Crisis of Democracy: an Invention?

Wolfgang Merkel
Febr. 10, 2020
JHU Bologna Center
THE DECLINE OF THE NATION STATE AND THE END OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Losing Control: Presidential Elections and the Decline of Democracy
ARThUR SANDERS

HOW DEMOCRACIES DIE
WHAT HISTORY TELLS US ABOUT OUR FUTURE
STEVEN LEVITSKY & DANIEL ZIELATT

DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE
Steps in the Wrong Direction
James Allan

DEMOCRAZY IN CRISIS
WHY, WHERE, HOW TO RESPOND
Christophe Buffin de Chosal
ROLAND RICH

DEmOCRACY AND CRISIS
Challenges in Turbulent Times
Springer
Democracy & Crisis: Three Levels of Analysis

1. What does democracy mean?
2. What does crisis mean?
3. What do the experts think: Normative standards (indices)
4. What do the people think: Legitimacy beliefs (surveys)
5. Challenges on the micro, meso, and macro levels of the democratic regimes
6. How resilient are Western (liberal) democracies?
„Embedded Democracy“ – internal and external challenges

- Heterogeneity & RWP
- Capitalism Socio-economic Inequality
- Dominance of Executive
- Globalisation Climate Change

A. Electoral Reg
B. Political Rights (de jure; in use)
C. Civil Rights
D. Effective Power to Govern
E. Horizontal Accountability

Civil Society
Two Meanings of Crisis I

1. **Acute crisis: Death or life?**

- Crossroad
- Existential threat
- Fundamental decisions/medicine are required

Examples:
- Italy 1920-22
- Weimar 1930-33
- Spain 1933-36/9
- Greece 1965-67
- Chile 1970-73
- Turkey and Venezuela at present
Two Meanings of Crisis II

2. *Latent crisis: Slow decline, erosion*

- Unfulfilled normative promises of democracy (min or max)
- Erosion: Worsening of quality, chronic diseases
- Diminished subtype: Defective, illiberal, exclusive democracies, but no collapse/regime transition
- Threshold question not resolved!

**Hypotheses:**

- If Type I, the smaller the crisis sample (clearer defined)
- If Type II, the bigger the crisis sample (and less defined)
Liberal Democracy Index – EU Countries, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, USA, and Japan

Source: V Dem - Varieties of Democracy: Average of 27 EU countries (excluding Malta), Australia, New-Zealand, Canada, USA and Japan
Liberal Democracy Index – Germany, Denmark, and USA
Satisfaction with Democracy (1973-2017)
Linking Three Levels of Analysis

MACRO
Regimes

MICRO
Individuals

MESO
Collective actors
Challenges to Representative Democracy

Micro Level: Elections and Participation

- Volatility
- Decline of voter turnout
- Social selectivity
- Polarization
- Electoral integrity
Decline of Voter Turnout

Annual average, EU-28 + Iceland, Norway, Switzerland. Only data on national lower houses of parliament were taken into account. Source: WZB.
Meso Level: Parties and Party Systems

- Loss of acceptance and trust in political parties
- Decline of catch-all parties
- Rise of populist parties, particularly right-wing populist parties
- Cosmopolitans and communitarians: A new cleavage in Europe and beyond
Trust in National State Institutions in the European Union

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Semi-annual averages for member states of the EC/EU in accordance with their historical composition.

Indicator: “For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.”

Decline of Catch-all Parties

Mean of Aggregated Vote Share

- Yellow line: since 1958
- Green line: since 1977

Time periods: 1960 to 2015
Two Cleavages: The New Competition

Diagram:
- Left-Cosmopolitan
- Right-Cosmopolitan
- Left-Communitarian
- Nationalist-Communitarian
- Communitarian

Legend:
- Cosmopolitan
- (Neo)liberal-Cosmopolitan
- Left
- Right
Cosmopolitans

- Winners of globalization
- Cultural, political, economic elites
- Urban middle classes
- For open borders: Goods, services, capital, workers, refugees
- Transferring sovereignty
- Deepening EU
- (Human) rights are universal; global citizens
- Multiculturalism
- Calhoun: „Frequent Flyers“
Communitarians

- Losers of globalization
- Lower educated people
- Pro-nation state
- Critical against EU
- Controlling borders
- “Leitkultur”
- Homogeneous communities
- Variety: *Folkhemmet* vs. Right-wing populism
Right-wing populist parties’ vote share (1950-2016)

Annual averages, EU member states and Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland.
Source: WZB Database “Elections, Parties, Governments”.

- All countries
- Countries with right-wing populist parties

• Western Europe
• Eastern Europe
The typical RWP voter in Europe

- Male, rural/ small towns and lower/ medium income, medium lower education

- Anti-RWP voter: female, higher income, well educated, from metropolitan areas

- Rational strategic choice of RWP programmatique: switch from neoliberal economic policies towards social protectionism
Macro Level: Shifts of democratic legitimacy?

- From input to output
- From parliament to government
- From nation state to supranational regimes
- From liberal democracy to illiberal democracy
- From consensus to majoritarian democracy
- From state to markets
“Embedded Democracy” – internal and external challenges

- Heterogeneity and right-wing populism
- Capitalism
- Socio-economic inequality
- Globalization
- Europeanization
- Capitalism
- Socio-economic inequality
- Globalization
- Europeanization

A. Electoral Regime
   - Selectivity
   - Majoritarianism
   - Renationalisation

B. Political Rights
   - De jure; in use
   - Polarization

C. Civil Rights
   - Illiberalisation

D. Horizontal Accountability
   - Dominance of the executive

E. Effective Power to Govern

- Heterogeneity and right-wing populism
- Capitalism
- Socio-economic inequality
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Crisis?
Quality & Resilience of liberal democracies

- Quality higher than ever in history, but vulnerable
- Stronger civil and political rights (gender, gays, minorities, monitory democracy)
- Critical citizens are more numerous (Norris; Inglehart; Welzel)
- Illiberalisation and de-consolidation in Eastern Europe
- Low resilience despite economic boom (Poland)
Crisis & Resilience II

- Ambiguous effects of the EU
- Balance of responsiveness and responsibility
- No (old) OECD democracy has ever collapsed since 1967
- Greece (2008 ff) as an example of democratic resilience
- Climate change and eco-authoritarianism
- No transition to autocratic regimes, but to illiberal, defective, and majoritarian democracies
Churchill

“Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time….”

Nov. 11, 1947 (House of Commons)