

DEMOCRACY AS SELF-CORRECTION

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Bosch Public Policy Fellow

**2012-2013 PAPER SERIES
NO. 1**



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TRANSATLANTIC ACADEMY PAPER SERIES

DECEMBER 2012

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The central political paradox of our analysis of the current state of democracy is that the key factors that contributed to the democratization of society have also led to the erosion of trust in democratic institutions. The current crisis of democracy then is not an outcome of some institutional failure of democracy; on the contrary it is a product of democracy's success. It is the result of five revolutions that have shattered our world in the last 50 years and made us more free

but less powerful than before: the Woodstock-Wall Street revolution of the 1970s and 1980s; the end of history revolutions of 1989; the digital revolution of the 1990s; the demographic revolution; and the political brain revolution brought by the new discoveries in the brain sciences and behaviorist economics. The question is, will democracy transformed be able to function as a self-correcting society?

1 INTRODUCTION

What was true about monarchy more than a century ago, that “it is an intelligible government [because] the mass of mankind understand it and they hardly anywhere in the world understand any other,”¹ is now true for democracy. Democracy is not without its enemies, to be sure, but it is devoid of appealing alternatives. The critics of democracy speak in the idiom of democracy, and the vote of the people is the only source of legitimate power.

At the same time, trust in the political institutions of democracy in the West — parties, elections, parliaments, governments — is in free fall. In the last three decades, people all around the world are voting more than ever before, but in many European countries the majority of people have lost the feeling that their vote really matters. There is a secular trend of decline of the electoral turnout in most of Western democracies, and the people least likely to vote are the poor, unemployed, and the youth, in short those who should be most interested in using the political system to change their lot. It is instructive that not once since 1968 have more than 60 percent of eligible U.S. citizens voted in a presidential election. And when it comes to the elections for the European Parliament, the electoral turnout has been in constant decline since the first elections in 1979; in some countries fewer than 20 percent have shown up at the voting booth on election day in recent elections. The dramatic decline of trust since the 1970s is painfully shown by the fact that anyone under the age of 40 in the majority of Western societies has lived their entire life in a country where the majority of citizens do not trust their national government.

In the 1970s, reformers were inclined to interpret the growing confidence gap between the electors and the elected as a sign of progress. For them,

democratic distrust was healthy for democracy — and they were right. A student who is ready to question the authority of his teacher makes a better citizen than the one who is prepared simply to obey authority. Theorists of the period, in their attempt to downplay the emergence of the confidence gap, developed notions that resembled Simon Kuznets’s work on inequality.² Kuznets’s famous curve predicted that income inequality will be generally small in the pre-industrial age (overall wealth and productivity were marginal so there was not much for the elite to capture), spike during industrialization, and finally decrease in the post-industrial age because of the spread of education and redistributive policies. In a similar manner, social scientists expected a decline of trust in democratic institutions when the public first attained broad educational gains and became politically active, but then increase as a result of democratization and the emergence of more open and participatory public institutions. Participation was the magic word. People can only trust a political process in which they actively participate. The expectation was that when there will be more women in the boardrooms and gays and lesbians take their rightful place in society, and when decision-making becomes more effective and transparent, distrust in public institutions should be transcended. The decline of trust in democratic institutions was celebrated as a birth of what Harvard political scientist Pippa Norris calls “critical citizens”³ — those who aspire to democracy as their ideal form of government, yet remain deeply skeptical upon evaluating how democracy works in their own country.

Now we know better. We know more about inequality and more about trust. Our societies are

Our societies are more democratic and open than ever before but our public institutions are trusted less than ever.

¹ *Columbia World of Quotations*. Columbia University Press, 1996.

² Simon Kuznets, “Economic Growth and Income Inequality,” *American Economic Review* 45, 1955, 1-28

³ Dr. Pippa Norris, *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government*, Oxford University Press, 1999

The central political paradox is that the key factors that contributed to the democratization of society have also led to the erosion of trust in democratic institutions.

more democratic and open than ever before but our public institutions are trusted less than ever. The democratization of public life — the fact that our societies are more inclusive — did not positively translate to trust toward public institutions as a whole.

The central political paradox is that the key factors that contributed to the democratization of society have also led to the erosion of trust in democratic institutions.

The current crisis of democracy then is not an outcome of some institutional failure of democracy; on the contrary, it is a product of democracy's success. It is the result of five revolutions that have shattered our world in the last 50 years and made us more free but less powerful than before: the Woodstock-Wall Street revolution of the 1970s and 1980s, the “end of history” revolutions of 1989, the digital revolution of the 1990s, the demographic revolution, and the political neuroscientific revolution brought by the new discoveries in the brain sciences and behaviorist economics.

All five of these revolutions profoundly deepened our democratic experience. The Woodstock-Wall Street revolution, the unholy but happy marriage between the social revolution of the 1970s and the market revolution of the 1980s, both broke the chains of the authoritarian family and weakened gender and racial stereotypes, giving new meaning to the idea of individual freedom. It made consumer choice an undisputed value and the sovereign individual the lead protagonist of the social drama (“The market gives people what the people want instead of what other people think that they ought to want,” Milton Friedman once opined). The end of history revolutions succeeded in making democracy the default option of humankind and in giving birth to a truly global world. The demographic revolution, marked by the decline of birth rates and the rise in life

expectancies, contributed to the social, economic, and political stability of Western societies. The revolution in neurosciences gave us a deeper understanding of how the individual decides and subsequently broke down the wall between the mythical rational voter and the irrational voter. And, when it comes to democracy, the promise of the digital revolution might be summarized in three words: “make it real.” It made us believe that societies could once again become republics.

Paradoxically, the same five revolutions that deepened our democratic experience now animate the current crisis of liberal democracy in the West. The Woodstock-Wall Street revolution contributed to the decline of a shared sense of purpose. As the politics of the 1960s devolved into the aggregation of individual private claims upon society and the state, our society became more tolerant and inclusive, if increasingly separate and unequal. The European end of history revolutions deemed democratization to be essentially a process of how best to imitate Western institutions. The demographic revolution made aging societies culturally insecure and fearful of immigrants. The revolution in brain sciences expelled ideas and visions from politics and reduced electoral campaigns to the processing of big data and the application of different techniques of distraction, customer targeting, and simulating real political change, while ultimately retaining the status quo. Meanwhile, the digital revolution questioned the very legitimacy of the institutions of representative democracy, calling for a more transparent and simplified “point and click” democratic ethos. It strengthened the negative power of the citizen while weakening the deliberative nature of democratic politics. Internet is better at “No” than “Go,” in the words of Micah Sifry.

All five revolutions empowered citizens while simultaneously removing much of their voting authority. The negative outcomes are myriad: a

fragmented society, growing distrust between the elites and the public, and a profound crisis of democratic politics that assumes different forms in Europe and the United States. In the United States, the crisis is seen in the government's paralysis and the inability of its institutions to govern. In Europe, the crisis is witnessed by a suspension of politics and an attempt to substitute democracy with technocratic government.

In short, democracy is not what it used to be. The lexicon of the democratic experience in many parts of the world might be reduced to two words: corruption and populism. The majority tends to believe that anything the government does is corrupt or can be explained by the corrupt interests of those in power; while those in power think that everything that people want is an

illustration of sheer populism. Not surprisingly, a growing number of people tend to vote for protest or extreme parties, while a growing number of governments tend to believe that their only chance of staying in power and continuing to govern is to endorse either Silvio Berlusconi-style media populism or the more subtle, but no less manipulative, tactic of making superficial adaptations to national policy while avoiding any far reaching substantial changes. Thus, the clash between reckless populism from below and shameless manipulism from above is the new game of democracy.

So, why did the triumph of democracy in the world result in the crisis of democracy in Europe and the United States?

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2 THE END OF HISTORY AND THE BIRTH OF THE DIGITAL WORLD

It was the best of years,” suggested British diplomat and political thinker Robert Cooper, commenting on 1989. It “divides the past from the future almost as clearly as the Berlin Wall divided East from the West.”⁴ Just as similarly, many will argue that the digital revolution was “the best of revolutions” as it divides the past from the future in just the same manner. The paradox, however, is that these two peaceful and splendid revolutions tore democracy in two distinctly opposite directions. The revolutions of 1989 were conservative revolutions in the actual meaning of the word: they wanted the world as it existed in the Cold War West. Their slogan was “no experimentation” because they wanted to freeze time and have the East dive into the West. The digital revolution, though, is a radical revolution, promising that everything will change and that democracy as we know it will change first.

By assuming democracy is the normal state of society and restricting democratization to an imitation of the institutions and practices of developed democracies, Central Europe’s post-communist ideology of normality committed two sins. It ignored the tension between democracy and capitalism, which is inherent and even necessary to all market democracies, and it contributed to a sense of triumphalism that turned democracy from a regime type of choice into a default option for humanity. Although history is the best argument why democracy and the market go together — most prosperous societies are market democracies — the tensions between the market and democracy are also well known. While democracy treats individuals as equal (every adult has an equal vote), free enterprise empowers individuals on the basis of how much economic value they create and how much property they own. Thus it is fair to expect that the average voter in a democracy will protect

the property of the rich only if he believes that they can increase his own chances to become wealthier. If the capitalist system does not enjoy popular support, democracy will not tolerate the inequality produced by the market. The revolutions of 1989 made the grievous mistake to assume that after the collapse of the communist system, the popular legitimacy of capitalism would be taken for granted, and that all inherent tensions between democracy and capitalism would be bypassed or ignored.

The discourse of democratic triumphalism on the other side has eroded the intellectual foundations of modern democratic regimes. No longer is democracy the least undesirable form of government, the best of a bad bunch. Instead, it became the best form of government, period. People were eyeing democratic regimes not merely to save them from something worse, but to deliver peace, prosperity, and honest and effective governance in one overall package. Democracy was presented as the only correct answer to a slew of unrelated questions. What is the best way to bring economic growth? What is the best way to protect one’s country (“freedom anywhere will make the world safer everywhere”)? What is the best way to fight corruption? And what is the best way to respond to demographic or migration challenges? The answer to all of these questions is, yes, democracy. Rhetoric has won over reality. Yet what the missionaries of democracy failed to recognize is that it is one thing to argue that problems like corruption or integration can be better dealt with in a democratic environment, but a totally different thing to insist that the very introduction of free and fair elections and the adoption of a liberal constitution can solve all these problems. In the imagination of the Central European revolutions of 1989, democratization was not so much about representation but rather the imitation of the institutions and political practices of the West. Refuges from the brave new world of communism,

The discourse of democratic triumphalism has eroded the intellectual foundations of modern democratic regimes.

⁴Robert Cooper, “The Meaning of 1989,” *The Prospect*, December 20, 1999.

Democracy is the political regime that best fits our current age of dissatisfaction.

Central European societies were longing for boredom and predictability. But in their quest for normalcy, the end of history revolutions radically transformed the nature of public expectations from democracy. Exhausted of living in a “dialectical world” where everything was its opposite, post-communist citizens developed a world-view where all good things should go together. Democracy meant prosperity; authoritarianism meant poverty. Democracy meant no conflict; authoritarianism meant permanent conflict. In a way, the revolutions of 1989 turned into an updated version of Voltaire’s Dr. Pangloss, who famously believed that “all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.”

But democracies were not and could not be “satisfaction machines.” They do not produce good governance the way a baker turns out doughnuts. (Good governance is a welcome but far from inevitable product of democratic governance.) The sin of the 1989 revolutions is that they mixed up the real advantages of democracy. Democracies can’t offer dissatisfied citizens dream fulfillment, but rather the satisfaction of having the right to do something about their dissatisfaction. That is its real advantage over the high growth authoritarian-type regime of, say, China. Democracy is the political regime that best fits our current age of dissatisfaction. In his insightful book, *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz⁵ demonstrates that the perverse effect of our explosion in choices is the rising dissatisfaction of the choices we make. The more we choose, the less we appreciate the choices we make and the less satisfied we feel. The customer who returns her dress 48 hours after she bought it so as to purchase another is our new model citizen. She is dissatisfied with her choice but asks for another option; choosing is therefore not the instrument, it is the goal. What gives meaning to her is the opportunity of non-stop

⁵ Barry Schwartz, “The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less,” P. S. Series, HarperCollins, 2005

choosing and not the choices she makes. It is the capacity of democracy today to adjust to the world of dissatisfied citizens and consumers, and not its ability to satisfy, that makes it so attractive not only to everyday people but also to elites.

The digital revolution did not try to put democracy on ice — it put it on a Red Bull diet. It feared that current democratic practices are divorced from the rhythm of the age, and fuelled growing expectations that the rise of modern technology will mark the return of democracy in a more authentic form. In the view of the “digital natives,” democracy does not have to be “representative” any longer. Thus the digital revolution has contributed to the delegitimation of the institutions of parliamentary democracy and parliaments themselves. It democratizes social life at the cost of “deleting” politics. Political communities have lost their relevance to our lives. Now the followers of political parties are just one form of social grouping among many to be found in the Internet.

The “segregation” effect of the Internet has been well examined. It also has its critics. But what is indisputable is that connectivity is not the same as commonality. Increased ethnic diversity within nation states, fragmentation of the public space, and our fashionable obsessions with individual rights have in fact eroded the foundations of national solidarity, and not only national solidarity.

For the younger generation, the experience with democracy is not necessarily through the prism of politics. While the vote may be losing its power in governing our countries, it is ironically becoming a new fashion in other spheres. Today we can vote for the top act in the Eurovision song contest. We can elect the best dentist of the month, and the top hairdresser of the year.

The problem with the expansion of “voting” as a universal principle in taking decisions is that

it makes it much more difficult for people to see the advantages (and not simply the downsides) of representative institutions. Representative democracy was never just a transitional stage between the direct democracy of the ancients and the “point and click” democracy of the future. It had merits of its own. It secured for us the unparalleled advantages of the separation of powers and guaranteed the liberal nature of democratic power. In a manner very similar to how the revolutions of 1989 weakened democracies by making them static and unexciting, the digital revolution remade the public’s expectations toward democracy by simultaneously expanding the principle of majority rule to non-political spheres of life and eroding the legitimacy of the institutions of representative democracy. Now, for the majority of people improving democracy means achieving more direct democracy.

Iceland is the first case where the process of writing a constitution was crowd-sourced to the people. After the collapse of Iceland’s banking system and the subsequent profound crisis of trust in political institutions, the majority of the island’s politicians decided that crowd-sourcing the writing of the new constitution was the only way to revive democracy in a country where people used to trust their leaders before being betrayed by them. Right now the experiment remains open ended, but we can expect that Internet-inspired egalitarianism and crowd-sourcing will become major factors in the move to reform democracy. So, be ready for brave new projects where people not only use crowd-sourcing and instant voting to improve representative institutions, but also to replace them.

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3 THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY?!...

The phrase “crisis of democracy” has circulated so broadly in the post-crisis West that it is easy to forget that democracy was always in crisis. Library shelves groan with piles of books on the crisis of democracy in just about every decade of the last century. In the 1970s, Germany’s Social Democratic chancellor, Willy Brandt, was convinced that “Western Europe has only 20 or 30 more years of democracy left in it; after that it will slide, engineless and rudderless, under the surrounding sea of dictatorship, and whether the dictation comes from a politburo or a junta will not make that much difference.” The short, unhappy life of Germany’s Weimar Republic and its tragic death — “part murder, part wasting sickness, part suicide,” in Peter Gay’s famous phrasing⁶ — left a lasting imprint on European attitudes toward democracy.

But if we shelve the seduction of “crisis rhetoric,” there is an important dimension of the crisis of democratic society today that is different from the dissatisfaction with a particular democratic regime. In our interdependent world, we depend more than ever on the decisions of others; those who are part of our communities, and those who never were and never will be. There is a palpable desire of people to vote in other peoples’ elections. Almost everybody at one point wishes to vote in the U.S. elections, and if presented with the option, probably many Europeans would find it more important to vote in the German elections than in their own. However, while we all agree that we should be able to influence decisions that affect us, in reality this is not the case. We are frequently consumers of decisions taken by governments we have not elected. There is a natural urge to make sure that others don’t make the wrong choices. Yet the only way to stop others from making the wrong choices is to restrict voters when making important

choices. Welcome then to democracy without choices, political regimes in which we can change governments, but not policies.

It would of course be great to be able to avoid making mistakes in the first place, but democracy was never great at preventing people from making mistakes. It was great on an institutional, psychological, and intellectual level to make it easier for people to correct their mistakes. At its essence, open societies are self-correcting societies. They allow their citizens to act on the basis of their collective experience and to make sense of this experience. It is not therefore by accident that democratic constitutions are basically books of fears. When, for example, you read Germany’s Basic Law, it is clear that it is guidebook for ensuring that no future Adolf Hitler can come to power in Germany by democratic means. Thus, the legitimacy and success of democracies depends not on their capacity to bring prosperity (autocratic regimes can do that just fine), it does not depend on their capacity to make people happy (we know far too many unhappy democracies), but it does depend on their capacity to correct its policies and to formulate common purposes. In this sense, the real crisis of democracy does not have to derive only from the breakdown of democratic regimes and the emergence of authoritarian government. Destruction or decline of capacity for self-correction is the simple definition of democracy in crisis. And democracy can lose its capacity for self-correction while the democratic façade remains untouched. A democracy that over a period of time constantly changes its governments but fails to correct its dysfunctional policies is a democracy in crisis. Democracy in which public conversation has lost its capacity to change opinion and where debate is reduced to a confirmation of existing ideological biases is a democracy in crisis. Democracy in which people have lost hope that their collective voice can bring change is democracy in crisis. In

Democracy can lose its capacity for self-correction while the democratic façade remains untouched.

⁶ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), xiii.

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this sense, the existence of competitive elections are a necessary but not sufficient condition for the existence of an open democratic society. The questions that we want to explore are: does the lack of meaningful political choice allow democracy to remain self-correcting society? Does the decline of trust in democratic institutions erode the capacity of democratic regimes to be self-correcting?

Have we reached a point where our democratic institutions serve the purpose of sustaining a failed status quo?

In April 2012, almost 90 percent of Europeans saw a widening gap between what the public wants and what governments do; only one-third of Europeans felt that their vote counts at the EU level; and only 18 percent of Italians and 15 percent of Greeks considered that their vote counts even in their own country. “Gridlock” has become the concept that best characterizes the way Americans describe their political system. Democracy has been turned into a game of “chicken” where preventing the other side from governing is more important than governing yourself. For example, in the last five years, Republicans in Congress have used the filibuster (a delay tactic with which votes on legislation can be completely obstructed) as often as it was used in the seven decades between World War I and the end of administration of President Ronald Reagan in 1989.

Not surprisingly, viewed from Europe, the United States looks like a dysfunctional post-communist democracy where politics is an ungovernable zero-sum game. And from the U.S. perspective, European democracies resemble decaying semi-authoritarian regimes where elites make all their choices behind voters’ backs.

In some sense, the difference in the U.S. and European elite responses to constraints on democratic politics resembles the contrasts between the Hollywood movie and the French experimental novel. U.S. elites hope to keep voters interested in politics by retaining a traditional plot, with a choice that should be black and white. Europeans, however, ditched the plot and work instead to convince voters to focus on the style and sophistication of the writing. In the United States, the risk is that voters will at some point realize that although their political representatives disagree on nearly everything, their economic policies when in office are awfully similar. It is here where the anti-elite resentment skyrockets. In the case of Europe, the risk is that voters will simply stop reading. The current debates around a banking union might be exciting for the cognoscenti, but they don’t stand a ghost of a chance to titillate voters.

4 DEMOCRACY AND THE POWER OF THE VOTER

Silvio Berlusconi's last act as prime minister of Italy in the fall of 2011 was to drive through a crowd of protesters who were taunting him with "buffoon" and "shame." The streets outside the presidential palace pulsed with chanting demonstrators waving Italian flags and popping champagne bottles as the 75-year-old media mogul met with Italy's president to tender his resignation. In one corner, a choir sang "Hallelujah," accompanied by an impromptu orchestra. In another, celebrants formed a conga line. Cars honked their horns and pedestrians broke into song. It looked frankly like some sort of revolutionary moment. But it was not. The fall of Berlusconi was hardly one more classical triumph of "people's power." It was instead a triumph of the power of financial markets. It was not the will of the voters that kicked Berlusconi's corrupt and ineffective clique out of office. It was the explicit joining of financial markets with the commanding bureaucratic heights in Brussels and the European Central Bank's leadership in Frankfurt that sent the message "Berlusconi must go." It was also they who selected Berlusconi's successor, the former European commissioner technocrat Mario Monti, to be Italy's next prime minister. People on the streets of Rome had every reason to feel simultaneously ecstatic and powerless. Berlusconi was gone, but the voter ceased being the most powerful figure in crisis-torn Italy. The public's celebration of the end of the Berlusconi regime resembled the enthusiasm of Italians upon greeting Napoleon's victorious army in 1796. The people on the street were not the actors but the spectators of history.

It is still true that in capitalist democracies, governments depend on the confidence of the voters. But the nature of the dependency has changed. In post-crisis Europe, we are witnessing the rise of a strange division of labor between voters and markets when it comes to the work of

the government. Voters can decide who will be in government — their votes still "choose" the winning party, while markets decide what will be the economic policy of the government, irrespective of who wins the elections. In the heated debate in Europe today about the future institutional architecture of the eurozone, it is clear that the new rules will additionally constrain the ability of the voters to influence economic decision-making. Simply put, markets want to be confident that voters will not make foolish decisions. In economic terms, this may make a lot of sense, yet in political terms they raise uncomfortable questions: Are the people still in charge? Does the power still lie with the voter? Has representative democracy become something of a sham?

During the 19th and 20th century, citizens' liberties were protected by the collective power of the individuals. People received rights and managed to preserve them because they were powerful enough to defend them. The story of democracy was the story of the struggle for democracy. Now our freedoms are protected by the logic of the market and the established constitutional order and not by our collective power as voters. The market believes in free, autonomous individuals capable of taking risks and ready to face responsibilities. "Markets are voting machines," Citibank's Walter Wriston once said. "They function by taking referenda."⁷ But respect for the influence of the customer is not the same as respect for the power of the voter. What the market does not believe in is the right of the people and their government to intervene when they have decided that the markets have failed. Therefore, if in the early 19th century, only 5-10 percent of the people had the right to vote — the educated and propertied males who had the right to decide on all social, political, or military issues — now everybody has the right to vote. But what

Now our freedoms are protected by the logic of the market and the established constitutional order and not by our collective power as voters.

⁷ Walter Wriston, *The Twilight of Sovereignty*, Scribner 1992.

Voters do not believe that their voice really matters in governing the country even when they agree that elections are free and fair.

we are witnessing is the shrinking number of issues decided in the political process. An increasing number of issues, like what should be an acceptable budget deficit in the case of the eurozone countries, have been stripped from electoral politics.

In his book *The Globalization Paradox*, Harvard economist Dani Rodrick⁸ argues that we have three options to manage the tensions between the national democracy and the global market. We can restrict democracy in order to gain competitiveness in the international markets. We can limit globalization in the hope of building democratic legitimacy at home. Or we can globalize democracy at the cost of national sovereignty. What we cannot have is hyper-globalization, democracy, and self-determination at once. However, this is exactly what governments want to have. They want people to have the right to vote, yet they are not ready to allow people to choose “populist policies.” They want to be able to reduce labor costs and to ignore social protest, but they do not want to publicly endorse authoritarianism. They favor

⁸ Professor Dani Rodrik, “The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy,” Norton, 2011

free trade and interdependence, but they want to be sure that when it is necessary, they will have the final say in deciding the law of the land. So, instead of choosing between sovereign democracy, globalized democracy, or globalization-friendly authoritarianism, political elites try to redefine democracy and sovereignty in order to make the impossible possible. The outcome is democracies without choices, sovereignty without meaning and globalization without legitimacy.

In short, the voter has lost his capacity to counter-balance the power of the market in the name of a shared public interest. The crisis of democracy today can be best understood not as a threat to individual freedom or as a risk of return of authoritarianism (the opposition democracy-authoritarianism has lost much of its usefulness when it comes up to make sense of the global politics) but as the frustration of the empowered. Voters do not believe that their voice really matters in governing the country even when they agree that elections are free and fair. People find fewer and fewer reasons to vote. Or, to put it differently, they find more and more reasons to vote with blank ballots. The voice of the citizenry has been rendered mere noise.

5 WHERE HAS VOTER POWER GONE?

A well-known French engraving of 1848, the year French citizens received the universal right to vote, illustrates best the dilemmas of European democracies at their birth. The engraving pictures a worker with a rifle in one hand and a ballot in the other. The message is clear: bullets for the nation's enemies and ballots for the class enemies. Elections were meant to be the instrument for inclusion and nation-building. They integrated workers into the nation by sharing power with them. But at a time when social cohesion ceases to be the goal of modern governance, elections start to lose their meaning as instruments of inclusion and begin to be seen as instruments of exclusion. In the age of globalization, elites are no longer in the business of building integrated societies, they prefer instead to surf on the waves of social disintegration. Russia is a powerful contemporary illustration: elites there don't exploit people, they exploit the natural resources owned by them. They repress people less than pacify them, providing them enough not to make trouble.

U.S. political theorist Stephen Holmes makes an important point when he claims that in the years of the Cold War in order to keep the border with communism closed, Western democracies kept the borders between social classes open. In the days of national democracies, the citizen voter was powerful because she was at the same time a citizen-soldier, citizen-worker, and citizen-consumer. The property of the rich depended on the readiness of the workers to defend the capitalist order. The citizen-voter was important because the defense of the country depended on her courage to stand against her enemies. She was important

because her work was making the country rich. And she mattered because her consumption was driving the economy. To understand why citizens today throughout the West cannot easily control politicians by democratic means, we need to look at the way in which various extra-electoral forms of dependence of politicians on citizens have been eroded. When drones and professional armies replace the citizen-soldier, one of the main motives of the elite's interest in public welfare is substantially weakened. The flooding of the labor market by low cost immigrants or outsourced production has also reduced elites' willingness to cooperate. The fact that over the course of the recent economic crisis, it became evident that the performance of the U.S. stock market no longer depends on the consumer power of the Americans is one more argument why citizens are losing their leverage over the ruling groups. (In October 2012, only 18 percent of U.S. voters strongly agreed with the statement "the middle class always does well when big corporations do well.") It is the decline of the leverage of the citizen-soldier, citizen-consumer, and the citizen-worker that explains voters' loss of power. And it is in the voters' loss of power where the secret of the growing mistrust toward democratic institutions derives. In this context it is not surprising that as Sasha Issenberg argues in his recently published book, *The Victory Lab*, electoral strategists rely on non-political messages to get out the vote and to win. The unintended consequence of the "political brain revolution" is that elections are not framed in terms of representation any more but in terms of mobilization of biases and nudging.

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DEMOCRACY AS POLITICAL REFORMISM

It is happier to be cheated sometimes,” observed Samuel Johnson, “than not to trust.” And he was right because a society of mistrust is a society of powerless citizens. At the beginning, I made the claim that the open society is a self-correcting society and that it is the decaying capacity of the society to correct its mistakes that should worry us the most. The crisis of democracy is just another name for the decline of citizens’ driven political reformism.

In his classic study “Exit, Voice, and Loyalty,” the great economist and social thinker Albert Hirschman, a modern age sage and a refugee from the age of catastrophe, argues that there are two kinds of responses to the deterioration of services or the performance of institutions: exit and voice. Exit is the act of leaving because you hope to find a better good or service somewhere else. “Voice” is the act of complaining, petitioning, or protesting, with the intention of achieving a restoration of the quality that has been impaired. Easy availability to exit is inimical to voice, for by comparison with exit, voice is costly in terms of effort and time. Moreover, to be effective, voice often requires group action and is thus subject to all the well-

known difficulties of organization — namely, representation and free riding.

Exit and voice thus distinguish the world of politics from the world of the market. The politics of voice is what we call political reform. But in order for political reform to succeed, there are several important preconditions. People must feel committed to invest themselves in changing their societies by feeling a part of that society. And for the voice option to function properly, people should strategically interact with others and work to make change together. Commitment to one’s group is critically important for the messy and methodical politics of change to work properly. What worries me most at present is that citizens react to the failures of democracy in a way similar to their reaction when disappointed with the market. They simply exit. They exit by leaving the country or stopping voting or, indeed, voting with blank ballots. But it is the readiness to stay and change reality that is at the heart of democratic politics. It is this basic trust that allows society to advance. This is why democracy cannot exist without trust and why politics as the management of mistrust will stand as the bitter end of democratic reform.

The crisis of democracy is just another name for the decline of citizens’ driven political reformism.

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