Democratic Decay Resource (DEM-DEC): Sixth Monthly Bibliography Update-January 2019

Tom Gerald Daly   2019-01-16T14:30:05

DEM-DEC Launch Podcast

The panel discussion to formally launch DEM-DEC on 22 October was broadcast by ABC Radio National's 'Big ideas' programme on 27 and 28 November and is now available as a podcast. The launch programme and details are on DEM-DEC.

The DEM-DEC Bibliography

The DEM-DEC Main Bibliography (finalised on 24 June 2018) presents a global range of research on democratic decay. It has a strong focus on research by public lawyers – spanning constitutional, international and transnational law – but also includes key research from other disciplines, as well as policy texts. Updates to the Bibliography are issued on the first Monday of each month, based on new publications and suggestions from users of DEM-DEC. All updates should be read in conjunction with the main bibliography on DEM-DEC.

Sixth monthly update since DEM-DEC was launched

This sixth monthly update was issued on 14 Janaury 2019 and is now available on DEM-DEC.

Additions in the January Update include:

- New Research Worldwide from December 2018
- A significant list of additions suggested by DEM-DEC Users
- Information on other additional resources added to DEM-DEC (see Links section)
- Forthcoming Research – which has been significantly expanded since the December Update

Identifying Themes

Each monthly Bibliography Update includes a section identifying themes from the update. The aim is simply to provide 'added value' by helping users to navigate the update, and to provide some limited commentary, especially on very recent research. Although it is impossible to capture every dimension of the issues covered in this Update, six key themes can be picked out.

1   Is Global Democratic Decay Stalling?

The [2018 Democracy Index Report](#) from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) was issued in early January 2019 and its authors suggest that the global "retreat of democracy" ended in 2018 – or, at least, stalled. An [explainer carried in *The Economist*](#) on 8th January summarises the report as follows:

The index rates 167 countries by 60 indicators across five broad categories: electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, democratic political culture and civil liberties. It is stricter than most similar indices: it concludes that just 4.5% of the world's people live in a "full democracy". However, the overall global score remained stable in 2018 for the first time in three years. Just 42 countries experienced a decline, compared with 89 in 2017. Encouragingly, 48 improved.

The explainer's emphasis on its 'strictness' clearly seeks to place it apart from other leading indices produced by [Freedom House](#) and [POLITY](#), and it is true that its metrics are somewhat broader. However, it is also important to highlight that indices such as [V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy)](#) also produce global democracy assessments based on highly sophisticated analytical frameworks. My advice? First, follow the old adage of "one swallow does not make a summer" – one positive report is good, but it seems important to wait and see if a consensus and similar pattern starts to develop across multiple leading indices. Second, the fine-grained story from the grassroots remains quite grim. While the EIU's report sounds a welcome note of hope, it should not lead us into complacency.

(Note: Links to a range of democracy indices, and a wealth of other resources, can be found in the [Links](#) section on DEM-DEC).

2   The Central Importance of Political Parties

A clear theme from this month's update is the central importance of political parties to democratic governance. To political scientists and other social scientists this will seem too obvious to state, but in constitutional law in particular theory and practice has yet to fully grapple with the status of political parties as constitutional entities whose activity directly shapes and impacts on the systemic health of the democratic order as a whole. A range of new publications provide food for thought: In an article published in the [*Journal of Communist and Post-Communist Studies* (December 2018)](#), John Ishiyama, Christopher Pace and Brandon Stewart argue that Russian threats appear to have had little effect on political parties' manifestoes in Europe (especially regarding security). In an article published in early January 2019 in *Comparative Politics*, [Raúl Madrid, analysing Chile and Uruguay](#), argues that the development of a functioning democratic system in electoral authoritarian regimes is often spurred by elite opposition parties, who promote suffrage expansion in order to weaken ruling parties' hold over elections and to improve their own electoral prospects. This highlights the importance of opposition parties to the endurance and vitality of democratic rule.

Two journal articles from 2017, suggested by DEM-DEC users, are also highly relevant. In one, [Ron Inglehart and Pippa Norris](#) ask: (1) "What motivates people to support Populist Authoritarian movements?" And (2) "Why is the populist

authoritarian vote so much higher now than it was several decades ago in high-income countries? They conclude that declining "existential security" is the answer, which covers not just economic insecurity but broader cultural backlash. In the second, focused on Poland, Kate Korycki argues that Polish political parties have weak "programmatic identities" (in terms of clear policy platforms) and analyses how the party in power (the Law and Justice (PiS) party) crafted a successful political identity based on a turn to the past and a narrative of state capture by communists. This, she argues, "polarized the field, casting political opponents as essential enemies, and casting the narrators as [the] country's saviors."

3 Direct Democracy, Deliberation, and Representation

A central tension emerging in the literature concerns how best to address the deterioration of democracy: is enhancing direct democracy and/or deliberative processes the answer, or a return to greater focus on representative actors? Or can they be combined? One book from October 2018, suggested by a DEM-DEC user (Responsible Parties: Saving Democracy from Itself), opts for returning to representation, arguing that the decades-long trend toward devolving power directly to the public – through mechanisms including primaries and local caucuses to select party candidates, ballot initiatives and referenda – has rendered both governments and political parties less able to address constituents' long-term interests, and less effective overall, thereby eroding trust in the political process. They argue that political systems must be restructured to restore power to political parties, as the core institution of representative democracy, to win back electorates' trust.

The question for essayists in the collection Politics with the People: Building a Directly Representative Democracy (September 2018), suggested for addition by a DEM-DEC user, is how to develop a 'directly representative democracy'. This, the editors propose, can be a new way of connecting citizens and elected officials to improve representative government, with congressional representatives meeting groups of their constituents "via online, deliberative town hall meetings to discuss some of the most important and controversial issues of the day." They argue that this can empower citizens and move past "the broken system of interest group politics and partisan bloodsport" (which might include the partisan gerrymandering discussed by Mikayla Foster in the latest (December) edition of the *Boston University Law Review*). An interesting companion piece, suggested by a DEM-DEC user, is a conference paper from April 2018, whose authors argue that how we perceive solutions depends on what we believe to be the fundamental problems, which they suggest as: "(i) disconnections between citizens and their elected representatives; (ii) disconnections between multiple publics of in the public sphere; and iii) disconnections between democratic will and policy action.

4 Elite Perceptions of the Electorate

Further complicating the discussion above are two recent articles, which further highlight the tension between representation and other forms of democratic participation. In the latest issue of the *UC Davis Law Review* (December 2018), Christopher Elmendorf and Abby Wood argue that perceptions of the electorate among political elites – i.e. candidates, legislators, party officials, and

campaign advisers – tend to be distorted; in particular, by assuming they are more conservative than they really are. They argue that reducing elite ignorance could have immediate benefits including reduced political polarisation in the short-term, but possible longer-term risks including more intense gerrymandering and microtargeted campaigns. In the Fall 2018 edition of the *Houston Law Review*, Elizabeth Reese picks up a similar theme, arguing that critics of current campaign finance rules in the USA, who see money in politics as distorting the democratic system, seem to overlook the question of voter autonomy and "risk becoming surreptitiously elitist without sufficient confrontation with certain paternalistic assumptions about voter preferences and behavior."

5   Can Democracy Endure in an Era of Misinformation?

Further expanding on the themes above, in a new short monograph published in December 2018, *Democracy and Truth: A Short History*, Sophia Rosenfeld asks whether constitutional government worthy of a self-governing people can be maintained in an age of widespread misinformation and polarisation. Rosenfeld interrogates, from a historical perspective, "a longstanding and largely unspoken tension at the heart of democracy between the supposed wisdom of the crowd and the need for information to be vetted and evaluated by a learned elite made up of trusted experts." For Rosenfeld, what we are currently witnessing is the unravelling of the functional relationship between these competing aspects of democratic culture, and the end of earlier assumptions that technological advances such as the Internet would enhance democratic discourse by empowering citizens and disrupting "outdated hierarchies of epistemic authority". This book is useful not only in anatomising the rise and nature of 'post-truth' democratic discourse, but also in Rosenfeld's attempt to offer proposals for defending the very idea of truth against the many forces that undermine it.

6   Is Hungary a Distinct Regime Type?

The questions above bring us back to mulling over why authoritarian populist forces have been gaining ground worldwide, discussed by authors such as Ron Inglehart, Pippa Norris, Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes (see the 'Forthcoming Research' section) in this Update. Of course, one dimension of authoritarian populism is the claim that a strong leader can understand the will of the 'true' people, which means he or she can do away with many of the mediating institutions of a democratic order and enjoy a more dyadic relationship with the public. In an article from September 2018, suggested by a DEM-DEC user, András Körösényi makes the case for viewing Hungary as a distinct regime type – a 'plebiscitary leader democracy' (PLD) formed through the impact of authoritarian populist discourse and other trends of contemporary politics on the political regime (e.g. de-alignment, growing electoral volatility, citizens' disengagement, personalization of politics and policy, legitimacy problems, the decline of party membership and partisanship, and the "mediatization" of politics).

(Note: For more discussion of concepts and regime types, see the Concept Index on DEM-DEC).

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