7. The crisis of democracy

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Origins: The crisis in the 1970’s

1. **Left-wing explanation:** Jürgen Habermas, “Legitimation crisis” (1973)

Left-wing explanation: Legitimation crisis

- Not an internal crisis
- Economic crisis (inherent to capitalism itself) → Loss of legitimacy
- Governments, according to Habermas, were required to provide answers and solutions because the citizens perceived the economic crisis as a problem to be solved through political and administrative means
- Expanding expenditures vs. austerity (crisis of rationality)
- Exit or voice: people feel under-represented (crisis of legitimacy)
- Individual lack of confidence → Fraying social cohesion (motivation crisis)
Left-wing explanation: Legitimation crisis

- Economic crisis
- Rationality crisis
- Legitimation crisis
- Motivation crisis
Right-wing explanation: Overloading

• Endogenous crisis to the political system
• The democratic mechanism had fueled a desire for participation, which was becoming more and more massed and standardized and less manageable
• The increasing participation was leading to an exasperation and a growing polarization of the political struggle
• On the contrary, the emergence of individualistic culture had disjointed and pulverized the social interests, producing party fragmentation and instability of the government
• An endless cycle of rising expectations
• The numerous and diversified demands of citizens, strongly centered on the economic and social level, imposed to governments a responsiveness that they were not able to provide
• A loss of confidence stemmed not only in the political system itself (labeled as anomic democracy), but a real delegitimation of authority
Liberals

- Liberalism and realism
  - Descriptive vision
    - Formal and procedural conception of democracy
      - Actor-centered approach
        - Elitist conception

Democrats

- Idealism
  - Normative vision
    - Substantive conception of democracy
      - Structural approach
        - Anti-elitist conception
The crisis of the Third Millennium: CAUSES (Foliti, 2016; Cilento and Foliti, 2016)

1. Globalization
2. Terrorism (September 11, 2001)
3. The economic crisis of 2008
1. Globalization

- Dominant economic model
- The world, from a commonwealth of independent and sovereign states and sovereign, has been transformed gradually into a global village, where the physical boundaries are canceled by an economy able to penetrate and captivate all spheres of human activity through its laws and its promises → Interests policy
- The economy triumphs over politics and multilateral institutions will gradually and inexorably be replaced to national institutions
- Democracy, with its procedures and its values, is itself the subject of a redefinition that promises to be painful
Democracy and globalization

• Democracy as procedure vs. democracy as culture (Laidi and Costopoulos, 2002)

• Rules of game vs. rules of life

• The game rules require a flexible and quick learning, perfectly in line with the exaltation of the present time and immediacy. Globalization, with its tension towards the "here and now", transforms democracy into a magical cure which promises effective and efficient solutions in a short time.

• Democracy as a culture, however, takes a long time to grow and root and is hardly definable and, therefore, it is always relative
Democracy and the Global South

- Growing disconnection between democracy as an electoral process and democracy as a culture
- This disconnection is produced by a gap of a temporal nature. Democracy as a procedure may be established quickly, but democracy as a culture takes time to be developed
- In countries without a democratic tradition, where the inclinations of domination and armed revolt are widespread, the democratic game on conciliation and competition principles can not be imposed in a single day and this explains why so many parties proliferate, claiming to be democratic while acting in a perfectly undemocratic way
Democracy in the West

• The progressive exaltation of individualism and individual rights has eroded the components of collective rights.

• The “homo democraticus occidentalis”, as Laidi and Costopoulos call it, conceives democracy more as an instrumental mean to satisfy the interests and personal benefits, and no longer as a common project.

• If democracy does not satisfy the demands of its citizens, this becomes a pure abstraction, dramatically widening the gap between democracy understood in the formal sense and the one really lived and experienced.
Globalization, democracy, and sovereignty

- Globalization, moreover, infringe on the nation-wide spaces and erodes certain collective preferences expressed in a democratic way, when these hinder economic interests.

- The weakening of the sovereignty and national policies compared to the powerful incisiveness of global phenomena would require an institutional intervention on a global or continental scale able to bring order and offer certainties.

- However, we have to take into account that the persistence of nation states and the lack of technical solutions to achieve a cosmopolitan democracy prevent a concerted and effective response.
The primacy of economy: the liberal perspective

- The market has the ability to respond to the tastes and desires of the people, faster and better than democracy, within a culture that becomes much more individualistic.

- The market economy, therefore, in its power to profit maximization, is thus legitimized by the majority of people, because it does not pretend to educate them or to envisage them a political or a social project, but it listens to (and anticipate) their wishes.

- In this sense, the citizens will no longer to be considered as members of a nation included into one state space, but as consumers isolated from each other and all together inserted into the Global Village (Wolf, “The Morality of the Market”, Foreign Policy, 2003)
Procedural democracy and equality of opportunities

• In this context, the fight against poverty and inequality does not constitute a politically democratic challenge because democracy is conceived primarily as a political regime.

• Democracy does not deal directly with economic and social issues.
The primacy of economy: the democratic perspective

- Precisely, what are the virtues of the market, in the democratic perspective are conceived as the source of the problem.
- The answer that free trade offers to the needs of individuals is clearly antithetical compared to the basic functions of democracy, i.e. expressing the common good and help the community to achieve both growth and equity.
- However, through a continuous invasion of the field, the economy uses the politics to suit the interests of consumers and investors, thereby distorting the essence and impeding democracy to pursue those goals that no citizen could have achieved individually.
- Economic growth vs. social problems (employment stability, growing inequality, climate change)
- Interests of consumers and investors dominate the common interest
Substantive democracy and equality of results

• In the Democratic vision, political equality and the achievement of certain substantive objectives constitutes an interdependent variable with the economic and social equality.

• Without the latter, even the most minimal of democracies is likely to remain a slave of power, of the market, of the status of the individual and of classism.

• As long as the structural inequalities will not be uprooted, political equality will remain only a pipe dream (Rueschemeyer, “Addressing inequality”, Journal of Democracy, 2004)
2. Before September 11: prosperity

- Liberal school was prevailing
- Mixing and keeping in balance hard power and soft power
- Slight precedence of interests over ideals
- Enlarging the democratic space, but with caution (starting from those states culturally and geographically closer to the West, that is to say in Latin American Catholic countries and in orthodox countries of post-communist and post-Soviet)
After September 11: insecurity

- Internal and external insecurity
- Realism and clash of civilizations
- A “new” Fukuyama ("Has History Started Again", Policy, 2002) vs. Islamic-fascism
- Modernity and democratization remain intertwined
- The rejection of the first causes the rejection of the latter
- No longer only the ideals or a crisis of legitimacy will make the change, but also the use of force
- No more only emulation, but promotion and (if necessary) imposition
- However, imposition is not sustainable
3. After the 2008 Great Crisis

The end of the Western primacy

• The contemporary world is increasingly post-American and increasingly post-Western.

• Not only the rest of the world is growing faster than the West, but the West is in a recession on all fronts, starting with the economic one up to the marketplace of ideas.

• We are facing the rise of the “rest of the world”

• The West has lost its economic, social and cultural leadership.

• The other major powers, such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa are emerging and are imposing their way of developing and their ideas
3. After the 2008 Great Crisis

The intrinsic crisis

- The West’s crisis is not, however, only a relative crisis, the psychological product of a comparison with the other powers of the world.
- This is also an intrinsic crisis, internal, that puts in serious doubt the hypothesis of a West as the only civilization and opens the door to the possibility of having more Wests to meditate.
- First of all, between the two sides of the Atlantic.
- Already Huntington in *The Lonely Superpower* argued that in a unipolar-multipolar world, the United States would have to watch their backs from Europe and, in particular, from its driving power, the Germany. The very birth of the euro would have resulted, according to the scholar, a major challenge to U.S. hegemony.
3. After the 2008 Great Crisis
The intrinsic crisis/2

- Not only interests
- Ideals and conceptions of democracy: procedural vs. substantive
- Democracy promotion: political vs. developmental
  - The last few years, however, it have been seen a gradual decline of Western engagement overseas, mainly due to the economic crisis that in the West was more keenly felt, and which required a substantial spending review of all items of expenditure, including military ones, and those assigned to the activities of international cooperation.
3. After the 2008 Great Crisis
The internal crisis in Europe

• It is further aggravated the gap between the Union center, i.e. the virtuous countries of the Central and Northern Europe, and its indebted periphery, i.e. the countries of the South (Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain)

• The very idea of democracy seems to be entered into a deep crisis

• People and governments feel powerless in front of the vagaries of global markets into crisis. The States seem to be progressively dispossessed of their sovereignty.
Distrust in European Union and in democracy

• In the citizens of the South, the intolerance is due to painful reforms and tremendous austerity measures.

• Institution that have required these reforms are perceived as distant, technocratic and illegitimate because are unelected.

• The citizens of the North, however, in the face of the good economic performance of their countries, do not want to delegate to a very inclusive Union a sovereignty of which they are jealous.

• Schmitter has described a plausible doomsday scenario in which the economic crisis as an opportunity to finally make EU a political union, can become a mortal danger to the euro, for the 'Union itself, and even for the democratic solidity of some of its countries.
Euro-skepticism

• All this happened because European elites have underestimated the attractiveness of the Euro-skeptic forces.

• The European narrative founded on mythical slogans as “an ever closer union” or “benefits for all” is disintegrated in front of the reality of a system which ended up creating winners and losers, debilitated by a democratic deficit that has come to de-legitimize the European project itself.

• The gap between ideal and real is the space within which the Euro-skeptics have entered and have been able to attract people through a more fresh fiction, able to look at the substantive issues of the present (especially, economic crisis, internal security, and migration policy)
The crisis of democracy in the world

• Russia: sovereign democracy (Surkov)
• Post-soviet countries: sad revolutions (Foliti, 2016)
• Doppelgangers of democracy (illiberal democracies): populist (direct) and elitist (directed) democracy (Krastev, 2012)
• Populism in Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic)
• Populism in Western Europe (Italy, France, Great Britain, Greece, Spain)
• Populism in Latin America
• Arab springs, democratic failures
• Rising traditionalism in Turkey and India
• Two Africas (Ochieng ‘Opalo) Elections as a mean of real democratization vs. elections as a mean to legitimate authoritarian governments)
Possible solution/1: V-Dem

• Each society will work to realize its own democratic values and build its own democratic institutions in its own way, because we also recognize the uniqueness of culture and history and experience (Hillary Clinton, 2011)

• While democracy is the cornerstone of the European Union, it is clear there is no single model for democratic government (Catherine Ashton, 2011)

• There is no single model of democracy, but democracies share common features (UN General Assembly, 2007)
Possible solution/1: V-Dem

Non-Western democracies: why?

- Western democracy is inherently flawed
- To seek more modest institutional differentiation
- Western principle can be only Western, these are too onerous for other societies
- Leftists: toward a regime based on economic justice, end of the Western normative imperialism
- Rightists: a pushback against social liberalism promoted by Western governments
Possible solution/1: V-Dem
Non-Western democracies: a cloak for authoritarianism

• Non-Western societies value consensus more than adversarial political competition: wise guardians and communal mechanisms
• Non-Western society value social justice more than individual rights (and especially, economic liberalism)
• Western democracies entails excessively permissive social values
Possible solution/1: V-Dem

Non-Western democracies: a cloak for authoritarianism

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Possible solution/1: V-Dem

Liberalism-Plus: 5 axis of variation

1. Paying greater attention to community ideals, especially those pertaining to religious morality, next to the protection of individual rights.

2. Empowering participation in decisions on economic reforms, according to less hierarchical dynamics compared to that in the neo-corporatist systems.

3. Providing quotas for minorities enabling them to have voice in the political arena and to stay away from the tyranny of the majority. Youngs recommends, however, not to stop the purely formal and institutional aspects, but to promote more liberal forms of communalism, which enhance even more the grassroots participation and respond in real time to the needs of a complex and evolving society.
4. Adopting alternative forms of activism and representation (for example, forms of deliberative or participatory democracy from below, including through new technologies), but without sacrificing the typical tools of liberal and representative democracy (political parties and parliaments).

5. Create legal systems where the formal element, of typically Western origin, cooperate with the informal traditional element, characteristic of some countries where legal issues are usually judged by tribal chiefs or village heads.
Possible solution/2: Cosmopolitan democracy
(Held and Archibugi)

- Ideal solution inspired by the Kantian project of the “perpetual peace” (1795)
- Global representation will be guaranteed to States and individuals
- Double citizenship: national and global
- Short run: development and consolidation of supranational institutions (regional) to complement the national institutions
- Long run: universal model of political and democratic representation to solve conflicts, poverty, diseases, environmental issues
Possible solution/2: Cosmopolitan democracy: Problems of feasibility

1. States are still jealous of their sovereignty (actually, cooperation is only possible on specific matters)
   - Supranational institutions do not evolve naturally, but their development depends on the willingness of the single states

2. Supranational institution actually are not able to apply effectively sanctions

3. There is no agreement on the method of decision-making
   - Unanimity
   - One state, one vote

4. There is no congruence between the spatial impact and the possibility of monitoring the effectiveness of decisions
The perpetual crisis (O’Donnell, 2007)

- We must consider that democracy is and always will be in some kind of crisis: It is constantly redirecting its citizens’ gaze from a more or less unsatisfactory present toward a future of still unfulfilled possibilities.

- This is because democracy is more than a valuable kind of political arrangement. It is also the often notorious sign of a lack. It is the perpetual absence of something more, of an always pending agenda that calls for the redress of social ills and further advances in the manifold matters which, at a certain time and for a certain people, most concern human welfare and dignity. This is why the meanings of democracy are so protean, and always essentially contested.

- It is also why the theoretical and empirical analyses that we frame as social scientists should take into account these constantly varying and contested meanings
• Many democracies are in crisis, though the crises vary as to depth and specific characteristics.

• Still, there is in these crises something that belongs to what is best and most distinctive about democracy.

• For the crises underline democracy’s intrinsic mix of hope and dissatisfaction, its highlighting of a lack that will never be filled