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Surendra Munshi (ed.): *Democracy Under Threat*

New Delhi 2017: Oxford University Press, 221 pp.

This timely edited volume aims to map the endangered state of democracies around the globe, to understand the potential causes of this crisis from various angles, and to explore plausible solutions. To this end, it brings together twenty contributors from fourteen countries with various backgrounds—academics, counsellors, diplomats, journalists, and political leaders. The book consists of twenty essays, which are grouped into six parts. Following the editor's introductory essay, the first two offerings explore threats to democracy from the perspective of leadership and institutions. The third part examines the growing influence of authoritarianism in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, East Asia, and

Turkey and Russia. Afterwards, in the fourth part, the book delves into three specific threats to democracy—populism, caudillism, and dynastic rule. The last two sections investigate whether the West has failed in preserving and promoting democracies around the globe, and what insights we can draw from two prominent leaders—Václav Havel and Mahatma Gandhi—who upheld democratic values both in word and in deed.

In the opening essay, Surendra Munshi directs readers' attention to the famous 'end of history' remark made by Francis Fukuyama in his 1989 article. He argues against this interpretation by fleshing out the relevant contexts such as the general decline of democracy and its imminent problems, including legislative gridlock and gerrymandering, the increasing attractiveness of authoritarian alternatives, and the 2008 global financial crisis, whose origins can be traced to the old democracies. This nicely sets the stage for the next nineteen essays. Since a short review cannot do justice to the full range of contributions made by this diverse book, I will introduce the key arguments of five essays I found particularly intriguing.

To begin, an essay by Shlomo Avineri points out four challenges to liberal democracy in the West—the mass-elite representation gap, the mismanagement of economic crises, the rise of social media, and the inadequately handled large-scale immigration crisis. He ascribes voters' alienation to an out-of-touch parliamentary elite oblivious to daily concerns and problems of the wider public. For instance, he points out that the liberal left shifted their concern from the socio-economic needs of the working class to other socio-cultural concerns, such as the environment, global warming, gender equality, LGBT rights, race, and post-colonialism. He rightly argues that the liberal left (particularly the middle class and academics) should get out of their comfort zone and re-orient

their attention towards the bread-and-butter issues of the weaker groups in their societies.

The essay by Tarek Osman provides a nuanced understanding of the rise and fall of democratic development in the Arab world by evaluating the Arab Spring in the light of the region's history. He argues that the Arab world has been consumed by tension between Islamists and secular nationalists with two differing views—one side trying to retain the structures formed in the early 1950s and other side wanting to transform them. He warns that the West should resist its urge to intervene in the region with the aim of promoting democratic ideals, since this is more likely to exacerbate existing problems and cause new ones. Instead, he finds hope from emerging businesses and social entrepreneurs who utilise human, financial, and logistical capital and as a result decentralise power and advance the rule of law, checks and balances, and anti-corruption measures.

In his essay 'The Growing Authoritarian Influence in Democratic Systems', Christopher Walker underscores how susceptible democracies (particularly unconsolidated new democracies) are to the intervention of authoritarian regimes in Russia or Iran. It details a wide range of 'negative soft power' examples that demonstrate the development and application of media (China's CCTV or Iran's Press TV), education (the Russia-supported NGO sector in Europe), and policy think, spreading confusion and misinformation and, as a result, undermining democracy. Walker argues that established democracies have been complacent by taking democratic ideals for granted, and he calls for the active reaffirmation and revitalisation of the core values of democracy.

A paper co-authored by Neelam Deo and Arjun Chawla highlights the issue of dynastic rule in India. The authors point out that the practice of familial succession in Indian politics became prevalent begin-

ning with the Nehru-Gandhi family. They then argue that this now deeply-rooted practice has compromised the meritocratic principle of selecting the most deserving candidates for a leadership position. Moreover, dynastic politics has resulted in a shrinking of the political space outside the party structure and the blocking of opportunities for regional party leaders to move to the national level. These shortcomings notwithstanding, the authors also admit the upsides of dynastic politics in that it has been functionally equivalent to quotas for under-represented social groups (castes or tribes) and women.

In 'The Enduring Legacy of Western Dominance' Thomas Pogge shares his critical view of whether the West has led the world towards democracy. The answer is an emphatic 'no'. Pogge points out examples of how the West overthrew democratically elected governments, helped to build a worldwide network of tax havens, and purchased a large amount of natural resources from the leaders of developing countries without asking how they came to seize power. Going further, he also demonstrates the failure of the West in upholding its cherished democratic values in its concern to survive and prevail against its rival—for example, Gorbachev's attempt to democratise the Soviet Union came to a halt due to the West's lack of reciprocation, and the West has financially supported dictators when it has needed resources or military bases.

In sum, the contributions by multiple authors in this volume add to our knowledge about the status of democracy around the globe in the following respects. First, given the widely-present democratic-backsliding happening in both old and new democracies, the book clearly shows that no country is immune to authoritarian appeals and a simple dichotomy of the East versus the West is of limited utility. Second, although various forms of threats exist around the globe, it is evident from the

book that specific threats are more likely in particular regions. For instance, old democracies suffer from the backlash against immigration from under-developed/developing countries, while new democracies are more vulnerable to manipulative intervention from authoritarian regimes. In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Evident contributions notwithstanding, several of the book's limitations also need to be pointed out. First, many chapters fail to provide readers with potentially the most interesting details. For instance, Christopher Walker's paper details the ties, connections, and subsidies of authoritarian regimes to vulnerable democracies, without offering smoking gun evidence such as Russia intervening in the US election by targeting African-American voters in an attempt to suppress Democratic voter turnout using social media platforms. Works by Michnik (Chapter 7) and Kiniklioglu (Chapter 8) convincingly demonstrate the growing influence of authoritarian values in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Turkey with various related examples, (e.g. politicising religion, cracking down on homosexuality and feminism, promoting an anti-EU stance). But readers could have benefitted more if each paper pointed out who in each society is particularly vulnerable, how they are targeted, and why the authoritarian strategy has become particularly successful in the recent period.

Second, some of the measures suggested as the means to save democracy are too vague for us to draw meaningful guidance. Specifically, remarks made by various authors, such as 'good leadership includes... good vision and morality' (p. 109), 'the United States must elect a true statesman or stateswomen to the presidency' (p. 203), or '[p]eople should hear each other's aspirations, and pain, and develop solutions together that give everyone equality of opportunity and dignity' (p. 62), come across as no more than aspirational. Instead, the

authors could have given real-world examples that demonstrate the living spirit of democracy and what concrete measures were taken to achieve this. For example, although Lu Hisu-Lien's chapter primarily describes them as victims of neighbouring authoritarian regimes, South Korea and Taiwan exemplify how new democracies can consolidate and function (e.g. peaceful mass protests resulted in the impeachment of President Park in South Korea, while student occupation of the Legislative Yuan led to closer legislative monitoring of trade agreements in Taiwan).

Third, comparing the key messages from some chapters can leave readers wondering where we should go from here. For instance, on the one hand, one can draw from Axel Kaiser's chapter about populism in Latin America that the major force endangering democracy is the people's expectation of big government. By making reference to prominent thinkers such as Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, John Stuart Mill, Antonio Gramsci, or Friedrich Hayek, the author clearly argues that the root cause undermining democracy is the region's socialists pushing 'too much government involvement'. On the other hand, following Avineri (Chapter 3) and Maira (Chapter 5), we are offered solutions such as more responsible and inclusive intervention by the government in caring for weaker and marginalised groups in society and addressing the growing inequality caused by globalisation and financialisation. Regarding these potentially contradictory messages, the book could have been more complete had the editor devoted a concluding paper to reconciling different viewpoints between chapters and suggesting fruitful avenues for future research and policy measures in this ever-important topic.

All things considered, *Democracy Under Threat* provides an accessible overview of the state of democratic back-sliding observed around the world and the potential

causes behind this phenomenon. A wide range of intriguing examples offered by authors with various backgrounds will send a clear wake-up call to both academics and policy-makers that 'history has *not* ended' and democracy is not something we should take for granted. More than two years have passed since the authors completed their papers and the 'various threats to democracy' pointed out throughout the book have come to loom ever larger. According to the Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligent Unit [EIU 2017], which the editor used to describe the plight of democracy in 2016, the world was faring much worse in 2017: 89 countries experienced a decline from the previous year, many of which include downgrades from 'hybrid regime' to 'authoritarian regime'. And even at the time of my writing (January 2019), the two oldest representative democracies—the UK and the US—are experiencing legislative gridlock over the Brexit withdrawal bill and the budget for Trump's border wall, respectively. These events make the book ever more relevant, and it is particularly recommended for students of public policy and comparative politics.

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Hilary Appel and Mitchell A. Orenstein:
From Triumph to Crisis: Neoliberal Economic Reform in Postcommunist Countries

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Within the simultaneous challenges of post-communist transitions, the construction of liberalised markets was typically forecast as impossible or, at best, as limited to specific windows of opportunity. Yet, post-communist countries have devised complex strategies to bypass the hurdles [Vanhuyse 2006]. And as Hilary Appel and Mitchell Orenstein's book shows, the region in fact exhibits a puzzling high embrace of neoliberal policies (p. 3). What is more, as the authors explore in great detail, this process did not unfold through a string of stand-alone episodes driven by right-wing power holders. Rather, because of an almost complete lack of prerequisites for functional markets, virtually all post-communist state-makers pursued neoliberal policies (pp. 2–5). According to Appel and Orenstein, the explanation rests on the underexplored process of 'competitive signalling', wherein the desperate need for capital galvanised the adoption of a globally hegemonic 'neoliberal consensus', above and beyond other transnational options or internal partisanship (pp. 4–6).

To begin with, the book parts with traditional transition studies by arguing for a clearer emphasis on the 'imperative of reinsertion into the global economy' (p. 5), rather than the more amorphously defined state-making-marketisation duality. Though the collapse of communism implied a high degree of institutional disintegration, Appel and Orenstein argue that at least a modicum of statehood did persist, whereas markets had been all but completely cut off for four decades (p. 16). Further urgency came from the fact that relatively similar economies across no fewer than 27 countries emerged all at once on