

Feature Article

Democracy is in crisis and how to take it back

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Introduction

The Cold War is over and two divided Germanys are united. East-European countries become integrated into the EU. Islamic terrorism seems to have lost its momentum. In spite of all this we cannot be satisfied with this world and somehow we begin to lose confidence in democracy. Democracy and election systems seem not to function well. Authoritarian, dictators, populists control politics in many parts of the world, even in would-be democratic countries. Politics itself is deteriorated.

Democracy is in crisis

Democracy means rule by people and this word consists of *dēmos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). Some critics have sharp insight into changing the status of democracy in the internet age. Even in the USA and in the EU, in which once stable and strong democracy, human rights and rule of law are thought as common ground and deep-rooted, democracy there is no more self-evident. Candidates with enough money can recruit technical-savvy people and pay information companies to manipulate electorates. They can win national elections and even presidency elections. Representative democracy is not immune to populism, if the moderate political parties become weakened from various reasons. Democracy cannot exclude populism and we should admit that the latter is a part of it. Democracy is in reality a kind of populism. There is populism from left and right as *La France Insoumise* (LFI) in France (left) and the *Front National* (FN) (right-wing) show. At any rate, populism claims that it represents wishes of masses against the elites. Democracy is a feasible thing, sometimes destroyed not only from outside but also from inside. How many people can vote deliberatively? Mass media focus from day to day on different topics like migrants, terrorism, wars, threat by medium and long range missiles, cyber attacks, economic crisis, cultural identity and so forth. Politicians will not hesitate to misuse fear and uneasiness among people. 'In the age of migration, democracy has begun to operate as an instrument of exclusion, not of inclusion'.⁽¹⁾ Citizens act irra-

tionally because they feel fear towards immigrants. The notion of the EU is based on ideal universalism and the EU itself is an idealistic-imagined community. Even well-educated Europeans facing the flow of asylum-seekers turned to nationalism. National identity is deep-rooted and a strong feeling. 'Identity, it appears, like sin, however much we oppose it, we cannot escape it'.⁽²⁾ Populism misuses nationalism and anti-liberalism to win elections. If it is necessary, populists do not hesitate to resort to racial prejudice.

Why does an unknown candidate become suddenly so popular? Who and what helps him or her for popularity? Afterwards we ask ourselves whether the elected candidate was really our true choice or not. Why do we feel a sense of helplessness after the election? Has the democratic system itself become a defective institution?

Democracy dies by election

There are the following words in "How democracies die", a book written by two professors, Levitsky and Ziblatt of Harvard University; 'The tragic paradox of the electoral rule to authoritarianism is that democracy's assassins use the very institution of democracy—gradually, subtly, and even legally—to kill it'.⁽³⁾ What makes the situation worse is that meddling with elections is very easy in the internet age. 'In 2016 the United States was attacked by a foreign enemy power. Unlike the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor or Al Qaeda's attack on the World Trade Center, the attack by the Russian Federation struck at the core of our democracy, our free and fair election system'.⁽⁴⁾

Plebiscitary also cannot be a grantee for the functioning democracy as the referendum on the Brexit shows. UK PM David Cameron was convinced and confident that English people would support him and deny the Brexit. The flow of immigrants and asylum-seekers unsettles the feeling of Englishmen and stirs up xenophobia. Fear towards the flow of immigrants, terrorists' attacks and increasing criminal rates committed by foreign people are surely an imagined danger. The number of 2 million immigrants makes in comparison with the entire

population number in the EU (512 mil.) and the America (327 mil.) only 0.4 % and 0.6% respectively. They can easily absorb them. So-called terroristic attacks caused by Islamic extremists are often covered by mass media and frighten ordinal people, but terror attacks triggered by white people and hate speeches against citizens of foreign origin should not be trivialized.

Internet and democracy

Audience is accustomed to consume sensational and superficial news provided by the internet. To gather information through the internet does not cost much and there is a general shift from newspapers to the internet to check news. The subscription rate of newspapers pro household is declining. Especially computer-savvy young people will not subscribe to newspapers. Instead they check news on the internet and read messages in the SNS like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. The reading habits of internet surfers are characterized as selective shopping of the news which are interesting for them. They will not read good-balanced long op-ed. TV programs are also full of entertainment like criminal dramas, soap operas, quizzes etc. the news in newspapers and on TV often lack deep insights into events and they are very superficial. They will not cover the world and chose news from narrow nationalistic standpoints. Messages obtained from SNS and so on are very short and lack background stories, historical context and multilayered deliberation. Party stakeholders lost their power because of ‘the explosion of alternative media, particularly cable news and social media’.⁽⁵⁾

Cambridge analytica

The internet age does not mean that we have won more freedom in opinion building but we are also controlled by big companies like GAFA, our own and foreign governments and also social information companies. Why can we use freely e-mail and surf? We do not pay for such services with money but with our personal data like our address, our age, our hobbies, our relationship with other people, our habits of expenditure, our opinions, our reading habits, our fields of interest, our trips, our pictures, in other words with our big data. Those data companies earn immense money to sell or use your data for other companies. Authoritarian and malign governments also gather personal data to control own population and other countries. That personal data can also be used to influence public opinion. Molly Schweickert, head of digital of Cambridge Analytica, explained in her self-confident presentation

⁽⁶⁾ about her company how the Trump campaign worked. This woman seems not to have a bad consciousness at all that her company have destroyed a democratic system. Many commentators to this presentation described her as evil. The owner of this information company, Alexander Nix said he used behavior science to influence voting habits.⁽⁷⁾ Based on the personal data, they have chosen suitable targets in the swing states in the United States and provided them with persuasive information and disinformation, aiming to move them to vote for Donald Trump. It is worth checking the YouTube movie ⁽⁸⁾ about Cambridge Analytica’s whistleblower Chris Wylie on testimony. Steve Bannon who supported Trump’s campaign for presidential election as a chief executive of the Donald Trump 2016 presidential campaign, has given the information company in England the name Cambridge Analytica. This information company is said to have used the personal data of 50 million people from Facebook. This company also meddled with the referendum on the Brexit. The EU had adopted the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) on 14 April 2016 and enforced the regulation on 25 May 2018. This regulation may make it difficult for companies to gather personal information without the consent of users. Users can check what kinds of their data are gathered and have the right to delete their own data.

Social bots

Social bots communicate with human beings and write and send automatically opinions in NSN, Tweets, Facebook, Instagram and so forth. Participants in social nets begin to believe that certain opinions must be supported from majority population because they are so prevailing. With advanced technology nowadays it is very difficult for ordinal people to discern personal human opinions and opinions produced by social bots. Social bots do not repeat the same opinions, but similar opinions with the same political tendency. They also change the usernames so that such diverse expressions can arouse the feeling among the audience that those opinions must be to a certain degree true. Bots attack political parties and persons which are against their notion. Real human beings also, non-paid or paid, disseminate their opinions. They try to scatter disinformation in order to discredit mass media and political enemies.

Russia’s Internet Research Agency (IRA) meddled in the election campaign as Table 1 shows.⁽⁹⁾

Russia interferes in elections in the USA, UK, France and Germany. The Atlantic Council Eurasia Center writes in the

Table 1: The volume of IRA Facebook Ads, Facebook Posts, Instagram Posts, and Tweets, monthly average

Year	Facebook Ads	Facebook Posts	Instagram Posts	Twitter Posts
2015	207	360	2,110	59,126
2016	564	2,442	2,611	57,247
2017	541	4,234	5,956	59,634

Source: Authors’ calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

article ‘The Kremlin’s Trojan Horses, Russian Influence in Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden’ how Russia uses vulnerable systems of western free democracy to control opinions of other countries.⁽¹⁰⁾ They recruited cooperative people in the third countries who write in the SNS, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and so on. Russian troll factories send disruptive information to democratic countries to disturb anti-Russia feeling.

The situation in Japan is almost the same according to Fabian Schäfer et al in their article ‘Japan’s 2014 General Election: Political Bots, Right-Wing Internet Activism, and Prime Minister Shinzō Abe’s Hidden Nationalist Agenda’. In the abstract of the article it reads: ‘In this article, we present results on the identification and behavioral analysis of social bots in a sample of 542,584 Tweets, collected before and after Japan’s 2014 general election. Typical forms of bot activity include massive retweeting and repeated posting of (nearly) the same message, sometimes used in combination. We focus on the second method and present (1) a case study on several patterns of bot activity, (2) methodological considerations on the automatic identification of such patterns and the prerequisite near-duplicate detection, and (3) we give qualitative insights into the purposes behind the usage of social/political bots. We argue that it was in the latency of the semi-public sphere of social media—and not in the visible or manifest public sphere (official campaign platform, mass media)—where Shinzō Abe’s hidden nationalist agenda interlocked and overlapped with the one propagated by organizations such as Nippon Kaigi and Internet right-wingers (*netto uyo*) during the election campaign, the latter potentially forming an enormous online support army of Abe’s agenda.’

The Asahi Newspaper conducted a public opinion poll about the relationship between the support rate for the government and information gathering habits on 14 and 15 July 2018. The result was published in an article ‘Those who check SNS are more supportive for the cabinet’ on 16 July 2018. People who do not subscribe to a newspaper but consume from the internet and SNS have a tendency to support the cabinet.

This result supports my personal impression by surfing comments in the internet news sites. One can encounter more rightists’ positions there. Bots seem to have helped shift to the right in Japanese politics. Besides bots, affordable politicians and institutions can also recruit writing personnel who are willing to write political opinions on the internet for payment. They need not live in the same country which is regarded as the target. They use VPN (Virtual Private Network) and disguise them-

selves for example as Americans who live in America. Ordinal people think that their opinions are those of Americans. This is a very dangerous and subtle way to meddle in politics in foreign countries.

How to take democracy back

Control of the internet is necessary for better functioning democracy and a ban of robots to disseminate political opinion and a ban of hate speech and racial discrimination are good ideas to maintain democracy. In order to protect personal data and check the contents of opinion in SNS, Facebook, Instagram and so forth, GAFA must cooperate with protectors of democracy. Democracy cannot be maintained without efforts from electorates and we must sharpen our political awareness to help democracy. We need to cooperate with like-minded nations and to strengthen feasible democracy. We must be conscious that democracy can be weakened by an election itself. Nationalism, even in a form of ‘own nation first policy’, will harness our mind and change electorates to nationalists.

Seeking for strong and autocratic politics even in the Western world

Those who are disappointed with democracy seek for a superman. The would-be strong figure uses and produces imaginary crisis from outside. Once elected, he or she will overrule convention and laws in order to maintain and monopolize, and if necessary, he or she does not hesitate to overrule parliament. The presidency system in North- and South-America or in other countries makes it possible. It happened in America, Asia, South-America and also in Europe. Mr. Donald Trump will not hesitate to behave as an autocrat. He shows sympathy for other autocrats like Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong-un, Rodrigo Duterte and so on. Trump overruled the parliament by emergency declaration and he fired James Comey, F.B.I. director and National Security Advisor Michael Flynn. The former was said not to be able to protect Trump from investigation according to the article ‘Mueller’s Investigation Erases a Line Drawn After Watergate’ of the New York Times on March 26, 2019. The president nominated William Barr, who was critical of Robert Mueller, as Attorney General on February 14, 2019, only one month before the submitting of Robert Mueller’s special report on March 22, 2019. Such tactics seem to be successful to avoid impeachment. The public opinion in the United States of America is changing since then in favor of Donald Trump after William Barr denied direct cooperation with Russia. Putin and Trump belong to the same type of politicians. Why did

Table 2: Means of information gathering of politics and society and cabinet supporting rate

Sources of information	I will support the cabinet.	I will not support the cabinet
Newspaper	32	54
TV	38	41
Internet News Site	42	38
SNS	48	22

Putin meddle in the presidential election 2016 in the United States? ‘The political party controlling the US Congress, the Republican Party, had dedicated itself for eight years to destroying any positive action by President Barack Obama. Hillary Clinton, his Secretary of State, was likely to be the Democratic Party’s frontrunner and even more likely to be the next President of the United States. Putin’s personal hatred of both seemed to be the key motivating factor that caused him to intervene’.⁽¹¹⁾

Even Trump cannot deny the fact that Russia has meddled in the presidency election 2016. ‘On February 16, 2018, Special Counsel Robert Mueller filed an indictment at the US District Court for the District of Columbia titled *The United States versus the Internet Research Agency (RF-IRA), Concorde Management and Consulting, LLC, and Concorde Catering*. The indictment alleged that the “research” organization was in fact a “Russian organization engaged in operations to interfere with elections in political processes.” According to the indictment, beginning in late 2013, the organization was formed, hired staff, and planned and received orders to manipulate the US presidential election through the largest Russian intelligence active measure ever conducted against the United States’.⁽¹²⁾

Authoritarian leaders’ tactics

Powerful politicians use supportive media and manipulate opinion. They try to weaken antagonistic mass media and describe them as witch-hunt and fake news. Levitsky and Ziblatt cite as a key indication of authoritarian behavior, ‘readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including media’ (p.29). “Strong” leaders sometimes resort to nationalism and national identity. They insist, for example, that our country is endangered and existing political parties and elites are corrupt. Strong leaders produce an enemy image in and out of countries like foreigners or immigrants. They insist on our own national identity and it should beat any costs to be protected. They stir up panic and fear among the population. Trump’s America first politics are criticized in the world. The American Troops withdrawal from Syria and Trumps skepticism of NATO are dangerous acts. There was a meeting of NATO in Munich and Angela Merkel criticized Trumps isolate policy. Her speech won standing ovation according to the Washington Post’s article ‘Trump foreign policy under attack from all sides at European security conference’ (published on 16 February, 2019).

Why Brexit and why Russia meddled in US presidency election campaign 2016?

In the op-ed in the New York Times ‘I Ran the C.I.A. Now I’m Endorsing Hillary Clinton’ published on 5 August 2016, written by CIA director Micheal J. Morell, he suggested that ‘(I)n the intelligence business, we would say that Mr. Putin had recruited Mr. Trump as an unwitting agent of the Russian Federation’. He writes also that ‘Donald J. Trump is not only

unqualified for the job, but he may well pose a threat to our national security’.⁽¹³⁾ Politico also writes: ‘Democrats say the indictment proves Russian meddling is no ‘hoax’’, on 16 February 2018. Is this meddling conducted spontaneously from Russia or with a cooperative act between Trump and Putin? As long as Mueller’s report in full text is not disclosed to the public, discussion on collusion and delusion will continue. For Putin, a realistic politician like Donald Trump must be a better candidate than Hillary Clinton. A Republican president is better than a Democratic president.

In England, the difference of the number of Brexiteers and who do not want to leave the EU, is marginally small as the last referendum showed. One can get a desirable result by even a small jolt to change the public opinion. Russia used nationalism in England and influenced the referendum. The EU imposed a severe sanction against Russia after the annexation of Crimea. Russia’s interest is to weaken the EU. Nationalism and xenophobia are useful tools to change public opinion. Some English people want to get back sovereignty and to stop the flow of foreign workers from other parts of the EU, especially from East-Europe. As far as the United Kingdom stays a member of the EU, it must accept many obligations of the EU imposed on the UK, even though it also enjoys advantages. The supporters of the EU appreciate free access to Europe, single market economy, no visa and no control on goods between Ireland and Northern-Ireland. Many financial companies and car producers have already decided to leave England before the final outcome of the struggle over the Brexit is certain. They see no future in England anymore to make business for the EU. England’s behavior was from the beginning lukewarm. The processor of the EU, the European Economic Community (EEC) was established in 1958. The UK did not become a member until 1972 because France used veto against the membership of the UK. England is not a member of the Schengen-Agreement and has not introduced the common currency Euro.

Future of the EU

Trump’s one-sided politics, like withdrawing the U.S. from the treaty of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty (INF), imposing punitive taxes on European goods to be exported to the US, parochial denial of the global warming, underestimation of the EU, positive evaluation of Putin, critique towards the old European members of NATO and so forth, have caused conflict between the EU and the United States. Trump tries even to downgrade the EU as an international organization instead of nation-state status. Trump is a threat to the EU. Isolationism of Trump weakens the EU and the weakened EU is welcome for Putin. An article of POLITICO, ‘Trump calls Macron’s comments on building a European army to defend against US ‘insulting’ published on 9 November 2018, Trump insists that ‘(p)erhaps Europe should first pay its fair share of NATO, which the U.S. subsidizes greatly.’ In the BBC’s news ‘Has Trump turned his back on Europe?’ on 14 January 2019,

James Naughtie of BBC News asked as ‘the EU says the US government has effectively downgraded its diplomatic status in Washington, how has the transatlantic relationship changed under Donald Trump’s presidency?’

Can the EU survive Trump?

Many countries believe in nationalism and resort to nationalism to maintain their own power. ‘After Europe means that Europe is suffering from an identity crisis in which its Christian and Enlightenment legacies are no longer secure. After Europe does not necessarily mean that the European Union is at an end so much as it signals that we need to leave behind our naïve hopes and expectations about the future shape of Europe and the world’.⁽¹⁴⁾

Europeans with European ideas make the EU stronger

The outcome of the European Parliament election to be held between 23 and 26 May 2019 is very crucial for the future of Europe. It depends on which sides win the election, leftists, rightists or democrats. Can populists increase their seats? Is Trump’s effort to weaken the EU successful? The collapse of the EU and a return to the former national states is not a correct answer for the crisis. The EU, only when united, has a power to cope with other world players like the United States, China and Russia. The EU is based on common values like democracy, human rights and rule of law. Those ideas are not only important for the EU but also for the rest of the world. They can constrain the arbitrariness of ‘Rogue States’. We should take the crisis nowadays in the EU rather for a chance of a stronger and enhanced EU. Ivan Krastev writes in his book “After Europe”:

‘In reality, the union’s various crises, much more so than any of Brussels’s “cohesion policies,” have contributed to the sense that we Europeans are all part of the same political community. In responding to the euro crisis, the refugee question, and the growing threat of terrorism, Europe has ended up more integrated than ever before, at least when it comes to economics and security. The close study of the history of political disintegration reveals that the art of survival is an art of constant improvisation. Flexibility—not rigidity—is what may yet save Europe. While most observers ask how populism can be vanquished, in my view the more apposite question is how to respond to its venality. What will increase the likelihood of the European Union surviving is the spirit of compromise. Making room for conciliation should be the major priority of those who care for the union. The EU should not try to defeat its numerous enemies but try to exhaust them, along the way adopting some of their policies (including the demand for well-protected external borders) and even some of their attitudes (free trade is not necessarily a win-win game). Progress is linear only in bad history textbooks’.⁽¹⁵⁾

The EU could become a more flexible and independent institution. The conflict with the US and Russia could make the EU stronger. Populism and nationalism cannot provide us with a solution for those problems but deteriorate them.

Japan and EU can help each other and make a contribution to the world

We are all involved in those problems which the EU tackles. Japan should not be an onlooker. Migration is a problem for us all, so peace operation, global warming, energy crisis, pandemics, democracy and so forth are also our mutual tasks. Japan cannot solve those problems alone. The EPA between Japan and the EU entered into force on 1 February 2019 and Japan should tackle those problems together with the EU. Japan and EU are also ready to launch implementation of Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). In this agreement too those common ideas of the EU are visible as follows:

‘The Agreement shows a strong joint commitment to defend multilateralism, the rule of law, democracy, respect for human rights, open markets, free and fair trade key values which should form the basis of the international order’.

Japan and the EU can help each other and the list of cooperation is long. They can contribute to world peace, democracy, preservation of ecology and so on.

Notes

- (1) Krastev, I. (2017). *After Europe*. University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 15.
- (2) Huntington, S. P. (2005). *Who are we?: The challenges to the America’s national identity*. Simon & Schuster, p. 21.
- (3) Levitsky, S. and Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die*. Broadway Books, p. 9.
- (4) Nance, M. (2018). *The plot to destroy democracy: How Putin and his spies are undermining America and dismantling the west*. Hachette Books, p. vii.
- (5) Levitsky, S. and Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die*. Broadway Books, p. 67.
- (6) YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bB2BJmNXpA>.
- (7) YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weQ9E6e3aJo>.
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- (10) Atlantic Council Eurasia Center (2018). *The Kremlin’s Trojan Hoases*.
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- (12) Nance, M. (2018). *The plot to destroy democracy: How Putin and his spies are undermining America and dismantling the west*. Hachette Books, pp. 144-145.

⁽¹³⁾ Nance, M. (2018). *The plot to destroy democracy: How Putin and his spies are undermining America and dismantling the west*. Hachette Books, p. 22.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Krastev, I. (2017). *After Europe*. University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 10.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Krastev, I. (2017). *After Europe*. University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 110-111.