is consequential given that elites in personalist parties are less likely to push back against incumbent power grabs than their counterparts in more programmatic and institutionalized parties. Thus, the election of leaders supported by personalist political parties paves the way for successful power grabs and ultimately authoritarianization. Together, these two trends shed light on how the contemporary wave of democratic erosion is occurring and inform our understanding of the actions and developments that serve as red flags that is democracy is in danger.

The rise of authoritarianization

The method through which democracies fall apart has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War. Historically, coups were the dominant mode of democratic collapse, often with military troops storming a presidential palace and asserting control. Today, internal takeovers by democratically elected leaders—referred to as authoritarianizations— have displaced coups as the most common means through which democracies transition to dictatorship.

These two methods of democratic failure differ from each other in important ways. Take the coup in Chile in 1973. On September 11 of that year, the Chilean military staged a coup against then-President Salvador Allende, who had won democratic elections in 1970. To do so, it took over La Moneda, the presidential palace, and attacked until Allende eventually took his own life. The coup launched General Agosto Pinochet and a military junta into power, establishing a dictatorship that lasted until 1989. The demise of Chile's democracy was abrupt and easy to identify, occurring over the course of a single day.

Contrast this with recent experience in Venezuela. In 1999, Hugo Chavez assumed the presidency, having won democratic elections the year before. Chavez won free and fair elections again in 2000, continuing Venezuela's long tradition of (at times flawed) democracy. In the years to come, however, Chavez pursued a number of actions that slowly pushed the country toward dictatorship. In 2004, he backed legislation that increased the size of the Supreme Court and allowed judges to be dismissed by majority vote, enabling Chavez allies to take over the Supreme Court and other lower courts. The government published a list that year, as well, of tens of thousands of citizens who had signed a recall petition, leading to their dismissal from public employment and loss of access to welfare benefits. It ratcheted up its targeting of the media too, passing laws that restricted reporting and engaging in actions to intimidate reporters. By the time of the 2005 election, Chavez opponents no longer encountered a fair playing field, prompting five opposition parties to boycott it. Not surprisingly, Chavez supporters ended up winning all the country's parliamentary seats. Chavez continued to monopolize power in the years after, ushering in a period of authoritarianism that persists today under his successor Nicolas Maduro. The downfall of Venezuela's democracy took place over a long period of time. It was a slow and incremental transition, so much so that determining the specific moment it occurred is difficult to assess.

These examples of democratic collapse in Chile and Venezuela reveal the key ways in which coups and authoritarianizations differ. Whereas coups are risky (with about half failing) and require careful planning, authoritarianizations are fairly easy to accomplish. They involve the incumbent government leveraging its access to power to push through a series of rule and personnel changes, culminating in a situation in which opponents can no longer mount an effective challenge. Because authoritarianizations usually occur over a drawn-out period and entail a multipronged approach to consolidating control, they are more difficult to push back against than coups are. There is no single moment or event that opponents can mobilize and rally against in protest.

These advantages, coupled with a post-Cold War political climate that

favors the appearance of liberalism and condemns coups, have made authoritarianizations a more desirable method for would-be autocrats to establish control.[4] The data bear this out. From 1946 to 1989, 64 percent of democracies fell apart via coup, with authoritarianizations occurring only infrequently.[5] By the 1990s, coups declined slightly in popularity, comprising 54 percent of democratic failures; authoritarianizations, by contrast, gathered steam and made up 38 percent of democratic failures. Fast forward to the 2010s, where only 36 percent of democracies transitioned to dictatorship through a coup and a whopping 64 percent collapsed via authoritarianization, as in Serbia, Benin, Nicaragua, and Turkey.

The data illustrate that authoritarianizations are now the most common way that democracies fall apart. Given their considerable advantages, they are likely to remain the method of choice for would-be autocrats in the years to come, as well.

The rise in personalist political parties

This evolution in the method through which democracies are collapsing is occurring in tandem with a change in the types of political parties supporting incumbent democratic leaders. Today's democratic leaders are increasingly backed by personalist political parties, as opposed to more institutionalized and programmatic political parties. This matters because research shows that democracies are at a greater risk of backsliding when leaders supported by personalist political parties govern them.[6]

Personalist political parties are parties that "democratically elected leaders create, which are used as vehicles to advance leaders' personal political careers or instead further party power over policy and personnel choices."[7] Levels of personalism in political parties can vary both across parties (the governing party of Ukraine exhibits high personalism, for example, while the governing party of Australia exhibits low personalism) and within parties over time (as evidenced by the increase in levels of personalism in the Republican Party in the US under Trump).[8]

Greater personalism in the leader's support party is harmful to democracy because incumbent power grabs are more likely to be successful in these contexts. In personalist parties, elites have less bargaining power with respect to the leader and lack the history of interactions that make working together easier. The collective action costs they face in challenging a leadership power grab are higher as a result. Leaders in personalist parties are also more likely to fill high positions in the party with loyalists and individuals from their personal network than with those from the political establishment who have government experience. The careers of elites in personalist parties are therefore closely linked with the fortunes of the leader, giving them more incentive to continue to support the leader even in the face of actions that subvert democracy. Leaders in personalist political parties are less likely to express commitment to democratic institutions, as well, because they typically have less exposure to how democratic politics works than leaders from more institutionalized parties do, who often have to rise up the ranks of the party apparatus to secure their positions. For these reasons, where democratic leaders govern with the support of more personalist parties, incumbent power grabs are more likely to be successful.

Leaders backed by personalist political parties are increasingly gaining office in today's democracies, as examples from Hungary, Venezuela, and Turkey illustrate, and their election helps to explain the contemporary wave of backsliding and reversions to authoritarianism we are witnessing.

Concluding remarks

The two trends discussed here highlight easily observable warning signs suggestive of a democracy under threat. For one, today's democracies are increasingly falling apart from within, due to multipronged power grabs on the part of incumbent leaders. These power grabs, in turn, are being facilitated by the rise of personalist political parties. The election of leaders backed by such parties essentially plants the groundwork for democratic erosion in the years to come.

Slowing down the speed of the contemporary autocratic wave requires

thinking backward and contemplating more seriously why voters are attracted to leaders supported by personalist parties to begin with. After all, an increasing number of today's autocrats were at one point voted into office in free and fair contests, indicating that voters supported their ascension to power. Coming to terms with why ordinary citizens are now more drawn to such leaders therefore warrants greater attention. Moreover, while the evidence suggests that traditional political parties in many developed democracies have lost their popularity in recent years, it is less clear why they have been replaced by personalist vehicles instead of new policy-based political organizations.[9]

At this point, one can only speculate about these things. It may be that economic changes have made voters disillusioned with the traditional establishment, leading to the rising popularity of leaders whose support group comes from outside of it. Likewise, it may be that the global rise in the elite rich has made it easier for aspiring politicians to found and maintain their own launching organizations. Regardless, gaining a better sense of these dynamics will be critical to pushing back against the contemporary democratic relapse.

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Every Kingdom Divided Against Itself is Brought to Desolation

Professor Cleo Paskal
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"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."
- Matthew 12:25

D emocracy is a delicate machine composed of many moving parts: electoral systems, campaign financing regulations, districting committees, media laws, election commissions, and myriad other pieces each pull in their own directions. In a healthy democracy, the parts mesh like well oiled gears and the whole moves forward, from election to governance to election to governance.

But sometimes bits break down, the wrong part pulls the machine too much in one direction, or a gear is weak and cracks under the strain, and adjustments have to be made. For example, in 2017, it was becoming clear that large amounts of money were being donated to Australia's political parties from funders tied to China, raising questions about the effect that could have on policies (unlike the United States, Australia allowed unlimited foreign funds to go to political parties). Not only did that potentially undermine national security, it undermined democracy – as parties might be tempted to ignore the desires of their voters in favor of the desires of their funders. And so, in a win for democracy, the laws were changed.

Additionally, parts that might work in one context, might not work in another. For example, countries with term limits say that is a way of precluding individuals from amassing too much power. Countries without term limits say that offering politicians the hope they might be reelected is a better way of ensuring that leaders don't just spend their terms lining

their pockets and paying back the 'friends' who got them elected. The first might be more appropriate for a presidential system, and the second for a prime ministerial/parliamentary system. Though both require strong access to information protections and a free press to curb excesses.

Political parties

Another major variable in designing an effective democracy is population size. Many who come from larger countries assume the words 'multiparty' and 'democracy' are inextricably linked, and yet that form of democratic government is relatively recent.

Often, Commonwealth nations model their parliaments on the one in the UK and yet, originally, Members of Parliament at Westminster were elected as independents. Much later on they formed loose alliances. And it was only in the 19th century, with constituencies so large that personally knowing one's member of parliament was unlikely, that rigid political parties as we now know them came to prominence.

As a result of the change, voters were asked to choose not between people, but between a predetermined set of positions put forth by those who ran the parties. Too often the positions existed just to show how different one party was from the other. If one party liked ice cream, the other had to hate it.

The development of political parties meant that the system went from a consensus model, in which the broad goal was to reach agreement with as many others as possible, to an oppositional model in which the goal was to beat the other side, regardless of the cost to the nation.

The potentially corrosive nature of political parties was clear from the start. In the United States, the first President, George Washington, was not a member of a political party and thought them such a danger to democracy and the state that he devoted much of his Farewell Address (1796) to warning against them.

> [The 'spirit of party'] serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foments occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions. Thus the policy and the will of one country are subjected to the policy and will of another.

> […] However combinations or associations of the above description may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion.

President Washington proved prophetic. Not only are there increasing concerns about foreign influence, the American political system has become so antagonistic it has forced some of the most public spirited and good-hearted leaders to become oppositional, and led many fine candidates to withdraw from political life for fear of the cost to their family, friends, and personal reputation.

...there are some countries in which the "potent engines" of political parties are not necessary, and would even more demonstrably impede democracy. They are countries with populations small enough for constituencies to know their candidates.

Democracies with large population sizes are not going to do away with political parties. Their destructive influences will need to be mitigated, part-by-part, through transparency, accountability, and vigilance – the very things that large western democracies have been telling the rest of the world for decades.

Population size and democracy

However, there are some countries in which the "potent engines" of political parties are not necessary, and would even more demonstrably impede democracy. They are countries with populations small enough for constituencies to know their candidates.

There are a large number of countries with populations under 500,000. That size means an assembly of 100 representatives would be elected by 100 constituencies of around 5000 people each – small enough for voters to get to know their candidates, and for the candidates to know the priorities of the electorate.

There is a range of examples of such 'nonpartisan democracies' (though some do have informal political groupings). They include Tuvalu, Federated States of Micronesia, and Nauru. Also, American Samoa, the Falkland Islands, Guernsey, and the Canadian territory of Northwest Territories. Globally, many municipalities (some much larger than 500,000) are run without political parties, additionally, governors of Japanese prefectures aren't members of political parties, the Nebraska state legislature and a couple of Swiss Cantons have nonpartisan elections. In many other governance structures as well, the nonpartisan system is the norm. It would be difficult to imagine running a company, for example, if the board was formally and rigidly divided between two or more factions. Yes, they are all pretty small, but that's the point. If working with a country under a certain size, different options are available and should be considered.

The effect of introducing political parties into polities with relatively small populations was made clear with two recent cases. In one case, at the insistence of the 'international community', political parties were introduced, in another they weren't (the term for political systems with

no political parties is 'nonpartisan democracy'). The resulting differences were marked.

Maldives. The Maldives is an islands nation in the Indian Ocean with a population of around 500,000. It has a presidential system, with a unicameral legislature of 87 members. Under the previous system with no formal political parties, the same man, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, held power from 1978 to 2008. Opposition grew and advocates, both outside and inside the country, pushed for a multiparty political system. Eventually the President initiated a reform process. Informal political parties formed, but progress was slow and there were arrests of opposition figures. In 2004 and 2005, there were violent protests and an attempted take-over by the opposition. Political parties were legally allowed starting in 2005.

Foreign interest in internal politics in the Maldives increased, with some nations favoring certain parties over others. Under President Gayoom, Maldivian Islam was largely moderate, in spite of attempted influence by more radical outsiders. In the confused and tense period of transition, pro-Islamic extremist took advantage of the opening to target foreign tourists, and twelve were injured in a bombing.

In 2008, the country held its first multiparty elections. After a run-off, a new president, President Mohamed Nasheed, was elected. President Nasheed was a moderate, however, because of the oppositional structure of party systems, bigger parties often look to smaller parties for support, rather than working with another one of the bigger parties (even though if the two big parties worked together, it would theoretically better reflect the will of the electorate). Looking to smaller parties means that marginal, and sometimes extreme, voices can carry disproportioned weight.

President Nasheed took a small puritanical Islamic party (one that supported amputations for theft and the death penalty for those who convert away from Islam), into the ruling coalition giving it effective power in governance that was much greater than its actual support in the country. Already, in just its first election, the will of the Maldivian people has lost out to the imperatives of the political party system.

Things became even more fraught as Beijing backed a favored political party, and political unrest grew, with Nasheed being pushed out of power and arrested, the Supreme Court getting involved, an assassination attempt, a state of emergency, and more. The situation is more stable now, but in many ways the Maldivian introduction of political parties quickly resulted in many of the challenges to real democracy described by Washington.

Nunavut. So, is there a democratic alternative to multiparty systems? One example of another path taken can be found in Northern Canada. In 1999, the territory of Nunavut was created. It has an area of around 2 million km2 (if it was a country, it would be the 15th largest on the planet), with a population of around 36,000. The majority are Inuit who have retained strong cultural traditions.

Instead of adopting the oppositional multiparty system Ottawa was promoting, the people of Nunavut decided to build on their own cultural strengths. With millennia of experience in self-governing local communities through discussions guided by elders and local leaders, they adopted a "community of communities" structure.

They rejected the multiparty system and instead chose nonpartisan democracy, in which each member was elected as an independent. The goal, according to the government, is to foster and implement the traditional "values of maximum cooperation, effective use of leadership resources and common accountability." The government also has an advisory council of elders to help ensure traditional culture and knowledge is considered in political decision-making.

So far, the structure has been a success. There has been no painful tearing of the social fabric, and democracy is vibrant and healthy. The main drawback is that decisions can take longer than in majority controlled multiparty systems because reaching real consensus can be a painstaking process. However, once the decisions are reached, they represent the will of the majority and are stable. There is no seesaw of policy that is sometimes found in multiparty systems as the winds of politics change.

A comparison between some of the drivers of a fictional multiparty democracy and a fictional nonpartisan democracy shows stark differences. In the reductionist example below (pg. 19), the checks and balances in the multiparty democracy are not working well, and the nonpartisan democracy is working as it should. The idea is just to show how this one difference in the 'gears' of democracy – political parties or nonpartisan democracy - can push other levers.

Of course, as with every system, there are drawbacks to nonpartisan democracy. In terms of domestic politics, for example, it motivates elected officials to bargain with each other for perks for their ridings ("I'll fund your bridge if you fund my road"). However, in countries with a small population, it tends to mitigate against some of the excesses described by Washington – which as seen with the Maldives can cascade quite quickly.

Summary

There is a tendency among development agencies and foreign affairs professionals to assume that democracy is actually pronounced "multipartydemocracy". This has led to some disastrous interventions in countries introducing, or reintroducing, more inclusive political systems. One of the current targets on that list is the Kingdom of Tonga, population around 100,000, where countries like Australia and New Zealand are actively pushing for political parties. And, in the case of New Zealand, Wellington seems to have already picked out its favorite party – the one that will deliver what it thinks is best for New Zealand.

Citizens of larger countries might mean well, but their political models are designed for different population sizes. In the UK, each single constituency averages around the entire population of the Kingdom of Tonga. The strengths of Tonga – the direct democracy of personally knowing one's candidates, of every citizen being only one or two people removed from their representative – do not exist in larger countries, so their people find it hard to imagine another way even though they are often the ones driving "democratization" programs. And that is how opportunities are missed.

For real democracy, every part of the machine, from campaign financing regulations to term limits, needs to be assessed to make sure that the most relevant, effective and appropriate pieces are being used to build a system that will deliver real stability, security and, yes, democracy. In some countries, that might mean political parties. In others, political parties could severely damage democracy. Just ask George Washington.

	Multiparty democracy	Nonpartisan democracy
Primary loyalty-responsibility of the elected member	To the political party. If rejected by one constituency, a loyal party member can be supported by the party and found a safe seat elsewhere.	To the electorate. If the local electorate does not support their local candidate, their time in politics is usually over.
Style of politics	Goal to beat opposition. Policies tend to reflect the will of the party. Rewarded for effective attacks on opposition. Candidate focused on understanding politics in political party. Willing to align with marginal parties even if they don't represent the majority sentiment of the country. Legal/economic/policy/etc changes can happen very quickly if there is a majority government or change of party in power.	Goal to reach consensus. Policies tend to reflect the will of the electorate. Rewarded for building up the constituency. Candidate focused on understanding politics in constituency. The majority rules. Progress/change may be slower, but is generally more in alignment with the will of the people and more stable.

	Multiparty democracy	Nonpartisan democracy
Funding	Comes largely via party, giving party leaders enormous control over who gets to run. Gives opportunities for outside interests (including corporations and foreign governments) to funnel money through the party to advance certain agenda.	Self or community funded, meaning it is more difficult for big flows of outside money to come in undetected. Constituencies are small enough to know what the person is really like (and where their money comes from).
Type of candidate rewarded by the system	People interested in power and willing to use oppositional and potentially destructive means to get it. While some will join in a genuine desire to advance the greater good, the system may make it difficult. Elected (or put forth) due to status in the party.	People who can deliver for their constituency – often by reaching consensus both in their constituencies and in parliament. Elected due to status/popularity in their constituency.

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Authoritarianism in Iraq and the US

Interview with Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi
Harvard University, United States

Iraq has endured a problematic transition to democracy. How has this affected its citizenry?

It has been a very difficult 18 years. The transition, or the transitional period, is very dynamic. After the collapse of the Saddam regime in 2003 and the American invasion, a new rule was set up to govern Iraq. At the time, I worked with what we called transitional justice in Iraq with international organizations. Transitional justice is a set of mechanisms that focus on how the Iraqis deal with the legacy of the abuse and crimes committed by the former regime.

The question is not just how to address these kinds of abuses, but also how to ensure none reoccur, and how to move forward to build reconciliation within society. There is a huge number of victims, and you also have quite a significant number of perpetrators, or alleged perpetrators, from decades of systematic abuses and human rights violations. So, when we started in 2003, we asked, "How will Iraqis deal with post–2003?" The focus was on the crimes committed by the Baath regime of Saddam. Unfortunately, the violence, the crimes, and the abuse never stopped. So, then the dilemma was, "When is this going to stop it? How about the other kinds of crimes?" That made it very difficult, because it didn't stop — the cycle of violence was continuing.

What we saw in Iraq after 2003 was a new kind of violence, with new perpetrators. We saw kidnapping, forced displacement, detention, and sectarian violence. Some people were killed just because of their religious identity. Some were killed because of their name, or because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. The point is that it's been very difficult, because this has built on decades of systematic abuses. It's had long-term damage, which is not easy to solve, and society can't recover within a short period of time.

Saddam's regime lasted a long time. Why? Because the authorities were the state. Saddam was the state. Saddam was the party. Saddam's rhetoric was that he was Iraq. Without him, he would imply, there's no Iraq. Without him, there is no homeland. That was always his message. When the regime collapsed, it's not like a government collapsed. No, the whole system collapsed, Iraq's entire identity. Most of the governmental institutions — military, security, and intelligence — are all connected to one man. It's a one-man show: the authoritarian. And when the man disappeared, everything disappeared. So, you have to rebuild everything from scratch, in a very unstable, insecure time. It's very difficult to rebuild all the same institutions that took generations to build.

In October and November 2019, there was a new uprising in Iraq, because a new generation of young people knew they need a homeland — they are lost. Even in new generations, they want to find themselves in order to build a country or a homeland, a state they feel proud of. As they grew up, their childhood or teenage years were violent, they saw corruption, a lack of security, a lack of stability. And they realized that they cannot live that way for a long time. They need a good government and real leadership.

I also worked with the UN in Libya as a transitional justice expert, and we

faced the same problems. Look at Libya now, after the fall of the Gaddafi regime. That was the tradeoff when the authoritarian regime collapsed: security versus liberty. In 2003 Iraq, many Iraqis said, "Now we are free, we have been liberated from a brutal dictator regime. But, we don't feel safe. We don't feel secure, we are not stable."

What critical factors must be overcome to achieve a better democracy or more stability in Iraq?

I think there are many factors, or many significant steps to take. Once again, you have to deal with the past. You cannot ignore it. In the past, both the perpetrators and victims are Iraqis, and in some cases, the same Iraqis. How do you move on? The easy answer, in theory, is to determine justice and reparation for the victims. A reparation comes with a materiality compensation, a moral compensation, and a recognition of what the victims suffered. At the same time, what do you do with the perpetrator? Accountability. But you cannot prosecute every single person — we need to be very strategic. Who should be prosecuted, and who should be granted a pardon or amnesty? Which victims should need to be compensated, and which should not? But that hasn't happened in Iraq, due to a lack of vision.

A variety of policymakers — including the American–approved policymakers who played a significant role in rebuilding the state of Iraq after 2003 — lacked this vision. They didn't think about what justice means. Justice does not mean retaliation, or revenge, or punishment. We need to achieve justice for all, and this is would achieve peace. That means the members of the former regime, the Baath Party, recognize the crimes committed against the Iraqi people, and they need to apologize. But that never happened.

Last year, I worked on a big survey of Iraqis with the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. We surveyed the victims of ISIS, or what we call the "affected community." We asked them, "What's your priority?" We found that Iraqis are focused on three main priorities: One, establishing security. Two, finding jobs or employment. Three, receiving public

> *Right now, the level of trust is very low. The Iraqi government and policymakers need to address this lack of trust.*

services, since basic needs often are not available, such as infrastructure for electricity, clean water, housing, and so on. You cannot have a substantial democratic process if you lack these factors. I think the Iraqi government needs to work on these three things to provide for their people and build trust between the people and their government.

Right now, the level of trust is very low. The Iraqi government and policymakers need to address this lack of trust. In our survey, when we asked respondents how much they trust the Iraqi government and institutions, the answer was very, very little. And this is not new. In 2003, just after the fall of the Saddam regime, we asked that same question — and the level of trust was very low in the former government. After 17 years, I don't see any significant change in the level of trust. This issue of trust needs to be addressed, especially now with financial challenges and the COVID health crisis, when you need people to be cooperative and to trust you.

That does not apply only to Iraq. It applies in the US, just the same. We now have a lack of trust. We are more divided than any other time before. But while many people didn't trust the Trump administration, many others will not trust the new Biden administration.

You mentioned your work with the United Nations earlier — how do you view the effectiveness of international actors such as the UN in guiding countries as they transition to democracy?

Well, the mission of the United Nations is to have a supporting role. Its role is to build the capacity of local institutions in order to promote justice, democracy, and peacebuilding. When we worked in Libya, maybe we were not very effective. But there are many reasons for that. Libya is one of the most complicated countries in North Africa, or maybe in the world. There are many external actors that have a (so-called) 'horse in the race'

in Libya, including Turkey, Egypt, Russia, Qatar, UAE, and countries of Europe. Each of these actors have different agendas, and each has become a local proxy player. That player could be funded and supported by that party or by this party, or by this country or other countries, and it becomes very complicated.

In Libya, when you try to get the local actors to the table in order to have a negotiation, you find that they're not enough, and you have to look further and beyond. You have to bring a better, more active architect, but the role of the United Nations mission in Libya is not very active, because that is its mandate — it's a supporting mission.

Do you kind of see any parallels in the rhetoric and language that Saddam Hussein used in his rise to power with that of the leaders of nations around the world today, particularly in the West?

To some degree, yes. There are a lot of similarities. Authoritarian regimes are like plants, and like a plant, they need to find the right environment and soil to grow and gain the support of a significant number of people. They often don't grow very quickly at first — they have to grab it slowly. When they address these people, they start with, "The great people of…" These authoritarian leaders say they will make you great, or that they've made you great, or that you are great because of them. They also always keep or make people afraid of each other. They always talk about some enemy, and how we have to find this enemy. If there is no enemy, they create it.

When I lived in Iraq as a child, they taught us a song on the first day of elementary school, "I am Arabian soldier carrying my rifle in my hand to fight the enemy." So, my first day in school at five years old, I was told to repeat this song. But when you're five years old, you cannot even comprehend the word enemy. I went to my mom and said, "What's the enemy?" I thought the enemy was a dinosaur, or a big animal. You're five years old — who's your enemy? And you know what I found out later, who the enemy is? It was me. I was the enemy of the regime. My family was the enemy of the regime. So, therefore, the former regime

persecuted my family. They executed my elder brother, and they put my younger brother in jail. I realized that we were all the enemy of the regime if we disagreed with them. If you were opposed to the regime, that meant you were not patriotic, that you were betraying the country — and that is the rhetoric they use.

Saddam Hussein knew he would never be the president of all Iraqis. He was the president of some Iraqis. And the other Iraqis, who he knew didn't support him, he considered them the enemy. He never felt sorry when he killed them and persecuted them. Here in the US, it is similar. President Trump never proved himself to be the president of all Americans, and never made any effort to be. He was the president of the 74 million people who voted for him in the last election, and never tried to bring this country together. Why? Here is a key situation, the similarity between dictators and authoritarians: they're seduced by power. They always put their self-interest as a priority, not the interests of the country or the people. They do it for their own glory, and only care about what history will write about them.

When they hire their aides, the criteria is not based on their competence or merit, but on loyalty. It's like a cult, not a government. They need people who say yes to them, who will sacrifice for them, and it doesn't matter their background or competence. I've seen a lot of similarities at this point. And to show that the country they govern is great, they show it has a very powerful armed forces. They spend a lot of money to build a very strong army, even if they don't spend money on infrastructure or subsidizing healthcare or education, because they think history always talks about power and how the most powerful leaders led powerful armies.

Do you feel that fearmongering and the influence of media has impacted democracy in the United States? If yes, how so?

It depends. The good thing about the United States is that we have a free media. Independent media is the heart of democracy. But not all the media in the US are independent.There is no single media outlet that

is 100% impartial. We have right-leaning media and left-leaning media; we have conservatives and liberals. But I see some extremes in some media outlets, which has had a negative impact on democracy, on the country. Despite that, I think a lot of the media does not represent any extreme ideology. It's healthy to disagree among each other and to have a different opinion. The challenge is whether we're listening to the other side. We could learn more from people who have different opinions than us, rather than people who agree with us. It's a healthy dynamic, to have healthy discourse and debate. However, there are limits. We need to be bound by facts and the truth.

Is there anything else that you would like to comment on?

Here in the US, we have a very strong sense of democracy, the rule of law, and an independent judiciary. So, that's going to protect us and our democracy. However, what is happening now, where some people are trying to overturn the election results, shows that there are systematic efforts by many people to undermine this democracy.

What protects us is the sense of ourselves, and it's been built for many, many decades — 200 years. But I can see cracks, now, and I'm afraid in the coming years that these cracks are going to grow larger and undermine this sense that protects us. That's my fear, because now it's been proven that it's not difficult for someone to try to undermine the democratic process. I have enough reason to be scared, maybe because I'm traumatized by where I come from. But I think it's good for us to address these concerns now, because we only need to look to countries like Iraq to know what the alternative may bring.

Interview by Alexandra Gilliard

Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi is an expert in transitional justice and rule of law initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. He has studied, written about, and worked on accountability measures and the (re) construction of Iraqi legal and political institutions since 2003. Currently, Al-Saiedi is a research manager and policy advisor with the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative's project in Iraq, Assessing Conflict-Affected Communities' Perceptions and Attitudes about Peace and Justice in Iraq. He is also an Iraq country expert in human rights and transitional justice with Physicians for Human Rights (PHR). From 2013 to 2016, Al-Saiedi worked as a human rights/transitional justice officer at the United Nations Support Mission in Libya where he designed and implemented advocacy strategies to establish transitional justice, including truth-seeking processes. Between 2011 and 2013, he worked as a senior researcher with PHR, conducting research on medical neutrality and human rights violations in the MENA region. With the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), Al-Saiedi designed intervention strategies and served as the organization's liaison in Iraq. Previously, Al-Saiedi reported on the Iraq war and Iraqi politics for The New York Times. Al-Saiedi has been a fellow and researcher at the Carr Center at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, where he examined electoral systems in post-Saddam Iraq. He was also a Harvard Nieman Fellow in 2007. He holds an MPA from Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

China and Democracy

Interview with Professor Carla Freeman
Johns Hopkins University, United States

On November 3 2019, President Xi Jinping remarked that "China's people's democracy is a type of whole-process democracy." What did he mean by that statement?

In using the concept of "whole-process democracy" in 2019, President Xi Jinping was launching a campaign aimed at rebranding China's political system as democratic to publics beyond China, refining a formulation long used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership that China is a "socialist democracy." In his remarks in November 2019, he associated the idea of "whole-process democracy" with how legislative decisions are made in China through "democratic procedures and deliberations." China describes its system of governance as "democratic centralism" whereby its communist party makes decisions as the representative of the Chinese people. Xi's remarks were delivered in the context of a growing international critique of China's political system amid protests in defense of civil liberties and rights in Hong Kong, chilling reports from China's Xinjiang region, and strong messaging from Washington that China seeks to propagate authoritarianism. The Chinese leadership appears to be moving beyond holding up its remarkable development story as a source of "wisdom" for developing countries to seeking to legitimize China's

> China itself describes its system as a "democratic dictatorship," a concept that resonates with Karl Marx's concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

approach to governance as democratic and even as an alternative to liberal democracy.

How would you characterize China's current regime?

China itself describes its system as a "democratic dictatorship," a concept that resonates with Karl Marx's concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Unlike governments ruled by single autocrats, however, China's political system today has Party and government institutions and governing procedures that seek to make political decision-making through a collective rather than a one-man dictatorial process. However, the participants in this collective process are the approximately 90 million Party members; among these, only those in the Party's upper echelons participate in central level decision-making. China's leadership had experimented with "intra-Party democracy" in selecting this top leadership, using a straw poll voting method. However, this process has reportedly been eliminated. The term limits that had become the norm for China's post-Deng leadership were also eliminated for Xi. Since Xi became China's top leader with a mandate to strengthen the role of the CCP, the Party's growing role in managing society, defining the scope of acceptable public and private discourse, including through the use of advanced technologies, raises concerns that the CCP has rekindled the "totalitarian ambitions," to quote the late scholar Tang Tsou, of the China's Mao-era state.

Numerous pros and cons surrounding China's Belt and Road Initiative have been studied and discussed. One concern is that

China may utilize the project to weaken democracies. Do you believe there is any merit to this argument?

China's flagship global initiative, the BRI, is a path to power for China through expanding China's access to new markets for trade and investment, as well as to resources to ensure its economic security. China's substantial economic relations with countries along the Belt and Road certainly give China greater influence on those countries' governments, as well as stakes in them. Governments with large BRI investments may choose to deploy more repressive approaches to delivering social stability in the interest of attracting more Chinese investment or satisfying Chinese investors. This may include availing themselves of Chinese technologies to manage their societies through enhanced surveillance, potentially strengthening illiberal political tendencies. Or, in the interest of averting Beijing's opprobrium they may weaken their stance on human rights, as Greece did several years ago when it blocked the European Union's criticism of China's human rights at the United Nations.

But the BRI has revealed tremendous demand from countries in need of infrastructure and has presented a remarkable opportunity for many to speed their own development. In short, in the absence of other options, the BRI was a call they could not ignore. However, with the encouragement of many countries in need of infrastructure, the BRI has catalyzed a greater role for other countries and multilateral development institutions in meeting the needs of infrastructure-deficient countries. The United States has begun to participate in this response through a new International Development Finance Corporation and other initiatives. US involvement can encourage high standards for project assessment and development and is a way for the United States to engage in new ways in regions where it has interests.

What would you recommend to the incoming US administration for dealing with China?

US-China relations are at their worst since normalization. Even after the strains caused by Tiananmen in 1989, the United States and China were able to find common ground in mutually beneficial economic ties. China's commitment to strengthening the CCP as essential to China's political future has frustrated expectations in Washington that there would be growing political convergence or momentum toward shared political values. Despite former president Donald Trump's inclination toward transactional rather than values-based foreign relations, his administration's foreign policy under Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made it clear that China's political leadership by the CCP made normal US-China relations impossible. However, although more countries came to share US concerns about the potential implications of a world organized in a way more congenial to Beijing's preferences, China's global power and influence continued to grow. Tensions between the United States and China became a feature of the global pandemic response, with the US handling of the pandemic in its own territory comparing unfavorably to China's management of the crisis, despite observations that China deployed tech-powered social controls.

The US should focus on rebuilding itself and by doing so will restore its frayed global moral authority. The Biden Administration will be better able to restore global confidence in American leadership and promote the values and institutions that have helped provide the stable and open global environment for global growth by demonstrating its efforts to serve the American people and make US society better, and by engaging multilaterally to expand its contribution to global public goods in partnership with others. We will be best served by not focusing so intensely on the bilateral dimension of the US-China relationship but rather by conducting our relationship as much as possible in the global public square in multilateral forums where long-established norms and rules are followed by the majority of countries. Where the United States is not a member, it should join key global regimes, like the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to demonstrate that it supports global rules and it should become a member in even those international groupings in which China may play a leading role. It should work with allies and partners to lead the development of new global regimes for new global challenges, whether these are from emerging technologies or demographic changes,

climate-related disasters, or disease. There are huge opportunities at this moment of global crisis for the United States to revive its global leadership role. Strengthening the United States from the inside out is vital to an effective strategy for competing with China--and for confidently working with China and other nations on the global challenges that urgently require global collective action.

Professor Carla Freeman directs the SAIS Foreign Policy Institute and is concurrently associate research professor in China Studies. She conducts research on Chinese foreign and domestic policy with a current focus on regional dynamics, including China and its periphery, nontraditional security, and China's role in international organizations. In 2020 she was US-China Chair at the Library of Congress's Kluge Center.

Professor Freeman received a PhD in International relations and Asian Studies from Johns Hopkins SAIS,. She completed her BA in history and Southeast Asian studies with honors at Yale University and earned a certificate in political studies with honors from Sciences Po in Paris and certificates in Chinese from Beijing Foreign Languages University and the Taipei Language Institute.

She is the Editor-in-Chief of the academic journal *Asian Perspective*, published by Johns Hopkins University Press

Looking at Democracy Across Four Countries

Interview with Dr. Remi Adekoya
University of York, United Kingdom

You've written that the COVID-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity for reforms in Africa. What reforms would you like to see? And what progress with said reforms have been made so far?

Each of the African states has slightly varying problems, thus reforms required in each of them would also be different. For example, South Africa has slightly different problems from Uganda, which, in turn, has rather different problems from Algeria. However, if one wants to paint a broad picture, it is plausible to suggest there are certain problems that exist in practically every African state at some level or the other.

Two major things which most African citizens would like to see more of in their governments is transparency and accountability. There's always a lot of talk about corruption in African government and the levels of this vary. However, again, the issue of corruption comes down to transparency and accountability. People everywhere in the world want to have effective governments, governments which can provide basic services like 24 hour a day electricity, running water from the taps, roads, infrastructure, hospitals, and schools. But one thing that I definitely think Africans would emphasize is having governments that are not just effective but to have more transparency and more accountability. I'm focused a bit

Two major things which most African citizens would like to see more of in their governments is transparency and accountability.

on Nigeria, and I can't see or notice any particularly strong or impactful reforms there with regards to increasing transparency and accountability. Certain moves have been made, but have these really translated to more transparency and accountability in meaningful fashion in everyday governance? I doubt that.

Currently, everybody's so focused on surviving the pandemic and it's economic impacts that, unfortunately, issues like transparency and accountability tend to be relegated to the background. But, in a best-case scenario, reforms that address major issues in Africa could technically be implemented now with results being seen after the pandemic.

Nigeria has a number of different issues including corruption, lessened political participation levels, civil rights, problems with Boko Haram, and recently, gangs involved in an abduction of students. How would you characterize Nigeria's current democracy? And what changes would you like to see made to strengthen it?

I'd characterize it as a struggling democracy. Some of the problems are attributable to the present government and, of course, to previous governments. Moreover, some problems are unfortunately very deep. When you mention the issue of abductions and the issue of huge and increasing insecurity in the country, this is largely down to an issue of state capacity. Nigeria is almost a million square kilometers, four times the size of the United Kingdom, with over 200 million people. At the moment, the state does not have the capacity to effectively protect that territory under its supposed control. The government is able to maintain

a relative form of law and order in the big cities and close to the centers of power, but further out, it simply lacks the capacity. It doesn't have the manpower. It doesn't have the financial resources. And the people who are employed, for instance, police forces, are underpaid, understaffed, and undermotivated. The average Nigerian police is not ready to risk their life to protect the citizens of the country because there's no motivation there. They know, if they are killed in the line of duty, nobody's probably going to take care of their families.

These are huge problems and not problems any government actually could solve, because the question is: what would be needed to solve these problems? Realistically speaking, first of all, quite a lot of money is needed. You need money to protect a territory. You need to be able to employ people. You need to be able to pay them well. You need to be able to equip them. This money's not really forthcoming.

The budget of Nigeria is about $30 billion. That's smaller than the budgets of some of the smaller states in the US. Comparatively, $30 billion is nothing to run a country of 200 million people. Why is the budget so small for a country of 200 million people? One would think money coming from taxes alone should amount to more than that. But unfortunately, that system of being able to extract taxes from citizens and use that to run the state is not really functioning in Nigeria. The government is over reliant on the revenues that it gets from oil, and that's just about enough to run a bare-bones government. But it's not enough to actually run a whole country and protect a country. The state would need to be more efficient in extracting taxes. You need money to run a state.

There is also a hugely corrupt political elite where most of those people simply exist in office to line their pockets. Some people who go into politics have good intentions at the beginning. But when they see how the system works, when they see how completely utterly rotten the system is from the inside, they give up and say, "there's nothing I'm really going to achieve here. So I might as well take care of my family and myself." Unfortunately, Nigeria has been run like this for a long time. That's not to say there are not lots of people in Nigeria with goodwill. There are

lots of competent, very well educated, intelligent, patriotic people. But these people find it difficult to get into the real positions of power and be able to influence events. Like I said, when a handful of them do get into government, they're isolated, and when they realize they are facing this corrupt system, think, 'I can't really change much here, so I might as well just go with the flow.'

We also need a complete change in sort of quality of political elites, people who get into positions of power. The trick, of course, is, how do you do that? How do you get the right people to become president, ministers, governors, senators, House of Representatives?

There are many other issues as well. Nigeria is unique in that it is the only country in the world that is half Muslim and half Christian. That creates other tensions. Very often, the Western mind is trained to see cultural difference where it sees racial difference. People often think the US is probably a difficult country to run because it's such a diverse country. This is because where people see racial differences, they assume cultural differences. But the fact is that sometimes there is a country like Nigeria where there are no racial differences, but there are huge cultural differences. Many people think that because everybody there is black, it's probably more or less similar people. That's not true. There is ethnolinguistic diversity, with hundreds of communities in Nigeria that have their own languages, their own cultural norms, their own values, and their own ways of viewing the world. You can go to some regions of the country and it's like you're in a completely different country. Managing all this together, trying to put it all into one sort of cohesive body, is extremely complicated.

You touched on budgetary and revenue issues. What about foreign aid to Nigeria?

Foreign aid is negligible when it comes to Nigeria because, unlike some African states where it's a third of their national budgets, Nigeria is not significantly reliant on it. The foreign aid that is received is mostly through NGOs, and it's more or less separated from the government's direct

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self-influence.

To gage foreign aid's effectiveness in Nigeria, it might be best to examine it at the project level, and some have been successful. For instance, the fight against eradicating polio, which Bill Gates has been a big part of, has been very successful in the North of Nigeria. But there have been other projects that have been less successful. For instance, resources were given for taking care of the families who have been displaced by the Boko Haram attacks. There have been reports of corruption and state officials hoarding those goods and controlling how they're distributed. This serves as a means of also maintaining political power, because one of the chief strategies of attaining and maintaining political power in Nigeria is through the control of resources. When you are living in a country where 70% of the people are poor, and if you're the one deciding who gets the bags of rice and who gets the bags of flour, you're the boss. That's how the political elite keep themselves in power, by creating these patronage systems.

Let's discuss another country where you've lived, Poland. We've seen Poland change as a leader in European democracy to a rise in populism, far right politics, and nationalism. What have been the causes?

There are various answers here. There's the socioeconomic angle, for instance. After the fall of Communism, the economic direction the country took is, broadly speaking, one of neoliberal economic policies. So irrespective of whether there was a left-wing government or right-wing government in Poland, a strongly laissez-faire capitalistic system was put in place just after Communism. There was strong emphasis on privatization that led to a situation in which Poland grew very strongly in the quarter century after Communism. However, it also created a lot of winners and losers within the country. It created regions that were richer, regions that were poorer. The eastern part of Poland ended up poorer and the western region richer. Warsaw and the main cities ended up richer. It created socioeconomic differences. Some people in the country felt that they were left behind. People who lived in the towns where there

used to be Communist factories that were often closed if they weren't profitable enough. This created a sense among a significant group of the population that they had lost out in this whole liberalization scheme, etc.

Also, among some people, it created a sense of loss of control, like we had in the Brexit referendum. Poland had been subsumed into this big EU body where it was essentially Berlin, and Paris occasionally, calling the shots and deciding what goes on in countries like Poland. Then there were huge multinational corporations that moved into Poland following the collapse of Communism, and were essentially bosses of Poles.

Moreover, there were internal party politics. The current government, Law and Justice, lost several elections on the way to actually winning power, and for quite a long time, polls rejected that party. They lost elections in 2007 and 2011. The party that was winning elections then was a very pro-Western, liberal party. But after two terms of that party in power, people had gotten fed up. Then a key moment occurred in he middle of the Polish election: the migrant crisis in Europe. When pictures started being beamed into people's living rooms on their TV sets of what seemed like millions of brown skinned migrants coming into Europe, the Right was able to play on that and say, there are hordes of Barbarians who are coming into our country to pillage and take everything we've got. Arguments like this really helped the Law and Justice party win power. I don't think they would have won that election if not for the migrant crisis, or even if they had, would have won it with a much smaller margin.

Since then, they've been able to constantly build on a message that says: we want some sort of a return to national control over our lives and we're tired of supernational organizations globalization. We are a Polish government, interested in Polish interests, and will never sell Poland out. We're never going to allow Poland to become subsumed into this fantasy, left, international world order in which there are no borders and all that kind of nonsense. We're going to maintain our Polish identity and remain Poles. Our party is the grantor of that. That message has worked so far for them.

You have an upcoming book, *Biracial Britain: A Different Way of Looking at Race.* **Would you discuss some highlights?**

I'll start with a bit of background about myself. I was born and grew up in Nigeria. My father was Nigerian. My mother was Polish. After going to primary and secondary school in Nigeria, I moved to Poland, where I went to university and lived for quite a bit. Then I moved to the UK about six years ago.

In Nigeria, practically everyone is black. So race is not an issue. It's the same for Poland where the population is about 99% white. In a country of 38 million people, there are only a few thousand people who are not white, because most of the foreigners there tend to be Europeans. But the UK is different, because the UK is 15% non-white. So, in the UK, race is a big deal and people talk about it a lot.

When I came to the UK, I started thinking about it even more than before, and wanted to write a book to discuss it. That's why I titled it *Biracial Britain: A Different Way of Looking at Race*. The objective was to look at these racial issues a little bit differently. What do I mean by that? First of all, the debate around race is increasingly polarized. And when debates get increasingly polarized, it becomes increasingly simplistic with people being divided into good groups and bad groups and evil groups and oppressed groups. But this does not really reflect the reality of the average individual in their everyday lives.

First, I wanted to talk about race not in a way that is usually done. They are usually written from the perspective of the author telling the reader their views on racial issues. But I wanted to show how other people see the issues. I interviewed a lot of people, mixed race people, mixed race Britons, and asked them about their experiences, asked them to tell me their stories, and then I narrated those stories in the book. I also included my experiences growing up mixed race, in Nigeria, in Poland and then in the UK. I wanted to take a bottom up approach, not centered on just me telling how I see things, but putting in other peoples' perspectives.

At the beginning of working on the book, I had the suspicion that mixed race people would tend not to see race in simplistic, black and white terms – good and bad - which is increasingly how race is discussed now, even in mainstream media. If you've grown up mixed race, you will probably tend to have had both positive and negative experiences with people from various racial backgrounds, even within your own family. For me, having grown up in Nigeria, I grew up around black people and have had both positive and negative experiences with black people. Same goes for white people.

Many of the problems which we have regarding racism and all sorts of prejudice, are human problems, stemming from human flaws. For instance, the human need for domination, fear of the Other, etc. This is also something which people's stories showed. I definitely wanted to explore in the book the mixed race perspective on race, with all its contradictions.

It's also important to note that it's not specifically about the race aspect but the cultural aspect. When we talk about these racial differences, what we really mean are cultural differences. My mother viewed the world in a completely different way from the way my father viewed the world, not because she was white and he was black, but because she was Polish and he was Nigerian. Those are two very different cultural universes. There were some things where I agree with my mom and there were some things that I agree more with my dad. I grew up with all these kinds of contradictions, and I expected that other mixed race people, other groups, also grew up with these kinds of contradictions. Sometimes they may not want to talk about it, especially within the Western context. This is because there is this idea within the West that brown and black people should stick together and not talk about any of the negative things that may be happening in our own black and brown communities.

In the UK, many people say that we don't talk about race enough. I don't agree. It's not that we don't talk about race enough. The problem is that we don't talk about race honestly enough. We don't want to say things that we really think. We just want to say things which might fit a

certain grand narrative that we think is necessary to our survival or to our thriving. So, when the issue of race comes up, everybody has their prepared talking points – many white people come with their own talking points and many black and brown people come with their own talking points. It becomes a psychological battle of us against them. This breeds disingenuousness.

Another important topic in the book is that when people think of mixed race, people think of the black/white mix. But, there are various other mixes and various other racial configurations. I spoke to people who had, for example, a Pakistani dad and a Lebanese mom, or a Jamaican dad and an Indian mom. That kind of that mixed race experience is not discussed very often.

Since the killing of George Floyd, the US has seen an increase in efforts to address racism. What do you think the United States can learn from other countries?

It's difficult to say because the racial dynamics in the US are shaped by racial demographics. You have a completely different situation in a country that is 95% dominated by one racial group with a 5% minority population than you have in a country, like the US, where about a third of the population is not white. So, it would be difficult for the US to learn from a country like Austria. However, we can look at the countries, which are touted as success stories when it comes to racial integration. Canada is a country that is often spoken of in a very positive light. One would have to examine policies that the Canadians have adopted there with regard to managing their race relations. Of course, there's a different history that must be taken into consideration. You don't have the slavery aspect, etc.

In the United States, there are structural factors at play with significant wealth disparities. In 2019, US white household median wealth stood at $188,200 compared to $36,100 for Hispanic families and $24,100 for black families, according to the US Federal Reserve. The typical white American family thus owns eight times the wealth of the typical black

family and five times the wealth of the typical Hispanic family. Median white families are about eight times wealthier than median African American families. But aside from real structural issues, there are also a lot of issues tied to emotions. There are feelings of humiliation, feelings of being denied dignity, feelings of not being seen as equals, etc. At the moment, I think the psychological aspects of relations have unfortunately taken over, and very often drive public debates. Problem is, when emotions start to cloud reason, we all lose at the end of the day.

The US is really unique because of its history and its racial demographics. The white majority has the feeling that it's losing its majority status and I think that was a big mistake of the Left to emphasize that. For many years, people on the Left stated, even in almost triumphalist tones, the Whites are losing their majority status and are going to have to get used to a different order of things. That's not really the message to put out there unless you want to get people on the defensive. I think that actually made some white people in the US concerned and think, what's going on here? Is it true we're actually losing our majority status? What's then going to happen? Of course, Obama's presidency brought that home to a lot of people, and we saw their reaction to that in the choice of Trump.

What really matters in managing these race relations issues are addressing structural inequalities, physical inequalities which exist, and discussing race relations in a way that doesn't make any group feel they are going to be marginalized. People react horribly when they feel, rightly or wrongly, that they are losing out or about to lose out. Sometimes it's actually difficult to try to correct a perception that can be factually wrong. But we have to try. If people feel threatened, then they start doing all sorts of stupid things, start believing all sorts of silly conspiracy theories, and become ready to go through all sorts of lengths to counter the perceived threat. The key is making no group feel that way. That is what any strategy for improving race relations needs to focus on. We need to try and get messages out there that will leave nobody feeling people like me and mine are going to be marginalized in the coming order.

What's your outlook for the future of democracy around the world?

I think a lot will be determined by the economic impact of COVID. We haven't started to feel it yet, because we are still focused on the public health aspect and surviving it. Hopefully, in the next year or two, enough people will have been vaccinated to make it less of a public health issue. But then we will start to feel the economic impact of it and have a better understanding of how many jobs have been lost.

There are various government programs in rich Western countries like the US and the UK where the government is supporting companies. Here in the UK, the government is paying essentially workers' salaries in many cases of subsidizing workers' salaries. While there's a cushion in the rich countries, poor governments in Africa and in many Asian states can't afford this. Even in the rich countries, that cushion cannot last forever. So, we'll probably face an economic crisis.

How bad that turns out to be will determine the survival of democracy or not. If the economic situation gets really bad, then I can imagine a scenario where various populist parties are going to come up with all sorts of crazy ideas about what we need to do to make everything right again, much like was seen in early 20th century Europe. So, if we have that kind of economic crisis, things could get really bad for democracy.

But if the economic crisis isn't that bad, if it's something relatively manageable, and doesn't manage to create situations in which half of a country's workforce doesn't have a job or a means of living, then I'd be cautiously optimistic about democracy. There's a big push for more democracy right now in most parts of the world. In Nigeria, there is currently an uprising for democracy by young people. There and elsewhere, the younger generation is saying, we are not going to take the things that our parents and grandparents took from their governments. They're going to protest, going to demand more of a say, and more rights.

Interview by Sheritha Brace

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Before joining academia, Dr. Adekoya was a political journalist who has written for Guardian, Foreign Policy, Foreign Affairs, Washington Post, Politico, Spectator, The Times, and Standpoint among others. He has provided sociopolitical analysis and commentary for BBC, Sky News, Al Jazeera, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), African International Television (AIT), Radio France International (RFI), and Times Radio, among others. He is a former regular columnist for Business Day, a Nigerian daily, and a former political editor of Warsaw Business Journal.

Waiting for Pericles

Tim Bovy

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D emocracy's history, said Walt Whitman, "remains unwritten" because it "has yet to be enacted." Quite simply, we have never got it right. A part of the problem is that democracy is often a misnomer. In 2014, for example, two respected scholars claimed that the US political system is more aptly described as "economic élite domination,"[1] which, as the Nobel Laureate economist Paul Krugman observed, enables the elite "to buy the political system…to serve their interests."[2] The Koch brothers viewed elected politicians as mere "actors playing out a script" whose "themes and words" they supplied."[3] In his nomination acceptance speech in 2016, Donald Trump told the American people, "I am your voice,"[4] a thinly veiled announcement that authoritarian leadership had arrived in America, reaching its crescendo on January 6, 2021.

In the UK, the oligarchic structure of British society is a theme that we can see running throughout the twentieth century. In 1915, a staunch critic of British culture "depicted Britain as a snobbish, class-ridden oligarchy preaching freedom to the world, even as it oppressed millions in India and other parts of the British Empire and condemned a third of its own people to poverty."[5] More recently, the Financial Times has warned: "Never mind the Russians – in Britain too, wealth and power are increasingly in the hands of a small elite."[6] Within the EU, countries such as Hungary and Poland flout democracy, as they brazenly embrace authoritarianism and an illiberal ideology, while the EU itself stands accused of having a democratic deficit.

Demagoguery and populism have become the trademarks of leaders in many of the world's industrialized nations. Donald Trump was as close to being a fascist as the US presidency is ever likely to get. Boris Johnson, Lech Kaczynski, Matteo Salvini, Jair Bolsinaro, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan (one could go on) have all been caught, to varying degrees, in the authoritarian slipstream of Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping.

President Biden is certainly a refreshing change from his predecessor; nevertheless, he appears intent upon maintaining the social imbalances and inequality for which neoliberalism is well known. Indeed, his cabinet already reflects this trend, setting the stage for an uninterrupted neoliberal line, from Regan and Thatcher, to Clinton and Blair, right through to Johnson and Trump, and Biden himself. The person standing at the podium might change, but the wizards of finance perched behind him, manipulating the narrative, remain the same.

The freedoms that we do value, as enshrined, for example, in the First Amendment of the US Constitution, could as easily be bestowed upon a sovereign nation by an enlightened dictator. Clearly, we want something more. We might call it Periclean democracy in which all of the citizens of Athens participated. "Our city is called a democracy because it is governed by the many, not the few. In the realm of private disputes everyone is equal before the law, but when it is a matter of public honors each man is preferred not on the basis of his class but of his good reputation and his merit. No one, moreover, if he has it in him to do some good for the city, is barred because of poverty or humble origins" (Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War 2.37.1). Although we must remember that Athenian citizens comprised less than 20% of

> By contrast with 5th Century B.C., Athens, in today's like-minded democracies, as we prefer to call them, people living in poverty or who are of humble origins have no voice.

the population, "they can be taken", notes A. C. Grayling, "to embody an aspiration which is implicitly realizable in Aristotle's idea of polity enlarging itself as more and more of the population become citizens."[7]

By contrast with 5th Century B.C., Athens, in today's like-minded democracies, as we prefer to call them, people living in poverty or who are of humble origins have no voice. Neoliberalism has converted us from citizens into consumers. Everything is a market. "We destroy the beauty of the countryside," said Keynes, "because the unappropriated splendors of nature have no economic value."[8] This recurring theme of the primacy of the market perpetuates an economic system in which, as Thomas Piketty has observed, "the rate of return on capital is higher than the rate of economic growth, ensuring that the gap between those whose incomes derive from capital assets and those whose incomes derive from labor" continues to widen, "mimicking the aristocracies of old Europe and banana republics."[9]

Neoliberalism has raised inequality to unconscionable levels, and buried society so far beneath the market that Margaret Thatcher declared the former non-existent: "There's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families."[10] As Tony Judt has observed, in such a political milieu, "the role of the state is reduced...to that of a facilitator. The task of the politician is to ascertain what is best for the individual, and then afford him the conditions in which to pursue it with minimal interference."[11] So, deregulate the market, and then simply get out of the way, ignoring the fact that, as Fred Block has astutely observed, "a fully self-regulating market economy requires that human beings and the natural environment be turned into pure commodities…."[12]

It would be convenient to say that neoliberalism drove a stake through the heart of democracy by creating the income gaps and inequality with which we are all too familiar, setting the stage for the populism and authoritarianism that feed off of it. But the spade work had already been done in the eighteenth century. James Madison called democracy "the most vile form of government. [Democracies] have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property, and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths."[13] Property was the key: I own, therefore I am. To this requirement, we might add another essential characteristic: I am white, therefore I am. A seminar/workshop at the University of Michigan in 2017 demonstrated that "a large percentage of whites dehumanize blacks, and they do so automatically and routinely,"[14] a mentality with a long history.

In July 1852, in a speech commemorating the Declaration of Independence, Frederick Douglas poignantly noted: "This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn." He asked the audience: "Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day?" After which he passionately drove home his message: "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim."[15]

How constant? One hundred sixty-eight years later, on July 3, 2020, The Los Angeles Times Editorial Board noted that: "For too many people, and for too many generations, the self-evident truth of equality has just been empty words scrawled on parchment. And it is incumbent upon us, as a nation, to turn those words into reality."[16] The "too many generations" take us right back to America's beginnings. Our Constitution, writes Howard Zinn, was not framed for "'we the people' but to secure the interests of the 'fifty-five privileged white males who wrote it,' adding that the government has served 'the wealthy and powerful' ever since. In his view, the problem isn't that the dream was deferred but that it was a nightmare from the start."[17] Enter Walt Whitman.

His dictum that democracy has yet to be enacted looks set to play forward for several more generations. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences earlier this year reported that, "Fewer than one-third of Millennials consider it essential to live in a democracy."[18] As another study released by The Bennett Institute for Public Policy at the University of Cambridge in October 2020 indicates, millennials complain that "existing structures have failed to address longstanding resentments in society, ranging from inequalities of wealth, to economic insecurity, to malfeasance among economic and social elites."[19] Among the young, democracy has lost its luster and its credibility, giving it an uncertain future.

We should not be surprised. The failings of democracy that today's Millennials point to echo down through the centuries, from the writings of Madison to The Los Angeles Times editorial board. For a recent historical snapshot of this failing, let's look at a very narrow span from 2008 to now.

We are still waiting for the "democratic awakening"[20] to occur that Dominic West referred to at the height of the Occupy Movement in 2011. The reason that it hasn't revealed a disturbing continuity of moral failure among governments from the financial collapse of 2008 through to the present. As Katrina vanden Heuvel noted ten years ago: "[The Occupy Movement] wants corporate money out of politics. It wants the widening gap of income inequality to be narrowed substantially. And it wants meaningful solutions to the jobless crisis. In short, it wants a system that works for the 99 percent."[21] It wants democracy.

It is important to remember that "We are the 99%"[22] became the battle cry, not of proletarians restlessly roaming the streets of a repressed Eastern city, but of the betrayed middle class occupying a park in Lower Manhattan. It did not take long for the discontent to spread to over 950 cities in 82 countries around the globe where nations scammed their citizens to benefit what the millennials of 2020 are calling the economic and social elites. We do not need Abraham Lincoln to remind us that you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.

The difference is that the Occupiers of ten years ago wanted to create "real democracy." The millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, are questioning why. They are joined by Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, in what the Cambridge Study noted above calls the "Democratic Disconnect."

One of the reasons for this disconnect is that the calls for reform after the 2008 financial collapse have gone unheeded. The comment of Bishop Welby (now the Archbishop of Canterbury) at the time was particularly relevant since it went straight to the heart of democracy's core values: "[One] principle seems to me to be clear, we cannot repair what was destroyed in 2008, we can only replace it with something that is dedicated to the support of human society, to the common good and to solidarity."[23]

Welby seemed to be saying: let's do something that America's Founding Fathers never intended to do; let's do something that Britain's Anglo-Saxon property owners lacked the will to do; let's build a democracy based upon the needs of the whole of society, rather than pandering to the demands of the select and winnowed few. It is now 2021, and we are still waiting to turn the empty words scrawled on parchment into reality. We are still waiting for our Pericles, a moment that, if it ever comes, will mark, not the end of history, as envisioned by Francis Fukuyama, but the beginning of the history of democracy in our time.

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Democracy is at the Crossroads of Victory and Failure

Dr. Tao Peng
World Journal, Germany

In today's world, democracy has encountered obstacles everywhere, and it is at the crossroads of victory and defeat. This is already an undeniable and undoubted fact. Whether in emerging democracies or in established Western democracies, democracy is facing unprecedented and diverse challenges. However, the problems and deficits faced by democracy can be reduced and overcome through various reforms and political and legal measures, although it requires a long and arduous process. The success of reforms and the realization of good governance are the key to determining whether democracy will win or decline.

The world is mainly undemocratic

The Democracy Index, published in 2018 by the British analyst firm The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), shows that the world is mainly undemocratic and the list of incomplete democracies is very long. The list of "incomplete" democracies is the largest group in the EIU Index, with 55 countries, in which 43% of the world's population reside. According to the index, only 20 countries have been awarded the title of "complete democracy", and more than half of the world's population lives in countries with dictatorship or a mixture of dictatorship and democracy. The "World Freedom" index from the American organization Freedom House regards 39% of countries as "free", while only 12% of countries are regarded as "free" by the EIU index. Since 2016, the United States has been called "incomplete democracy" by the EIU Index, especially because the public's dissatisfaction with government work has increased and their trust in public institutions has also fallen. In the ranking of the incomplete democracies, the United States, which was regarded as

a beacon of democracy in the past, lags behind South Korea, Japan, Chile, and Estonia, only behind African island countries Cape Verde and Portugal. In addition, the polarization of society and the foreign and domestic policies of former US President Donald Trump have also caused the index to have a negative impact on the assessment of American political culture. Many European democracies, such as France, Belgium, and Italy are also classified as "incomplete democracy" by the EIU Index. Moreover, the index value of Western Europe also dropped slightly for the third time in a row. Only seven Western European countries are among the top ten in the democratic development rankings.

In addition, the Bertelsmann Foundation's Transformation Index also points out that in more and more countries, civil rights and freedoms are restricted or completely deprived, not just in dictatorships. In democratic countries, civil rights and freedoms are also suffering more and more. Among the 129 transitional countries surveyed, the quality of democracy in one-fifth of the countries has greatly declined, repression in many places is also increasing, and political participation is also decreasing. One of the most striking examples of these "non-liberal democracies" is Hungary. The freedom of the press in the country is particularly severely restricted by the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

Challenges to the United States and Western Democracies

The challenges to American democracy are clearly reflected in last year's presidential election. Donald Trump did not recognize the failure of the ballot box, but asked to continue his office. One of the prerequisites of democracy is that those who lose the election must recognize the

result. In a democratic society, the majority respects the rights of the lost minority and form a basic social consensus. On this basis, society has the ability to widely accept compromise solutions. Democratic state institutions must be accountable to laws and constitutions so that citizens can trust them. However, all of these are beginning to decline, which is particularly prominent in the United States. American society has become so polarized that these prerequisites are no longer taken for granted.

The process of possible loss of basic social consensus is underway. To be effective, democracy needs the willingness to reach consensus and compromise. However, in the new media world, a place has been found to separate them. In social media, people emphasize differences and widen channels, and countless examples of this can be seen every day. Trump took advantage of these influences. He demonized political opponents, provoked racist dissatisfaction, and expressed distrust of the system (led by himself). For months, he claimed that large-scale postal voting fraud occurred. Due to the high percentage of postal votes during the new coronavirus epidemic, some states will only vote by post. Therefore, this laid the foundation for the above-mentioned conflict situation. Although there is no evidence of large-scale postal voting fraud, half of registered U.S. voters are now convinced of its existence. A survey shows that among Republicans, this number is as high as 80%. 74% of the interviewees said they were worried that "politicians would conduct election fraud in an organized manner to influence the results of the election". On January 6 this year, 147 Republicans voted against confirming the Electoral College votes, including Senators Josh Holly, Ted Cruz, and others.

Due to the new coronavirus pandemic and to the words and deeds of President Trump and his supporters, the US election presents unprecedented polarization. President-elect Biden won 80 million votes in a record turnout while President Trump received approximately 74 million votes. Supporters of Biden and Trump do not recognize each other, and the two sides are almost unable to engage in dialogue. The divide between Democrats and Republicans has widened as never before. Now, the two halves of the population are facing an irreconcilable situation. Half of Americans feel controlled by globalization, technological progress, and the country's political elite. The other half of voters believe that Trump is the embodiment of evil. In addition, his supporters regarded him as a

hero and worshipped him as a god.

One of the factors that contributed to the polarization of voters' opinions and the accelerated loss of social consensus is that many people worry that the United States will be demoted and plunged into a deep social crisis. Under the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic, the failure of social policies, poverty, inequality, and lack of economic prospects have caused people's distrust of the current political system and dissatisfaction with the political elite. In the United States, even in the midst of a pandemic, people who are seriously ill have to go to work and have no sick days. Many poor people, whether they are package carriers or restaurant employees, cannot pay rent. In contrast, no industrialized country in the world has performed less poorly than the United States. These social structural problems (including many people who still do not have medical and health insurance) have not been solved or alleviated for a long time, because for Americans, social security systems like those in Europe are utopian social reforms. Many Americans reject any reforms or labor laws that sound like socialist rhetoric, even though the United States desperately needs such reforms.

Another factor is the social differentiation formed in the Internet age. The Internet is one of the most powerful tools to deconstruct traditional democratic politics. It is increasingly changing the rules of the game in democratic countries and posing severe challenges to their governance. The Internet can promote the anti-system movement and may even become the "gravedigger" of the political system of democratic countries. The function of the Internet has contributed to the fragmentation of crowd opinions, the reduction of traditional social consensus, and the proliferation of anarchy. It also led to the rapid spread of anti-system, anti-eliteness, hatred and anger, making traditional democratic political values lose their charm, and leaving mainstream media to be ignored or cast aside. The Internet is known as the "second environment" and "new nature" of contemporary people. The disorder and non-intelligence of network communication has caused the Internet, the "second environment" of contemporary people, to be increasingly degraded and polluted. The "new nature" that keeps netizens from being guided by democratic rules and values is changing the human nature, the world outlook and the illustrations of contemporary people. Anarchism, racial hostility, or even fascist thoughts have gained new rich soil. The Internet

not only has positive functions such as promoting direct democracy and enhancing social supervision of the government and the powerful, but also has the negative effects of destroying democratic systems and infringing on human rights. The Internet revolution is a double-edged sword, which can both kill demons and create devils.

All the above-mentioned declines, such as social division, loss of consensus, and loss of trust in public power have not only occurred in the United States, but also in other Western democratic countries. Opinion polls in France show that right-wing nationalist Marin Le Pen is only a few percentage points away from President Emmanuel Macron, although the next election will not be held until next year. However, election results in the first round of 2017 and the angry protests in the yellow vests later showed that the basic social consensus is also very fragile. In Germany, even though populist attitudes seem to be declining, conspiracy theories are widely spread. In opposition to the German government's new coronavirus epidemic restrictions, right-wingers, anti-vaccination and anti-democracy people, and conspiracy theorists held protest rallies and demonstrations together. In addition to Germany, there are similar demonstrations in other European countries such as Poland, France, and Austria. These are different than the in the United States: American demonstrations have more individualism and liberalism, while German demonstrators have formed more of a "community of the people". However, the demonstrators of the two countries have one thing in common, that they both believe there is a majority and a minority, and the minority wants to control and manipulate the majority through conspiracy. Like the United States, these countries once bound by a strong-shared history are splitting into opposing tribes, each with its own internal ideology. The basic social consensus is in the process of losing. New social media promotes the disintegration of the public, and society is split into smaller and smaller resonance spaces. In a deeply divided public, people have lost their sense of unity. It disintegrates the basic democratic consensus, and political opponents are seen as enemies. In addition, the rise of extremist forces and right-wing political parties in Western countries has also strongly impacted traditional mainstream politics. This has caused a crisis in government governance, making anti-democratic and anti-human rights words and deeds public and normalized. The most

representative are the American white supremacist groups, the French National Front, the British Independence Party (UKIP), the German Alternative Party (AfD), Italy's populist Five Star Movement, and the sudden emergence of extreme right-wing parties in other European countries. According to World Report 2021, published by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Human Rights in many European countries has deteriorated. This is especially true in Hungary where the government used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to double down on its attacks on democratic institutions and the rule of law. And in Poland, where the ruling conservative nationalist elite continues to strengthen its grasp on the judiciary and to smear journalists critical of the ruling party. Attacks and harassment against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people increased, and several LGBT activists were arrested during the year and faced spurious charges.

Democracy is alive

Although democracy is in danger on a global scale, the results of the 2020 US presidential election and the rise of many grassroots movements in Western society have embodied the vitality of democracy and demonstrated that democracy is still alive. The confirmation of President-elect Joe Biden's victory by Congress proved the tenacity and survival of American democracy, despite the turbulence and chaos in the United States before and after the presidential election. For example, pro-Trump rioters stormed the US Capitol on January 6, destroying artifacts everywhere, directly threatening the safety of congressional representatives and guards, and forcing the ongoing certification proceedings of Electoral College votes to be halted for a while. In the days when President-elect Biden was about to be sworn in, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) also issued a warning that there where plans for armed protests in all 50 state capitals and Washington, DC, inciting more bloodshed fear. In response to this situation, America's most senior general, Mark Milley, and the entire Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a statement on Jan. 12, 2021 condemning the violent invasion of the US Capitol and reminding service members of their obligation to support and defend the Constitution and reject extremism.

The vitality and hope of democracy also include the civil rights movement, the women's movement and the LGBTQ movement, especially the largest social movement in American history - "Black Lives Matter (BLM)." Today, 75% of Americans realize that systemic racism is a big problem. Even if many have been worried about the chaos surrounding the presidential election, the American democratic system will not be successfully destroyed. Around the world, there is more and more political participation, and women's political participation is also increasing. Their participation is not only political, but also economic. People see new forms of citizen participation, including participation through social media and extensive actions using legal means. Compared with traditional participation, new social participation is more dynamic and broader. For example, there are protest movements in the United States, Hong Kong, and Belarus, where people protested on a large scale against the government and demanded protection of their human rights. The same situation exists in many other parts of the world.

Democracy needs to be guarded

To reduce the democratic deficit, reconstruct democratic consensus, and prevent social divisions, it is necessary to promote citizen participation and dialogue between political ethnic groups, implement reforms such as the social security system and labor law, and combat corruption. The government and society must also strive to reach consensus. Only in this way will it be possible to reduce more populism and ideological radicalization and to curb the division of society. In addition, the government's full and effective fight against the current COVID-19 pandemic is also a crucial step, which will help restore the normal life of society and the people's confidence in the government's governance capabilities.

The governance dilemma weakens the legitimacy of the democratic system. The reason why a democratic system has legitimacy and is widely recognized is that it is a necessary prerequisite for good governance. On the contrary, poor governance will undoubtedly affect citizens' satisfaction with democracy and weaken citizens' support for democracy. For example, the 2008 financial crisis and its consequences have left developed democracies in a dilemma in terms of economic

...achieving better good governance through various reforms is an effective way for Western countries to reduce democratic deficits and to maintain and stabilize their democratic systems. In this sense, democracy is at the crossroads of victory and defeat.

development and political legitimacy. At the same time, in emerging market countries, the view that Western systems and policies are not worthy of imitation is becoming more and more attractive. Moreover, the political disorder that plagues Western countries and the government's failure to deal with it have further weakened the attractiveness of Western democracies. China achieved results in the fight against the new coronavirus epidemic, being ahead of the United States and Western democracies. It makes Beijing further believe that China's authoritarian government is more capable of governance than Western democratic governments, even though in the early stages of the epidemic, the Chinese government lost several weeks of effective control due to concealing the facts and suppressing the truth revealers, allowing the virus to spread rapidly and making it a global pandemic.

Therefore, achieving better good governance through various reforms is an effective way for Western countries to reduce democratic deficits and to maintain and stabilize their democratic systems. In this sense, democracy is at the crossroads of victory and defeat. Whether democracy wins or declines depends on whether the above-mentioned reform measures can be effectively implemented, whether the consensus of society and democracy can be rebuilt, and whether effective dialogue between different political groups can be achieved.

The history of authoritarianism is not over yet, and liberal democracy is not unbreakable once established. In the context of globalization, the game between democracy and authoritarianism has not declined, on the contrary it is increasing. Democracies must face this harsh reality and spare no effort to uphold and promote democracy. The construction, improvement, and promotion of democracy will always be on the road, and there is no room for any slack or pause. Although people are born selfish, they also naturally pursue fairness and justice. This is the human foundation for the establishment and continuation of democracy.

Democracy needs to be continuously maintained and improved. There is no democratic system that is automatically immune to decay and free from decline.

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Effects of Democratic Strains on Journalism

Interview with Professor j. Siguru Wahutu
New York University, United States

In late 2018, you predicted a difficult year for journalists in 2019 in the US and the UK. With the elections highlighting news in the US and Brexit continuing to be an issue, how would you describe 2020 for journalism? How did the respective political environments impact journalism?

This is a great question, which I've been thinking about since then. Unfortunately, 2020 was worse than I could have ever imagined. As the impending deadline for Brexit loomed for the UK, media organizations resorted to palace intrigue type of coverage more than calling out the lies of the administration for its shocking incompetence. Not only that, one may imagine that audiences may have felt frustrated at the inability to get meaningful information not just about COVID-19 but also Brexit. So here we are, in 2021, and the same questions are still being asked by many not only in the UK but around the world about what a no-deal Brexit means for the daily lives of people. What does it tell us about the political class in the UK? These are still unknown to most of the British audience.

US journalism has faced a uniquely frustrating set of realities over the last four years. The Black Lives Matter protests this summer and the harassment, arrest, and targeting of journalists covering the demonstrations pointed to a turn in the relationship between journalism and the State. According to the US Press Freedom Tracker, as of the 21st of December 2020, 312 journalists had been assaulted in the US, a vast majority of which were by law enforcement officers. Yet, while one may think the journalists and news organizations would cover these assaults as systemic targeting of them by the State, we have seen assaults being covered as an aberration. Thus, there have been very few concerted attempts to view this from a macro perspective. The tradition of covering events as episodic, fractured, and unconnected has hampered

American journalism from making a case against the State. The outgoing government's sustained and gradual erosion of norms has meant that American journalism has been like frogs in a boiling pot. Instead, the profession has primarily focused on palace intrigues to the detriment of their freedom to inform the public.

Working in environments of political polarization as well as pressure from misinformation/disinformation from various sources, Western journalism has recently been faced with a number of challenges. However, African journalists have worked in many problematic circumstances for years. What can Western journalists learn from their counterparts in Africa to better navigate the current environment?

It is strange to think that we are now in a time where one can confidently argue that Western journalists can and should learn from their African colleagues. I remember making this argument last year and being greeted with incredulity and skepticism from some quarters. Many American journalists entered the profession when there was a general sense that American journalism was the best in the world. The current generation of journalists has never been faced with a regime as hostile to their profession as the departing US administration. As a result, American journalists have kept on trying to do journalism in the way they were taught to do it. Cover both sides, privilege state actors as sources, and hope that the audience will be able to differentiate between good and bad actors. But perhaps one of the more egregious misconceptions has been the flawed expectation that State actors will always privilege the good of the country rather than seek self-benefit, even when the latter comes to the State's detriment.

One of the things that African journalism has tremendous experience in is working in a State where the regime is outrightly hostile. For example, many an African journalist knows how to cover an outgoing regime that threatens to overturn a legitimate election. They know what to look out for, what to report, and what to ignore. African journalists have long been engaged in what Joan Donovan and danah boyd term *Strategic Silence and Strategic Amplification*. African journalists know that not every conspiracy or every fringe group needs to be breathlessly covered. They understand that bad actors need to be outrightly called bad actors rather than hedging in the name of "objectivity." For example, they know that if a politician with rumored presidential ambitions is calling for tanks on the street, this is not a curious factoid but a message with implicit and explicit framing. As such, coverage must strongly repudiate it for what it is without trying to "see the other side" of the argument.

In some countries, social media and surveillance on private data have been leveraged by governments in attempts to strengthen their power. How concerning do you find this? Could it not only impact affected countries but democracies elsewhere?

This is one of the scarier things that is happening on these platforms as it pertains to threats to democracy worldwide. One of the problems is that often when these public-facing technologies are designed, very little thought is again given to bad actors (such as authoritarian States). For example, there was a recent story by BBC's Dickens Olewe that the Tanzanian government used Twitter's policy on copyright infringement to silence activists. One of the most frustrating issues is that Silicon Valley companies are often subservient to claims by State actors from countries on the continent. There is very little attempt to try and verify whether or not claims such as those by Tanzania are legitimate, to the detriment to activists and human rights advocates.

In another example, there was a story recently in The Guardian newspaper of a massive hack allegedly perpetrated by Saudi Arabia and UAE against al Jazeera journalists through WhatsApp. This, in and of itself, was not new. Social media companies have shown people in the Global South that they are always more likely to side with the state than with citizens when the interests of these two groups are at odds.

We know this because of the way we have seen a couple of the bigger platforms being willing to work with bad faith state actors to suppress dissent. From Myanmar to Nicaragua, these companies sacrifice their users at the altar of good government relations with bad government actors.

There are also examples where the state made policy to specifically allow its agents to go through the online activities of users to determine who would be allowed into its borders. We have seen this in recent government policy that allowed border agents to rifle through social media profiles of those coming to the US. Think about all voices that were silenced on social media over the last four years for fear that when they arrived at a US border, CBP would access their social media feed to determine whether they had said anything critical of the US government.

All the examples listed have an impact not just those in affected countries but democracies everywhere. As I have often told my students, if you want to know what will happen in the Global North with regard to social media, pay attention to what these companies are doing in the Global South. For example, we know that as recently as two years ago, Google could continually track a user's location even after the location services are turned off. Moreover, Professor Douglas Schmidt from Vanderbilt pointed out that Google uses the data it collects from other sources to de-anonymize existing data. In short, the very nature of Google's massive data collection (including from sources outside Google) allowed it to by-pass the anonymous nature of that enormous amount of data it collects. Imagine if American law enforcement figured out how to access this level of data to target people suspected of crime. Which groups do you think would be disproportionately targeted?

Let's turn to Kenya. Kenya's Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act was passed in 2018, including provisions to prevent cybercrime and punish offenders. However, some (in particular, the Blogger's Association of Kenya (BAKE) have argued the Act threatens freedom of speech, freedom of the media, and data privacy violations. What are your thoughts on the Act and its potential effects?

The Act is an attempt by the State to surreptitiously tamp down on online speech and stifle any form of dissent. Acts like these have seen a rise hand in hand with the misplaced concerns about mis/disinformation. I say misplaced since research has continually shown that the fear around mis/disinformation that grew out of the 2016 American presidential election and Brexit were more of a moral panic. Research from the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society and the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism has shown that online mis/disinformation played a marginal role in either election. If anything, we now know that it was mainstream media organizations that were vital players in seeding mis/disinformation. However, the hysteria from the early years led several countries such as Kenya and Tanzania to push through legislation to curtail online freedoms. I think of this Act in much the same way we saw a proliferation of anti-terror laws in the Global South after 9/11.

Perhaps one of the critical issues with the Act is that it was incredibly vague when it came to details. For example, it uses the term' fake publications' without defining what this means or whether there is a difference between misinformation and disinformation. Another example of this is in its needless inclusion of the term' hate speech,' which, as discussed in the Act, was at odds with protected speech. In a country where political discourse is the order of the day, the State would be able to easily accuse someone of perpetrating 'hate speech' online if they referred to a politician as shady. While it is easy to view this vagueness as a bug, I think it is important to remember that this is a feature of the Act. Ambiguity gives the State sweeping discretionary powers to use these words in whatever way that benefits them.

So, I agree with BAKE about the threats of laws such as this, more so now when news organizations are making moves to shore up their digital presence. Such laws will curtail the freedoms they have worked so hard to win from the State. While the more contentious provisions had been suspended for a period of time, they came back into effect in 2020, so we can anticipate seeing more legal challenges in the coming months. That being said, it is also true that this Act is a step in the right direction. Considering the growth of Kenya's connectivity, it provides a way to protect Kenyan users from predatory and extractive digital technologies. My issue with the Act is that the State thought it could sneak in terrible

...democracy is still in its nascent stages [in Kenya] and thus always needs to be nurtured and protected while also being cognizant of the fact that these nations are relatively still young and are mere toddlers compared to the US and the UK.

laws and thus poisoned the whole thing. The hubris is astonishing.

Kenya has experienced mixed results in its transition to democracy. What significant challenges/threats does it currently face?

Democracy is a hard thing. I think if the last few years have shown us anything, it's that this thing we call democracy is rickety and can be challenged, destroyed, and nearly burned to the ground in a very short span. The US and the UK have shown us that we need to be somewhat circumspect and humble in talking about what democracy and challenges/threats to democracy look like. In five years, the whole world has watched, aghast, as the US has descended into what may have been called anarchy had it been unfolding in Kenya.

I bring up these two countries to put the challenges faced by Kenya specifically, and the continent generally, into context. Kenya is 57 years removed from colonization. While that may seem like a lot of time, I think of it as meaning that democracy is still in its nascent stages and thus always needs to be nurtured and protected while also being cognizant of the fact that these nations are relatively still young and are mere toddlers compared to the US and the UK. So yes, there are challenges in institutional maturity, engagement with Global North partners with regard to electoral stability, or even now, as we move towards a more digitized landscape, the ownership of electoral data. But I think we are in a learning process, and the country will make mistakes, as any country would. Still, the hope is that on the whole, Kenya learns from these mistakes and protects its democracy selfishly. Part of this may entail not relying on the US and the UK as the arbiters of what is right for Kenyans and instead, working to vernacularize what democracy and democratic institutions mean for the average Kenyan.

What should be done to bolster Kenya's democracy? To strengthen democratization in Sub-Sahara Africa?

I think one way to think about this is to ask what we mean by democracy. Too often, people conflate voting with democracy, and I believe this then means that for the average citizen, the periods between elections are not viewed as also being part of enacting or effectuating democracy. I would argue that a critical way to bolster democracy is by ensuring that the institutions within Kenya work for Kenyans and reflect the country's contextual reality. By this, I mean that our discussion of democratic institutions cannot start from asking how well they work compared to those in the Global North. Preferably, our discussion has to start with how well they serve those in the margins. Democracy has to be less about what we have on a piece of legislation and more about how one piece of legislation ensures that those who have been left in the cold are brought towards the center. Like their colonial predecessors, African states have tended to treat those in rural areas more as subjects than citizens. As such, any discussion about democratization or democracy on the continent has to contend with the need to make democracy and its attendant institutions felt by the marginalized rather than fetishizing elections. Democracy is a recipe. Several ingredients may be more available in a few places while others may be available everywhere. The idea is to stick as close to the ingredient list as possible while ensuring that your recipe is more suitable to your taste buds. What works for a Nigerian palate may not work for a Kenyan one or a Somali one. So what can be done to strengthen democratization in sub-Sahara Africa? I honestly don't think there is one answer for that, and that is the point.

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From the Code of Hammurabi to a Revised Rules-Based World Order

James Stockmal

SK Partners, United States

In thinking about the future of democracy, it might be useful to discuss its origins and what others have to say on the subject. When asked where did democracy begin, most historians would point to the city state of Athens, especially since the word democracy stems from ancient Greek, demos (people) and kratos (rule). We will get to this in a bit, but some archaeologists have suggested that other civilizations did have rules of law long before the Athenians.

Tell Brak in the 7th century BCE is considered to be the world's first city ruled by a kinship-based local assembly and the first organized religion. Located in what is now Syria, Tell Brak was a crossroads of commerce across Mesopotamia. Others have recently claimed that Jericho may have been the first "city," settled somewhere around 9000 BCE. Both places developed agriculture, had some sort of rules of order, and stopped nomadic living. Hammurabi, the 6th King of Babylon created 272 laws for governing commerce and life in 1754 BCE. His Rules of Law and Civic Governance may have been the first constitution, that is, an aggregate of fundamental principles that constitute the legal basis of polity. Archaeologists have suggested that two necessary pre-conditions needed to evolve – the invention of writing and coinage and the move to cities. Previous codes of commerce were thought to have existed prior to Hammurabi, namely those of UR and Eshnunna, but none as extensive as his.

Draco's rules of order in 621 BCE in Athens were rather harsh and cruel, hence draconian. Solon posited citizen membership should be based on wealth or a plutocracy vice birth or aristocracy in 594 BCE. In Cleisthenes time, 508 BCE, citizens voted by hands at a weekly assembly. Pericles, in 403 BCE, extended citizenship to all males 18 and over, who were non-slaves and owned property. Aristotle advanced the notion of constitutional law in 350 BCE.

The Romans extended the notion of democratic principles to that of a Republica from the Latin Res meaning thing or affair. The Republica was the thing that belonged to the Roman people, or Populus Romanus. The legislature was elected and consisted of the Senate and four assemblies called the Comitia with 30 Curiae, plus local tribes. It became more and more difficult to legislate with the expansion of the Holy Roman Empire (HRE). It was difficult to be a representative government across three continents. So, the HRE had to rely on city-state alliances. Much has been written about why the empire fell, but it seems the struggles of corruption, infighting, over expansion, not paying attention to budgets (e.g., keeping Hadrian's Wall operational was a huge overhead for the Roman leaders), and not treating hired help well seem to be compelling reasons for any organization, let alone an empire to learn from, even a future democracy.

It wasn't until the 18th century where representative governments first began to appear in Northern Europe. It was compelling to come together to collectively address societal issues in practical ways. For the United States in our early history, there was much debate on what kind of democracy we should be. Madison argued for a "direct democracy"

vs. a "representative democracy" that we have today. Representative democracies solved the dilemma between enhancing the ability of political association to deal with large-scale problems while presenting the opportunity for citizen participation. Alexi de Tocqueville, from his travels across our nascent country, viewed our democracy as a political system -- a rule by the people, but also a system of rights. Hammurabi's code was also a system of rights and the rules were progressive, not regressive.

The current international, rules-based liberal order was created after World War II, beginning with the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944. A big part of the rationale was to avoid what happened after World War 1. Officially known as the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, it was attended by forty-four countries and focused on agreeing on a new set of rules for the international monetary system focused on stability – of markets, trade, and security. The Atlantic Charter of 1941 between Roosevelt and Churchill helped create the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the conference simply built upon this treaty and the desire for stability.

At the conference, the US favored a system of exchange pegged to the US dollar. The British preferred exchange pegged to the pound. In the end, the US dollar would be set to the value of gold at $35 per ounce and all other central banks would peg their currencies to the US dollar. This agreement was seen to lessen volatility and prevent competitive devaluation of currency. Also, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Banking Group (WBG) were established coming out of the conference. The IMF monitors exchange rates and identifies nations needing additional monetary support. The WGB manages funds that are made available for assistance and development.

The "Bretton Woods" system wasn't fully operational until 1958 and it "collapsed" in the 1970s, but it has had lasting influence on international currency exchange and trade. Monetary and fiscal policy changes in the US in the 1960s created several problems and challenges to the system. Expanding the Vietnam War and creating the Great Society caused a

big rise in inflation. The US gold supply was inadequate to cover the number of US dollars in circulation. Nixon devalued the dollar in 1971, which created a run on the gold reserve, and suspended the dollar's convertibility to gold. In 1973, central banks were no longer required to peg their currencies to the dollar. The banks had a few options instead: peg to another currency, peg to a basket of currencies, or let their exchange rates freely float in the market. This is the system we have today, although some countries still took actions the Bretton Woods system wanted to avoid – competitive devaluation of their currency, like China did in August of 2015.

The Bretton Woods system had three flaws: adjustment, confidence, and liquidity. The adjustment problem reflected downward rigidity in wages and prices which limited normal price adjustment of the gold standard price. Also, the US, serving as the central reserve country, didn't have to adjust its balance of payments deficits, while the rest of the world had to do, thus creating resentment. The confidence problem was directly related to the US balance of payments deficit which created fear of a run, and, in turn, also created a liquidity concern throughout the 1960s.

Other issues have strained this international order in recent times:

- Rise of nationalism in many countries like Poland, Hungary, and here in the US
- Rise of populism in 2000s in democracies including Austria, Brazil, India, and Indonesia
- China's threat to intellectual property (IP) and currency manipulation (3% drop in 2015)
- Russia's aggressive actions in Crimea and elsewhere
- Rogue state and non-state actors.

So, what can be done? Jain and Kroenig have suggested possible ways forward:

- Revitalize by creating a renewed focus to rally democracies, not just those in the transatlantic alliance, but across Asia, Africa, and

Latin America, to work together to shore up common values, but also to engage with the autocracies like China and Russia to garner their support for the international system.

- Adapt and redesign the international system to address existing short comings, and perhaps create new institutions to address the new realities facing democracies, especially in the developing world.
- Defend the system and create more opportunities for compliance, oversight, and governance to hold states accountable for their actions including addressing autocratic interference (think Belt and Road), terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and disruptive technologies.

Jain and Kroenig also suggest that whichever strategy is taken; the revised international rule of law should include the following principles of governance:

- Access to justice and judicial review
- Legal certainty
- Proportionality
- Equality and non-discrimination
- Transparency

Furthermore, each of these approaches require engagement, as well as the belief that countries still want to be part of a rules-based liberal order. Stephen Walt asserted that "We deceived ourselves that the rest of the world would adopt freedom and the rule of law." He states further, "…liberal world order is a myth…more people live under authoritarian regimes." In fact-checking this, the Economist Intelligence Unit says that 49.3% across 165 countries have some form of democratic rule. More distressing is that 89 of these countries fell in their democracy score and only 27 improved; the rest were flat. In 2017, the US was ranked only 21st. Norway, Iceland, and Sweden are the top three followed by New Zealand.

But democracies and a rules-based order do offer the promise of better living:

- There is a causal link with democracy and the increase in education levels (Crespo-Cuaresina and Albasi-Shausci, 2010)
- Democracies have greater wealth, better health, lower infant mortality rates, greater spending on education and better teacher to student ratios; for example, global gross domestic product (GDP) has risen from $4,079 in 1945 to $11,500 today
- Less death from wars, in fact since 2000 less than one-hundredth of 1 percent have died in armed conflict.

What is the ideal future democracy? Can we really reboot the UN, the WTO, and other international institutions? Can we build a coalition of the D10 and G7 to re-affirm a rules-based order? Can they work together on other global issues like climate change, terrorism, human rights, inequality or poverty? What are the key elements of the new order? Perhaps:

- Effective participation – that is the opportunity to express ones' own views to others
- Equality in voting – one voice, one vote
- An informed electorate – the opportunity to learn about policies and possible alternative policies and their consequences (similar to or building on the Evidenced-Based Policy Act under the Obama administration)
- Inclusion of all citizens
- An "open" process
- Fundamental rights (ala the US Bill of Rights)
- Free and fair elections
- Freedom to assemble
- Freedom of expression
- Independent sources of information (free press)

There are many questions that need further vetting. Should universal basic income be included in a reframed, liberal rules-based order as many have suggested to address poverty across the globe? How do we handle technology which has disrupted the order and will likely continue to offer further disruptions at the national, local, and personal level?

> *The path forward should also include not only national representatives but tap into the ideas that governors, mayors, business leaders have already implemented to address issues like climate change and inequality.*

From a strategic perspective, engagement of the D10 should include several scenarios and build the democratic capabilities needed for each scenario, much like Jain and Kroenig have suggested. This should include a purposefully examination of how best to improve on the institutions we have developed over the past 75 years. It should also include clear communication on the benefits of living in a democratic society and a dialogue with autocracies to bring them along into the new order. The path forward should also include not only national representatives but tap into the ideas that governors, mayors, business leaders have already implemented to address issues like climate change and inequality.

We may not be able to have a Galactic Senate like in Star Wars and as in the saga, there will always be rogue actors to undermine the system, but can't we do better? There is no try, do or do not. The future of democracy is our responsibility.

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Modi's India: Toward an Authoritarian State?

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On May 16, 2014, a watershed moment occurred in the political history of India. The crushing general election victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the main Hindu nationalist party, did not only end the reign of the Congress Party but marked the rise to power of Narendra Modi. The former Gujarat Chief Minister and BJP's leader became Prime Minister of India. Introducing himself as the "voice of the people," Modi kicked off a national-populist era, raising major concerns about the future of the "largest democracy in the world." In spite of the controversy surrounding his persona, the Prime Minister enjoys massive popular support and the BJP was reelected for another five-year term in 2019, "attaining a second consecutive single–party majority in the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament)" (Vaishnav & Balloch). Even though Modi's actions are dangerously close to the limits of constitutionality and often disrespect personal freedoms, democracy is still alive and India cannot be considered an authoritarian state. This short paper explores the correlation between some of the populist measures initiated by Narendra Modi's government and the apparent decline of the liberal democracy in India. Such initiatives include the centralization of power in the executive branch by attempting to weaken democratic institutions, the muzzling of the press, and the domestic abuse of religious minorities.

Since he came to power six years ago, Prime Minister Modi has endeavored to concentrate power in the executive branch by subverting institutions like the Indian Parliament, the bicameral legislative body. Under Modi's government, the Parliament is no longer a key place for debate. For instance, in March 2018, three weeks before the end of the annual budget session of Parliament, the Speaker of Lok Sabha and BJP controlled, Sumitra Mahajan, applied the "guillotine," a procedure empowering her to pass outstanding budgetary allocations. In doing so, PM Modi's party denied the opposition the opportunity to have a say concerning the Budget, demonstrating the government's disregard for parliamentary procedure. In response, "the livid Opposition… [justly] raised cries of 'murder of democracy'" ("Shocking how government passed the Union budget"). Undermining liberal institutions is a common feature of populism leading to the creation of a democratic illusion. Alas, the Indian Parliament is not the only institution permeable to such corrosion.

The judiciary seems under governmental influence too. This is the case for the Supreme Court of India, the country's apex court. Supreme Court cases are decided by at least two justices assigned by the Chief Justice, India's highest-ranking judge. Nonetheless, doubts on the integrity of the Court were casted in January 2018, when four senior justices, calling for an exceptional press conference, accused Chief Justice Dipak Misra of procedure violation. Appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of Prime Minister Modi, Chief Justice Misra was "fiercely criticized… for repeatedly intervening to ensure only judges of his choice could hear the matter" (Safi). "The Chief Justice is clearly manipulating and misusing the judiciary in the interest of the government," declared Prashant Bhushan, a prominent Indian public interest lawyer. During the news conference, the four justices made crystal-clear that the preservation of the Supreme Court's independence was vital for the protection of Indian democracy.

Additionally, Narendra Modi is leading a war against journalists who do not act as cheerleaders for his government. These journalists are labelled as "anti-nationals." Since the country's independence from Britain in 1947, "India's free press has played a crucial role in protecting [the] democracy" (Goal & Gettleman). However, many media owners now faced pressure from the government to dismiss journalists criticizing the BJP or governmental reforms. Prime Minister Modi is also widely supported by an army of online trolls practicing cyber-bullying against protesters. In 2017, Bangalore journalist Gauri Lankesh, a fierce critique of Modi's government, was shot by Hindu nationalists while she was returning to her home. The persecutions in the media sphere generate a climate of fear and many journalists tend to censor themselves, fearing reprisals. The media is a vehicle of democracy and is often referred as a fourth power, counterbalancing the three others (executive, legislative, judiciary) and ensuring transparency. By extension, an attack against the freedom of the press is an attack against democracy. Unfortunately, oppression does not only target journalists.

Similarly to most right-wing populist leaders, Prime Minister Modi is eager to create an "organic" nation where Hinduism prevails. Hence, since the rise of the BJP, religious minorities and Muslims in particular have been abused. Hindu nationalist mobs as well as anti-Muslim pogroms multiplied and the government has been accused of fanning hatred. Furthermore, in December 2019, Modi government passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) making "persecuted religious minorities who belong to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian… communities… eligible for citizenship" (Findlay). However, this law does not include Islam. The CAA constitutes a significant step in the creation of Modi's Hindu nationalist Utopia.

For a state leader pretending to speak on behalf of the "people," Narendra Modi is acting in a way that is rather harmful to individuals' interests. Indian government's grasp over liberal institutions and the hindrance of the free press demonstrate that Prime Minister Modi has been stifling the pillars of democracy during the last six years. While the future of India democracy is impossible to predict, the political system does not carry any term limits and a majority of the population still says "Howdy Modi." Under these circumstances, Modi will unsurprisingly continue to turn the country into an even more illiberal democracy but the question remains: to what extent?

Nathan Martins is a sophomore at Santa Monica College, California, majoring in political science. His interests include comparative politics, U.S Foreign policy, and international relations in general. After graduating from college, Mr. Martins intends to pursue a law degree.

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